

SAMARIA

SATAN

SCIENCE

SCRIPTURE(S)

SECRET MARK

SEPTUAGINT

SEXISM

SIX HUNDRED AND SIXTY SIX

SLAVERY

SOUL

TEN COMMANDMENTS

THE BIBLE STYLE GUIDE

TEXTUS RECEPTUS

THEOLOGY

TORAH

TRINITY

UNCIAL

VEIL

VELLUM

VIOLENCE

**A RESOURCE FOR
JOURNALISTS AND
BROADCASTERS**

**IT'S AMERICA'S FAVOURITE BOOK
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(SOURCE: TIME MAGAZINE)**

**IT'S THE SACRED TEXT THAT JEWS,
CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS SHARE
IN A GLOBALISED WORLD, KNOWING
HOW TO REPORT THE BIBLE HAS
NEVER BEEN SO IMPORTANT**

This style guide by the Bible Society is here to give you a helping hand. It will enable you as a journalist or broadcaster to address questions such as:

- In general, do British people view the Bible negatively? (p5)
- When was Jesus really born? (p11)
- Does the Bible have anything to say about environmentalism? (p14)
- Is Intelligent Design the same thing as creationism? (p19)
- How do Christians deal with violent texts within the Bible? (p31)
- How many books are there in the Bible? (p43)

How to use this guide

The main part of this style guide (section 3.0) is an A–Z directory of biblical terms and issues. But it also includes useful overviews on topics such as the history and interpretation of the Bible. Throughout the guide, a word or phrase in bold type means that there is also an entry in the A–Z directory on that subject.

Still got questions?

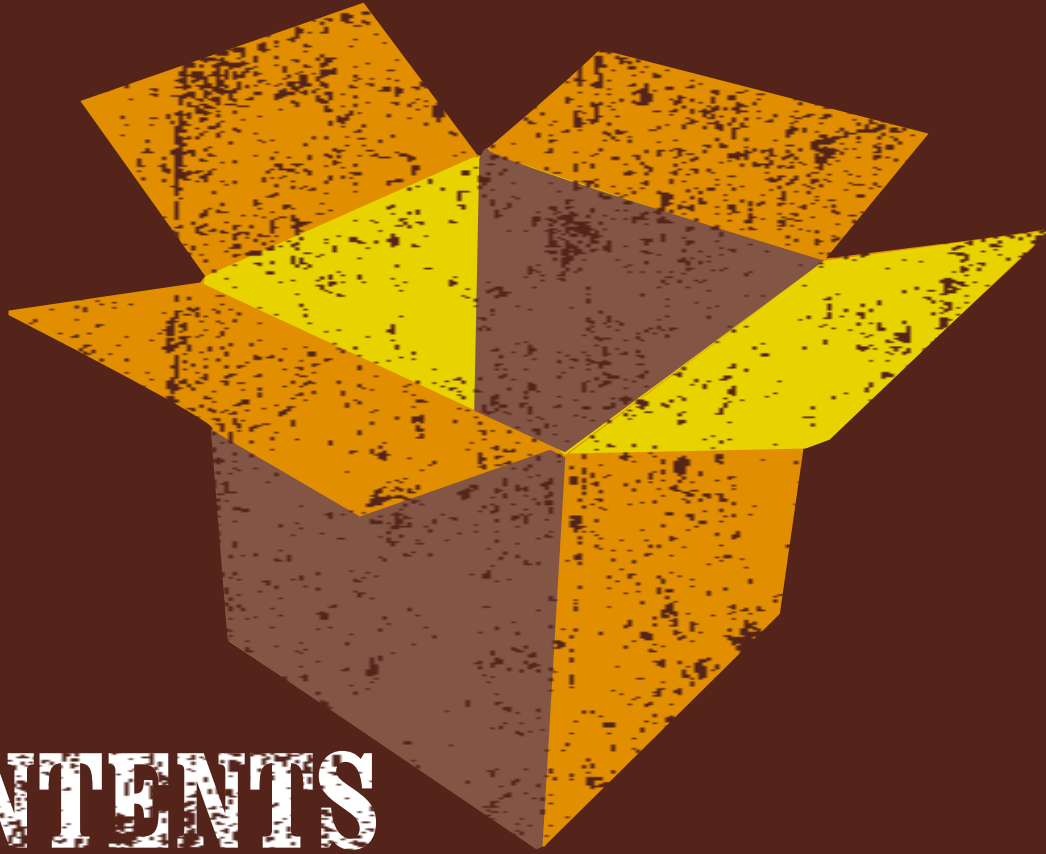
Then we're here to help, in terms of giving you further background or pointing you in the right direction for comment. You can contact us on 01793 418100.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE SOCIETY?

The British and Foreign Bible Society (popularly known by the shorthand 'Bible Society') is a charity that exists to make the Bible heard throughout the world. The majority of our work is overseas, making the Bible available in language people can understand and at a price they can afford. Here in this country, we work to build bridges between the Bible and people's everyday lives.

We were founded in 1804 CE and are part of a world-wide federation known as United Bible Societies, which operates in more than 180 countries. Together this global alliance distributes many millions of Bibles every year in a range of formats, which includes print, audio, Braille and increasingly, sign language.

To find out more, visit www.biblesociety.org.uk or our media blog www.bitemybible.com



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FAST FACTS

1.0 FAST FACTS

This section includes some snappy facts and figures about the Bible.

- The word 'Bible' comes from the Greek and Latin words which mean 'book' and 'the books'. This is because the Bible is a collection of books, as well as a single book.
- The books of the Bible were originally written in three different languages – Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. No books were originally written in Latin.
- The documents of the Bible were originally written on either papyrus or leather scrolls. Later, they were written on **vellum** and then gathered into books called **codices**.
- The Bible contains many different kinds of documents – poetry, legal documents, songs, letters, eyewitness accounts, people stories, historical documents and advice material.
- The writing of the Bible took over 1,000 years. It was roughly written between 1200 BCE (Before the Common Era) – 100 CE (Common Era) and its books were written in what is now Israel, Iraq, Egypt and different parts of the then Roman Empire.
- Bible writers included scribes, fishermen, kings, royal officials, prophets, musicians, secretaries and poets, as well as the odd doctor or tree-surgeon.
- Although there is substantial agreement, the exact number of books in the Bible varies from one Church tradition to another. Many Christians within the Protestant tradition recognise 66 books in the Bible. Most Christians within the Catholic tradition acknowledge those 66, plus 7 others, bringing their total to 73 books. Christians within Orthodox traditions have different totals again. Greek Orthodox Christians recognise 76 books (the common 66 plus 10 others), while Ethiopian Orthodox include 81.
- Christians usually divide the Bible into the **Old Testament** (books written before the birth of **Jesus** by Jews) and the **New Testament** (books written after the death of Jesus by Christians – most of whom were also Jews). The Old Testament is referred to as the Tanakh by most Jews.
- A set number of books in two categories of the Old Testament (called 'the Law and the **Prophets**') were agreed upon by the second century BCE. The exact number of books agreed to be part of a third category, the 'Writings', was either settled in the second or fourth century CE, depending on your perspective.
- A set list of 27 books in the New Testament was settled on by most Christians during the fourth century CE. However, 20 of that 27 were pretty much agreed upon by the end of the second century CE. The letters of Paul had been gathered together by the start of the second century CE. The four **gospels** also existed together as a single collection called 'the Gospel' as early as the turn of the second century CE.
- For ease of use, over the years the books of the Bible have been subdivided into chapters and verses (e.g. the book of John, chapter ten, verse 16, is shortened to 'John 10.16'). However, this specific numbered format only took shape in the sixteenth century CE. Previously, Bible passages were divided by verses and only later by chapters. These divisions were given letters and then numbers. In ancient times, sections of the Bible were referred to only by name.



**FACTUAL ACCURACY
AND THE BIBLE**

2.1 BRITS AND THE BIBLE

It's easy to get the impression that the Bible is unpopular and viewed negatively by most British people. However, Bible Society's own research shows that this is not necessarily the case. Many imagine the Bible to be a book written in old-fashioned language, containing lists of rules and regulations that some people try to force upon others. They are very negative about this idea of the Bible.

However, most people are surprisingly open to modern translations of the Bible, agree that it contains timeless stories and are intrigued by new, creative ways of bringing it to life. Audiences respond well to the Bible if it's presented like this. So if you're considering depicting the Bible on screen, in print or over the airwaves, it can be helpful to consider some of the following questions:

IS THE BIBLE BEST DESCRIBED AS AN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF RULES, REGULATIONS AND TEACHINGS?

The Bible certainly does contain legal material, letters and instructions, but most of it is actually made up of either advice material ('hints and tips') or relationship stories. In fact, it's estimated that up to 75% of the Bible is narrative. In many ways, it resembles a collection of biographies rather than an official rulebook.

IS THE BIBLE BEST DEPICTED AS A BLACK LEATHER BOOK, WRITTEN IN OLD-FASHIONED LANGUAGE, WITH GOLD LETTERING ON THE FRONT?

Of course, there are lots of Bibles like that. But the most common Bibles for sale in the UK and the USA are modern-language versions with other kinds of covers. The Bible also exists in many other formats and its stories are represented in a variety of different ways (see **7.7, Back to the old school** for some examples). Nowadays, the Bible really is multimedia.

IS THE BIBLE VERY SIMILAR TO LOTS OF OTHER HOLY BOOKS?

Sometimes, people assume that the holy books of different religions are pretty much alike in terms of their size and subject matter, but this isn't actually the case. Of course, there are similarities, but the Bible is fundamentally different. The important difference is that for the most part, the Bible is a book full of relationship stories. The Qur'an (which is a fifth of the length of the Bible) does contain some biographical material but focuses far more on questions and answers about specific religious matters.

The sacred texts regarded as revealed within Hinduism (the Vedas and the Bhagavad-Gita) contain philosophies, hymns, poems and ritual texts. The Bhagavad-Gita may only be a tenth the size of the **New Testament**, but the Vedas are far larger than both the Old and New Testaments put together. The Tipitaka (the collection of holy books within Buddhism) has three sections and is around 11 times the size of the Bible. It includes practical teachings of the Buddha, as well as stories about (and guidelines for) Buddhist monks and nuns. Comparing sacred texts and highlighting similarities can be important, but it's a mistake to think that they are all much of a muchness.

2.0 FACTUAL ACCURACY AND THE BIBLE

This section includes some broad principles to consider if you are depicting the Bible on screen, in print or over the airwaves.

CHALCARS

CHURCH

3.0

CODEX

COVENANT

CREATIONIST

CRUCIFIXION

DEAD SEA SCROLLS

DENOMINATION

DEUTEROCANONICAL

DEVIL

DIRECTORY

DISCIPLE

EASTER SUNDAY

EBIONITES

END-TIMES

ENVIRONMENTALISM

EPISTLE

ESCHATOLOGY

ESSENES



This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.

ABRAHAM

The physical ancestor of Israel and an important figure for Jews, Muslims and Christians alike. His life is described in the book of Genesis, which describes him as a migrant who had God’s blessing. He was originally called Abram, but was renamed Abraham (‘father of many’) by God. God is said to have made a **covenant** with Abraham that cemented the relationship between God and the Jewish people. He is understood by Christians to be a role model in terms of his faith.

ACTS

A shortened name for the biblical book, the Acts of the **Apostles**. It contains details of what the apostles did after the death and **resurrection** of **Jesus**. In the late second century CE, other books were written in a similar style and also given the name of ‘Acts’. These included the Acts of Andrew, John, **Paul**, **Peter** and Thomas. None of these works, however, ever made it into the collection of books in the New Testament.

ANAGIGNOSKOMENA (PRONOUNCED ‘ANNAGIN-OA-SKOMMENNA’)

A term used by Greek Orthodox Christians for what others call the apocryphal or **deuterocanonical** books of the **Old Testament**. The word (which means ‘worth reading’ or ‘those which are to be read’) was first used by a bishop called Athanasius in the fourth century CE. The anagnoskomena also include some books not included in the apocrypha or listed as deuterocanonical. Sometimes, the anagnoskomena are referred to by Greek Orthodox Christians as the ‘ecclesiastical books’.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitism refers to a negative attitude towards Jewish people or their culture. Some scholars have made the claim that the **New Testament** is an Anti-Semitic collection of documents. It’s not hard to see why. Down the centuries, a number of texts have been quoted to support a negative attitude – and even violence towards – the Jewish people. The most notorious of these is Matthew 27.25, where ‘the Jews’ cry that they are willing to be held responsible for shedding the blood of Jesus. This later developed into the idea that ‘the Jews killed Christ’ and led to them being branded as God-killers (this saying was left out of the 2005 CE film *The Passion of the Christ* for that reason). Others have seen references to ‘the Jews’ in the **gospel** of John (e.g. 8.44) as highly critical and promoting a ‘them and us’ mentality.

However, following the Nazi Holocaust in particular, many scholars began to wonder if such interpretations were actually valid. The consensus among biblical scholars now is that since the New Testament was largely written by Jews, charges of Anti-Semitism in the Bible are a bit misplaced. As many see it, negative statements in the New Testament about Jews reflect tensions within the Jewish community of the first century CE – not Anti-Semitism from without. The references to bloodshed in the gospel of Matthew, for example,

are also found in other Jewish texts of the time. Further, the gospel writer Luke, who wasn’t Jewish, emphasised the equal role that non-Jews played in the murder of Jesus (Acts 2.23). For these reasons, the vast majority of Churches today would strongly oppose Anti-Semitism and reject the idea that the Bible is Anti-Semitic. In fact, some Christians are now very supportive of the state of Israel (see **Zionism**), because from their perspective the Jewish people have a key role to play in fulfilling Bible prophecy.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Describing something non-human in human terms. There are lots of examples in the Bible of God being given human characteristics. This includes walking in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3.8), having an arm, an ear and even having nostrils (Isaiah 59.1; Psalm 18.15)! Most Christians, however, understand these references to be metaphorical. They believe that God is a spiritual being, based on other statements in the Bible, such as John 4.24. (As an aside, Mormons, however, do believe that God has a physical body.)

The Bible also contains *anthropopathisms*, where God is described as having human emotions, such as anger, jealousy, love, compassion etc. (Nahum 1.2; Malachi 1:2–3; Romans 3.5). There has been a long debate within Christianity about how literally these biblical statements were originally meant because on the one hand, the divine **Jesus** was understood to have suffered death, while on the other, there are texts that seem to say that God does not have mood swings – Philippians 2.6–8; James 1.17.

ANTICHRIST

The term antichrist comes from the Greek word *antichristos*, which roughly means ‘opponent of Christ’. It’s only found four times in the Bible, in the letters of John (1 John 2.18, 22; 4.3; 2 John 1.7). However, the concept behind it is understood by many to be found in other books too (e.g. Daniel chapters 7–11; Matthew 24.15–25; 2 Thessalonians 2.3–12 and Revelation 13.1–8). In the letter of John, there are references to more than one antichrist (and to an anti-Christian spirit in general). The other references are understood by some to refer to an individual human who will arise at a given point to marshal the masses against **Jesus**.

In every age, people have identified specific figures as the antichrist, depending on their particular standpoint. This has included Caesar Nero, various Popes, Martin Luther and Hitler. In our own time, the finger of suspicion has been pointed at Vladimir Putin, Osama Bin Laden and even David Hasselhoff. Popular interest in the Antichrist was aroused by the 1974 CE film *The Omen*, which portrayed the antichrist as a literal child of the Devil called Damian (a concept and name not found in the Bible).

APOCALYPTIC, APOCALYPSE(S)

A style of crisis writing found in the Bible (and elsewhere) involving doom-laden revelations about major disasters or of the end of the world. The term comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which means 'revelation'. Apocalyptic writing was usually understood as involving some kind of heavenly vision, during which secrets would be revealed. The only two examples of apocalypses in the Bible would be the books of Daniel and Revelation, although some would say that there is also apocalyptic material in the books of Zechariah and Ezekiel. Among Catholics the book of Revelation is sometimes known as the Apocalypse.

APOCRYPHA, OLD TESTAMENT

The term apocrypha comes from the Greek word *apokryphos*, which means 'something hidden'. It means different things in different contexts. Generally, it has a negative meaning and refers to 'wannabe' books of the Bible – rather than real ones. Some Christians use the term '**Old Testament Apocrypha**' to refer to a certain set of books that are sometimes claimed to be part of the Old Testament, but as they see it, don't really belong in the collection. This includes, with some minor variations, the books of Wisdom, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Baruch, Sirach, Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians take a different view. As they see it, those books are genuinely part of the Bible, so they don't refer to them by the negative term 'apocrypha' (Catholics, however, don't include 1 and 2 Esdras or the Prayer of Manasseh). They refer to them as either the **deuterocanonical** books or sometimes as the **anagignoskomena**. Other 'wannabe' Old Testament material (other than that particular set of books) are usually described by everyone as Old Testament **Pseudipigrapha**. Most Christians agree in describing 'wannabe' Christian texts as '**New Testament Apocrypha**'. For further detail on this issue, read section 6.2, **Finalising the Writings collection**.

APOCRYPHA, NEW TESTAMENT/CHRISTIAN

This term refers to a range of literature (such as **apocalypses, gospels, epistles** and **acts**) that were mostly written after the books that form part of the New Testament (i.e. from the second century CE onwards). They offer interesting insights into how Christianity developed and splintered during the second century CE. Most of the works are attempts to embellish the original **New Testament** material, providing extra information where there were clear gaps in the market.

The infancy gospels of James and Thomas are classic examples of this, since they cover the childhoods of Jesus and of the Virgin Mary. Many second century gospels cover the period after the **Resurrection of Jesus**, especially the **Gnostic Texts**. Some writers, such as those who produced 3 Corinthians or the Epistle to Laodicea, spotted excuses in the New Testament itself to produce extra material. For example, 1 Corinthians 5.9 refers to another letter of Paul to the

Corinthians and Colossians 4.16 mentions a letter to the Laodiceans. The Apocalypse of Peter appears to be a grislier version of the book of Revelation.

However, that's not to say that this wider field of later Christian literature contained nothing of value. Some of the earlier material may be compared to unauthorised biographies of Jesus and the apostles. In other words, they may contain grains of truth but are generally to be taken with a large pinch of salt. Especially valued were four teaching documents; the Epistle of Barnabas, the Didache (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), the Shepherd of Hermas and the first letter of Clement. Most biblical scholars believe that these particular documents were written fairly early, in the late first and early second centuries CE. Therefore, these four works were sometimes floated as possible candidates for inclusion in the New Testament canon. Eventually, however, they were left out of the mainstream canon because people didn't think they were written by the apostles or with their approval. Certain other works, such as the *Egerton Gospel* and gospel fragments found at a rubbish dump in Oxyrhynchus (Egypt) may be even earlier again. They may even be among the other accounts of the life of Jesus that the gospel writer Luke mentioned (Luke 1.1–3) and therefore be of some historical value.

APOSTLE

The term apostle comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which roughly means 'someone sent'. There are 80 references to apostles in the New Testament, but some scholars would argue that there appear to be two different types (although the distinctions aren't all that clear). Many of those references are to the 12 men who were sent out by Christ to preach during his lifetime and who were later witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 10.1–4; Acts 1.21–22). As such, they were viewed in some sense as authority figures within the early Christian community.

Later, Matthias and Paul were also understood as apostles in this way (Acts 1.26; 1 Corinthians 9.1). However, there were also a wider group of people called 'apostles' who were sent out as messengers to/from churches or as missionaries (Acts 13.1–3; 14.4; 1 Corinthians 12.27–29; 2 Corinthians 8.23; Philippians 2.25). It is in this second sense that some later Christian writers described **Mary Magdalene** as the 'apostle to the apostles'. This was because she was sent by Jesus with a message to the 12 apostles.

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.

B

ARMAGEDDON

The word only occurs once in the Bible – at Revelation 16.14–17 – to describe the ‘battle of the great day of God the Almighty’. The Greek word used is *harmagedon*, which many scholars think is itself a translation of the Hebrew phrase *har megiddon* (‘mountain of Megiddo’). The city of Megiddo held a strategic position in the ancient world. It was built on a mound and enabled those who held it to control the area. It was therefore the scene of many bloody battles.

Based on this, many interpreters believe that the description of evil forces ‘gathering at Megiddo’ is symbolic (somewhat like ABBA singing that they were finally ‘facing their Waterloo’). They think it means a final defeat of evil, rather than a physical gathering for battle. Others, however, understand Armageddon as a literal bloody battle that will take place among the nations in Israel, which will end when Christ returns to put a stop to it. The word Armageddon has now entered popular usage to refer to disasters that could spell the end of planet earth (e.g. a nuclear war or an asteroid on collision course with earth as in the 1998 CE film *Armageddon*).

ATONEMENT

A ritual action that repairs a damaged relationship between humans and God. The **Old Testament** contains elaborate laws about atonement. Rather than pay the penalty in person, sinners arranged for animals to be sacrificed on their behalf. These ‘sin offerings’ were understood to make amends when people broke the law of **Moses**. The Day of Atonement described in the Old Testament is a yearly day of fasting that is still kept by Jews. The New Testament draws on language from the Old Testament to describe the **crucifixion** of Jesus as an act of atonement for sins. The death of Jesus on the cross was understood as a sacrifice to God on behalf of sinners. The crucifixion is also described in the Bible as a ‘ransom’ price and as a victory over the **devil**. These ideas were later developed into various theories of what the death of Jesus on the cross meant.

Christian writers throughout the centuries have emphasised different aspects of the atonement. The dominant view has been that Jesus was punished for the sins of others while dying on the cross. However, other theologians thought that Jesus was paying a ransom price to the devil on the cross, who had been holding humanity hostage. A smaller number emphasised how the death of Jesus was an act of love and in this sense an example to follow. Current debates focus on the language used in the New Testament for the atonement (e.g. was it literal or symbolic?) or the problem of sacred **violence** which it seems to involve.

AUTHORISED VERSION (AV)

See the entry on **King James Version** (KJV)

BAPTISM

A water-based initiation ceremony or **sacrament** that is understood in different ways across the Churches. The term is linked to the Greek word *baptizein*, which originally meant ‘to plunge’ or sometimes ‘to submerge’. The Greek term *baptismos* referred to a range of washing rituals. In the New Testament, both **John the Baptist** and **Jesus** are said to have baptised (John 3.22, 23). The actual method of baptising is not set out clearly in the Bible. Some insist that the ‘coming up out of the water’ of Mark 1.10 shows that total immersion underwater is involved. Others argue that this shows no more than the ceremony took place standing in a river. Different Christian groups therefore use different methods – total immersion underwater, pouring over the head or sprinkling of drops of water.

Many Christians understand water baptism to be a ceremony that publicly symbolises someone’s repentance for sin, faith in Jesus and entry into the community of the **Church**. As such, some Christians would want to insist that only those who are mature and capable of both feeling sorry for their sins and of believing, should be baptised. This idea, also involving total immersion underwater, is sometimes known as ‘believer’s baptism’.

Others, however, would be more open to the baptism of babies and children on the understanding that the practice is an initiation ceremony into the Church. Catholic Christians believe that baptism is not only a symbolic initiation ceremony, but that it actually saves souls from **original sin**. Therefore, they believe that it is important to baptise children. Some charismatic Christians speak of ‘baptism of the Spirit’ (cf. Acts 1.5) as a post-conversion dose of the **Holy Spirit**, accompanied by special gifts (often speaking in tongues). Other Christians understand this gift of the Spirit to take place in some form at the moment of conversion.

BIBLE CODE

A hidden code, allegedly found in the Hebrew text of the Bible, which is said to have accurately predicted a series of world events. These include Hitler’s role in the Nazi Holocaust, Einstein’s role in developing a revolutionary scientific theory and President Kennedy’s assassination. The code was ‘discovered’ by an Israeli mathematician called Eli Rips in the 1980s and 1990s. The code works by using a computer program to count letters at regular intervals in the Hebrew Bible. This analysis reveals intersecting words hidden in the Bible text, much like in a crossword puzzle. These words relate to significant events (e.g. ‘Kennedy’ ‘assassin’ and ‘Dallas’).

The mathematical code was publicised by an American journalist called Michael Drosnin. His 1997 CE book *The Bible Code* became an international sensation. He claimed that there was a ‘Bible beneath the Bible’ and that the prophecy of Daniel 12.4,9 referred to the Bible Code. However, sceptics have argued that hidden codes such as this can be found in any lengthy book. The absence of vowels within Hebrew texts of the Bible also makes it more likely that coincidences can be found. Criticisms notwithstanding, the idea that there is coded meaning within the text of the Bible persists and has spawned a series of follow-up literature in the same vein.

BIBLICAL CRITICISM

'Biblical criticism' (also known as the historical-critical method) is a catch-all phrase which generally means looking at biblical documents from a scholarly, rather than a necessarily religious viewpoint. It includes specialist fields such as investigating what sources were used by the biblical writers (source criticism), the situation for which material was originally written to be used (form criticism), how it was finally edited together (redaction criticism) and how faithful later biblical texts are/were to the originals (textual criticism).

Christians had studied their sacred texts critically for centuries, but biblical criticism took a new twist during the eighteenth century CE. Scholars who weren't Christians began to take God out of the equation and investigate the biblical texts as purely human documents. During this process, cherished ideas sometimes went out of the window (e.g. that **Moses** had written the **Pentateuch**, that the story of Jonah was historical and that chapter 16 of Mark's **gospel** was part of the original). Others attempted to 'demythologise' (take the myth out of) biblical stories. For example, they explained the miracles in terms they thought people would find more believable (e.g. that those **Jesus** 'healed' were schizophrenic, not demon-possessed).

Many modern biblical scholars have rejected certain positions held by the first modern biblical critics as unfounded (e.g. that King David was a fictional character, that the gospels were written as late as the mid second century CE etc). However, other ideas, such as the 'quest for the historical Jesus' (based on a perceived distinction between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith') remain. For their part, biblical scholars within Christian communities have taken on board much – but not all – of the fruits of modern biblical criticism (e.g. accepting that the Gospels were written in common Greek). Sometimes they reject positions that are viewed almost as facts by some scholars (e.g. the existence of a gospels source document called 'Q', the idea that the book of Isaiah had several authors etc.).

Christian scholars often raise questions about the assumptions certain biblical critics make that colour their studies (e.g. that miracles are impossible, that the Jesus of **Gnosticism** is the real one etc.). Others argue that the historical-critical approach to the Bible is a bit dated. As far as they are concerned, the discussion has now moved on from questions about the DNA of the biblical texts. Of much greater interest is what the texts meant to later generations or what they mean to people now. Yet the biblical criticism movement has spawned an entire industry of academics literally selling their ideas about the Bible to the public through books, seminars, speaking engagements and media appearances. This has been mockingly described in some circles as 'the Jesus business'.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF JESUS

A group of people often mentioned in the New Testament (e.g. Matthew 12.46; 13.55; Acts 1.14; 1 Corinthians 9.5). There are several schools of thought as to who they were and the issue has been a subject of open debate among Christians for centuries. Some believe them to be the literal younger brothers and sisters of **Jesus**. In their view, Mary went on to have other children after Jesus was born. Others, mostly Catholic and Orthodox Christians, believe them to be close relatives of Jesus (either cousins or stepbrothers/ stepsisters). This is linked to their belief that Mary was a virgin her whole life.

In 2006, these relatives of Jesus were linked in with a conspiracy theory called the 'Jesus Dynasty'. It was suggested that two of these brothers of Jesus (James and Jude) were originally leaders in the early Christian community. James and Jude allegedly opposed the apostles **Peter** and **Paul**, who were set on taking the original teaching of Jesus in a new direction. However, this controversial idea is not held by the majority of **New Testament** scholars.

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.

CANON, CANONS, CANONICAL

From the Greek word *kanon* (which means 'measuring stick'), the canon refers to the set list of books understood to belong in the Bible. Therefore a 'canonical' book is a term often used for a book that is considered to genuinely be part of the Bible. As the Bible developed, books were only believed to be part of the authoritative collection if they 'measured up' to certain criteria (e.g. they were somehow linked to the apostles, or to **Moses**). For more information on the canon and its development, see **6.0, Designer Collections**.

CATHOLIC EPISTLES

An old-fashioned term for a group of letters in the **New Testament** that were understood to be written for Christians in general, rather than just for individuals or for specific churches. They include James, 1 and 2 **Peter**, the three letters of John and the letter of Jude. The word 'catholic' in this sense means 'universal'.

CHARISM, CHARISMATIC

A *charism* (from the Greek word *charisma*) is a 'gift from God'. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 refers to the range of charisms or skills given to Christians by the **Holy Spirit**. Christians who emphasise the importance of these gifts, especially the ability to 'speak in tongues', often refer to themselves as 'Charismatic'.

CHRIST

See the entry on **messiah**

CHRISTMAS

The Date

The annual Christian festival held on 25 December (or 6/7 January within some Orthodox traditions), to celebrate Christ's birth. No one really knows for sure the day or year when **Jesus** was actually born. The tradition of the early Church held the date to be either 6 January or 25 December, depending on the calendar used. A potential problem with this, often stated, is that Jesus could not have been born in midwinter because the Bible says that the shepherds were in the fields at the time with their sheep (Luke 2.8). However, the *Mishnah*, a collection of ancient Jewish legal documents, shows that shepherds and their flocks were sometimes in the fields during the wintertime (*Mishnah Seqal*. 7.4). So a winter date is not necessarily out of the question.

Nevertheless, many argue that the selection of 25 December was more symbolic. They view the choice of this date as a snub to the pagan beliefs common in the Roman Empire at the time. On that date, people used to celebrate the birth of the sun god Mithras. Some people believe that replacing the Mithras festival with the birth of Christ was a way of edging paganism off the scene. However, there is little evidence that this is what happened and this idea only became popular in the twelfth century CE. In any case, there is another good reason for the choice of 25 December. The gospel of Luke (1.5–11, 23–24) seems to suggest that a relative of Mary (the mother of Jesus) called Elizabeth fell pregnant

soon after her husband had seen a vision during the festival of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur takes place on the tenth of the Jewish month of Tishri (September/October). Mary is said to have fallen pregnant six months after Elizabeth (1.26–45), which would be the Jewish month of Nisan (March/April). Nine months of pregnancy would therefore mean that Jesus was born some time during the Jewish month of Tebeth (December/January). There are some rough edges to this chronology, but we know from the Christian writer Augustine that it did influence the choice of 25 December in the early **Church** (*On the Trinity*, Sermon 202).

As to pinpointing the year, there are an even more complex series of factors to take into account, including the date of King Herod's death, the census of Quirinius (see below) and the age when Jesus started his career (understood from Luke 3.23 to be aged 30). Most scholars think that Jesus was born between 4–6 BCE.

The Story

The census of Quirinius is sometimes mentioned as a mistake in the Christmas story. Luke 2.1–3 describes how Jesus was born during a census (in Greek, *apographe*) of the Roman world. This is said to have taken place when Caesar Augustus was reigning and when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Some scholars argue that there is no evidence of such a large-scale census across the Roman Empire. They also maintain that the Romans would never make people return to their ancestral homes just to be taxed.

However, other scholars point out that *apographe* would be better translated 'registration'. A registered oath of loyalty to Caesar Augustus was required throughout the Roman Empire (including Judaea) in 3 BCE to mark his silver jubilee. The problem with this is that Quintilius Varus, not Quirinius (as recorded in the Bible), was the Roman legate (governor) of Syria at this time. However, the Roman historian Tacitus indicates that sometimes, provinces were ruled by both a legate and a procurator (Tacitus, *Agricola* 15). So it would be entirely possible for Quirinius to have been the procurator, but not the legate, when Jesus was born. The early Christian writer Justin Martyr says this was in fact the case (*Apology* 1.34).

At Christmas, the subject of whether Jesus really was born in a stable sometimes comes up. Many Bibles say that the baby Jesus was laid 'in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn' (Luke 2.7). This can conjure up images of a wooden stable at the back of a hotel, as in so many nativity plays. A number of biblical scholars have pointed out, however, that this verse would be better translated as 'no space in the upper room' of a house. Lower rooms were often used as stables, which is why there was a manger available.

These wise men are described in the gospel of Matthew as travelling to worship Jesus, guided by a star. The Bible doesn't say that there were three of them (some traditions say there were as many as 12), but many assume that from the fact that there are three kinds of gift named (one per visitor). The visitors are described in Greek as *magoi*, a word which refers to priests/wise men from Persia who were both stargazers and dream-interpretors. Later Christian thought linked the visitors with the kings riding camels of Psalm 72. The wise men are not named in the Bible; later tradition named them Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar.

CHURCH, CHURCHES

These common terms are understood differently among Christians. The word Church comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* (roughly meaning 'called out' and usually translated 'church' in English). In the New Testament, 'the Church' can refer to either individual Christian communities (Romans 16.1; 1 Thessalonians 2.14) or the universal Christian community in general (Galatians 1.13; Philippians 3.6). The Bible never uses the word to refer to church buildings. Many Christians understand 'the Church' to refer to the wider community of believers rather than a particular denomination. Those not tending to equate 'the Church' with any one particular denomination often emphasise the teaching of Paul about diversity within the Christian community (e.g. 1 Corinthians 12).

Officially, Catholics understand 'the Church' to be the Roman Catholic Church alone, while also acknowledging that other genuine Christians might well be found outside its hierarchy. As they see it, the gospel of Matthew has Peter (understood as the first Pope) being handed leadership of the entire Christian community by **Jesus**. (Matthew 16.13–20). There are different views on this issue among Orthodox Christians, mirroring both these inclusive and exclusive positions.

However, some New Testament scholars have questioned whether Jesus even intended to found a Church organisation in the first place. They believe that Jesus simply encouraged people to follow Him, rather than become members of an in-group. Others scholars, however, have emphasised the use by Jesus of structured community language to refer to His following (e.g. 'family', 'household', 'flock'). With this in mind, they believe that it is plausible that Jesus meant to found a Church.

CODEX

(PRONOUNCED 'COAD-EX'; THE PLURAL CODICES IS PRONOUNCED 'COAD-UH-SEES')

A codex is an early type of book, containing papyrus or **vellum** pages that were sewn together. They were originally used in Roman times only for important legal documents, as most writing was still done on large papyrus rolls. The early Christians, however, quickly adopted the more travel-size codex as their own. Many of the oldest and most important copies of the Bible are contained in codices, including Codex Bezae (written in Greek and Latin during the fourth or fifth century CE), Codex Sinaiticus (written in Greek during the fourth century CE) and Codex Vaticanus (written in Greek during the fourth century and now kept in the Vatican library).

COVENANT

(PRONOUNCED 'CUVVER-NANT')

A sacred contract made between two partners, which creates a permanent relationship between them. In the Bible, God made a series of covenants with people, each with specific terms. This includes one with Noah after the **flood**, another with **Abraham**, two through **Moses** with Israel (one at Sinai and another at Moab), one with King David and a final 'new covenant' through Jesus. Some Christians believe that the new covenant introduced by **Jesus** completely replaced the previous covenants made through Moses. Others believe that the previous covenant remains, just that Jesus changed the terms. Some scholars argue that the new covenant introduced by Jesus was also a testament (as in 'last will and testament'), because the Greek word translated 'covenant' (*diatheke*) usually referred to a testament rather than a covenant.

CREATIONISM, CREATIONIST

(ALSO KNOWN AS 'SCIENTIFIC CREATIONISM' OR 'SPECIAL CREATION')

The idea, claiming a biblical and scientific basis, that all species came into being as the result of separate acts of creation by God, rather than via a long process of evolution. There are two variations of this concept. *Young-earth creationism* is the most widely held and high profile version. This is the idea that the world and the life-forms within it were created by God in a literal six days and that the earth has only existed for a few thousand years. *Old-earth creationism* is the idea that creation happened over a longer time-span. The days of creation as described in the Bible are understood to be either many years in length or a non-literal framework for the story.

Most people who believe in creationism tend to be either Evangelical or fundamentalist Christians. Some would insist that the events described in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 literally happened exactly as described. Others, however, would say that Genesis was either a symbolic description of real events, or a teaching story. Many Christians believe that there is nothing in the Bible to contradict the theory of evolution and/or that the method by which God created the species is unimportant.

Nevertheless, it's not entirely accurate to say that all Christians believed Genesis to be literally true up until Charles Darwin proposed the theory of evolution in 1859 CE. Until then, some Christians (having no other information to go on) turned to the Bible and concluded (by trying to calculate timespans from genealogy lists) that the world was merely several thousands of years old. However, the anti-Christian philosopher Celsus, writing in the third century CE, ridiculed the story of the creation of Eve. Nevertheless, even he admitted that 'the more modest among Jews and Christians are ashamed of these things, and try to give them somehow a symbolic meaning' (Origen's *Against Celsus*, 4.38). It's also worth noting that creationism is not an equivalent term for **Intelligent Design** (ID). See also **Science and the Bible**.

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.

D

CRUCIFIXION

A cruel punishment for criminals that was common in the ancient world. The Romans were particular keen on it, often organising mass crucifixions of thousands of people. Crucifixion (from two Latin words meaning 'fix to a cross') involved nailing or tying someone to an X or T-shaped structure. The victim was then left to starve, suffocate or bleed to death. It was known as a punishment for slaves (Roman citizens were normally exempt) and was widely dreaded. Prisoners were usually crucified naked, which made it even more humiliating. The crucifixion of **Jesus** described in the gospels followed standard Roman procedure (Matthew chapter 27, Mark chapter 15, Luke chapter 23 and John chapter 19). Contrary to popular belief, Jesus was probably made to carry just the cross-beam (rather than the whole thing) to his place of execution, where it was then fixed to a stake.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS

A set of ancient documents that were discovered between 1947 CE and 1956 CE in eleven caves near the Dead Sea in Israel. Twelve of them are written on leather, one is embossed on copper and the rest are on fragments of papyrus and leather. The 800 manuscripts are mostly fragments rather than whole texts, although the copy of the book of Isaiah is almost complete. The scrolls are a collection of Bible books, rule books, biblical commentaries, poetry and liturgical texts.

They were most likely produced by a Jewish sect that existed during the time of **Jesus**, known by some as the **Essenes**. Their headquarters were at Qumran near the Dead Sea. Carbon 14 dating tests reveal that they were written roughly between 200 BCE–70 CE.

Apocryphal/deuterocanonical/anagignoskomena books from the **Old Testament** were also found among the scrolls. The biblical texts have been very useful in terms of helping scholars translate the Old Testament more accurately and in gaining insights into how the Bible developed. The non-biblical documents found in the caves are highly cryptic, using language that was meaningful mostly to insiders of the sect.

There have been many sensationalist books written about the link between the Essene community and Jesus/the early Christian movement. Conspiracy theories developed that the scrolls contained information that the Church wanted to suppress. This was largely because the Catholic archaeologist leading the editorial work on the scrolls, Fr. Roland De Vaux, delayed placing the texts into the public domain. In reality, most scholars recognise that the delay was due to a combination of disorganisation, not appreciating the scale of the task and a degree of academic pride. The scrolls were eventually made public in 1990. In summary, the scrolls are a huge help in understanding the nature of Jewish society of the time and in establishing more exactly the text of the **Old Testament**, but are not generally understood to be threatening to Christianity.

DENOMINATION

The term for a particular Christian organisation or Church such as the Church of England, the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the Assemblies of God etc.

DEUTEROCANONICAL

The Catholic term for seven books that they believe to be part of the Bible, but that others call into question. Other Christians often refer to these books as either the **Old Testament apocrypha** or the **anagignoskomena**. The word means 'of the second canon' and began to be used as a term after the Council of Trent in 1546 CE.



DEVIL

See the entry on **Satan**

DISCIPLE

A follower or student of a religious leader, from the Latin word *discipulus* (which means 'pupil'). In the Bible, Isaiah, **Jesus**, **John the Baptist** and **Moses** are all said to have had disciples (Isaiah 8.16; Matthew 8.21; Mark 2.18; John 9.28). Sometimes the word is used in a narrower sense to refer specifically to the twelve **apostles**.

EASTER SUNDAY

A major Christian festival celebrating the **resurrection of Jesus**, which takes place on a Sunday in the Spring. This is because the resurrection is understood to have taken place on a Sunday, after Jesus was crucified to death the Friday before. The name comes from the Old English word *Eostromonath*, which was the name for the month in which the festival fell. In other languages, the festival is usually given a name drawn from the Hebrew word for the festival of **Passover** (*pesach*, leading to the French Pâques, the Italian Pasqua etc). The festival of Easter marks the end of the forty-day season of Lent.

EBIONITES

The name given by many scholars to a particular sect of Jewish Christians that developed during the second century CE. The name comes from the Hebrew word *ebyonim*, which means 'the poor'. The Ebionites apparently believed **Jesus** to be a **prophet**, but denied that he was God or born of a virgin. They also believed that people had to keep the law of **Moses** to be saved. Because of this, they had little time for the writings of the **apostle Paul** (who saw things differently).

The Ebionites produced a series of writings to reflect their views, including the **gospel** of the Ebionites, the gospel according to the Hebrews (an edited version of the gospel of Matthew) and the gospel of the Nazoreans. The Ebionite sect is thought by some to have been a spin-off from the wider Christian movement of the Nazarenes. However, scholars do disagree on whether there is any real difference between the terms Ebionite and Nazarene, because the early **Church** seemed to use them both of them quite loosely.

END-TIMES

See the entry on **last days**

ENVIRONMENTALISM

In recent decades, the view that people have a duty to protect the environment has gone mainstream. In its wake came a desire, particularly among committed environmentalists, to investigate what the Bible may or may not have to say on the subject. A common complaint from some within the green movement was (and still is) that the Bible encourages an exploitative attitude towards the earth. They maintain that Christians down the centuries have often argued from Genesis 1.28 that God has given humans the green light to rule and 'subdue the earth'. As they see it, this has led people to ride roughshod over animals, plants and the earth itself. God's plan seemed to be that humans were to be conquerors of – not carers for – the environment.

However, recent studies have questioned this idea. Scholars acknowledge the long-standing view among Christians that God had in some sense set humanity over creation. However, they point out that this did not often translate into an understanding that humans could exploit the natural world. For most of Christian history, Genesis 1.28 was interpreted in all sorts of different ways – and very few of these gave exploitation

the thumbs-up. Only from the seventeenth century CE onwards was that text used as permission from God to scientifically 'master and manage' the earth.

Nevertheless, it is true that from the 1960s onwards, some (but not all) Christians did distance themselves from the growing environmental movement. This was sometimes because they were suspicious of the New Age 'earth-centred' language (e.g. 'Gaia', 'Mother Nature', 'oneness with the universe' etc.) often associated with it. Some Christians do still think that climate change science is not as well-founded as is popularly believed. As far as they are concerned, the **Church's** mission is to save souls rather than the planet. They believe that 2 Peter 3.10–12 says that the world is going to be destroyed by God anyway, so there is no need to worry about its future.

Many other Christians, on the other hand, believe it is important to protect the natural world. They aim to rediscover the Christian desire to care for creation found in earlier centuries. They point out that Genesis 2.15 speaks of the need to 'cultivate and care' for the earth and that Revelation 11.18 criticises those who would destroy it. With this in mind, they are often more comfortable with the concept of 'creation care' than with the term 'environmentalism'.

EPISTLE

A Greek type of letter, often used to refer to the semi-formal correspondence included in the **New Testament**. Epistles (from the Greek word 'epistole') had a set format, opening with a greeting and a prayer/thanksgiving, followed by the body of the material and then a closing section.

ESCHATOLOGY, ESCHATOLOGICAL

Teachings to do with either the last days, the end of the world or eternity. The term comes from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means 'last'. Eschatological teachings include the **antichrist**, **judgment day**, the **last days**, the **millennium**, the **rapture** and the **resurrection of the dead**. The book of Revelation is a favourite source of reference for many of these ideas. Some Christians heavily emphasise the eschatological teachings found in the Bible because they believe that the end of the world is currently near. In the Middle Ages, Christians were often encouraged to meditate on 'the four last things' - death, judgment, heaven and hell.

ESSENES (PRONOUNCED 'ES-EENS')

A Jewish religious movement that existed in Judaea (Israel/Palestine) roughly between 146 BCE and 70 CE. The name 'Essenes' comes from the Greek word *essenos*, which in turn probably comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'doers of the Law'. It was probably an outsider's term for the fringe group, which had its headquarters at Qumran by the Dead Sea.

We know about them for three reasons. Firstly, they were described by the Jewish historians Josephus and Philo. Secondly, the discovery of their **Dead Sea scrolls** revealed much about their beliefs and about the **Old Testament**. Thirdly, archaeological research at Qumran has also shed light on their lifestyle. The Essenes saw themselves as the only true keepers of the new **covenant**. As such, they had their own particular interpretations of Jewish Law and Scripture – which meant they had no time for the High Priests in Jerusalem. They believed that the end was nigh and were particularly concerned about ritual purity. People became members of the community through a washing ritual. Some members of the sect were celibate and lived almost like monks at Qumran, while others lived throughout Judaea, marrying, having children and doing ordinary jobs.

There were some similarities between the early Christian movement and the Essene sect, who existed at the same time. For example, both movements believed in sharing property, had similar hierarchical structures and sometimes even used the same phrases. However, there were significant differences between the two. The Essenes were highly secretive about sharing their teachings, whereas **Jesus** told the **apostles** to proclaim his teachings on the housetops (Matthew 10.27). The Essenes shunned the worship of the temple (Damascus Document 6.14), but the early Christians met there for worship every day (Acts 2.46). The Essenes were instructed to love each other but hate their enemies (Community Rule 1.9,10), an idea **Jesus** condemned (Matthew 5.43). It is possible that **John the Baptist** may at some point have been linked to the group that produced the scrolls, but there is no hard evidence for this.

EUCHARIST (ALSO KNOWN AS 'HOLY COMMUNION', 'THE LORD'S SUPPER' OR 'THE MASS')

The word Eucharist means 'thanksgiving' in ancient Greek. It's used to refer to the bread and wine ceremony introduced by **Jesus** during the Last Supper. During this meal, he broke bread, gave thanks and then described it as his body and blood. Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians understand this to be a real change, with the bread and wine mystically and invisibly transformed into the sacrificed **Jesus**. Other Christians understand **Jesus** to have rather introduced a memorial ceremony, which they sometimes prefer to call **The Lord's Supper**, a term used in 1 Corinthians 11.20. For them, the bread and wine don't really change but are simply symbols that help them recall that the body and blood of **Jesus** were offered on the cross.

F

FALL

The teaching that humanity originally started off in God's good books, but then 'fell' from favour. The concept of the fall is drawn from the story of Adam and Eve's temptation and disobedience in the garden of Eden (Genesis chapter 3). The sin in Eden has been variously interpreted as pride, self-determination and even as a sexual sin. The idea was later developed within Christian thought by the influential **theologian** Augustine.

The concept is also closely linked to the teaching of **original sin** and the need for salvation for humanity (understood to be provided by **Jesus**). Some modern scholars reject the traditional interpretation of the fall and have attempted to recast the meaning of the Genesis story. Drawing upon anthropological and sociological studies, they rather see the story as offering real insights into the human condition and the common experience of sin.

EVANGELIST

(ALSO 'EVANGELISM', 'EVANGELISATION' BUT NOT 'EVANGELICAL')

'Evangelist' is a term later used to describe the four writers of the **gospels**, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It's also used in the Bible to refer to wandering preachers and in our day, to people who publicly preach the Christian faith. The word tele-evangelist comes from this term. 'Evangelism' or 'evangelisation' are terms used to refer to spreading the Christian faith. These terms are often confused with being 'Evangelical', which means belonging to a particular form of Christianity.

EXEGESIS

(PRONOUNCED 'EX-EJ-EES-IS')

A technical term used by some to describe interpretation of the Bible.

EXODUS

The exit of the **Hebrews** en masse from Egypt to Canaan, with **Moses** as their leader. The event is associated in the Bible with the parting of the Red Sea, through which the Hebrews are understood to have walked and the Egyptian army to have drowned. Whether there is any evidence for this event outside the Bible is a matter of debate. Many Egyptologists believe that Israelites did live in Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh Ramesses II. During this period of history, however, there is no evidence of any such mass migration. A smaller number of Egyptologists, however, date the presence of the Israelites in Egypt to the reign of other pharaohs, such as Didimose, when there is some evidence of such a population shift. Others point to apparent mentions of the plagues of Egypt (e.g. the river turning to blood) in the *Ipuwer papyrus* (an ancient Egyptian poem) as proof of the event. The second book in the **Old Testament** was given the Greek name 'Exodus' (exit), because it contains the details of this event (Exodus chapters 12–14).

FLOOD, NOAH'S

The story of Noah's flood is found in Genesis chapter 6 but is also referred to elsewhere in the Bible. In the book of Genesis, Noah and his family board a giant boat ('the ark') to survive an extensive, destructive flood that wipes out the rest of humanity. Noah's zoo-like ark is a tale many remember fondly from their childhood. Many throughout Christian history have – and still do believe – that the flood was a real event that engulfed the entire planet. This is often connected in our own time with a belief in young-earth **creationism**. The flood is understood to have wreaked havoc with the planet and caused drastic change in the geology of the earth (a way of accounting for scientific evidence that the earth is old).

Other Christians equally believe that the flood was a real event, but that it was a regional flood that took place only in the Middle East. Still others believe that the account of the flood was in fact a teaching story about God's relationship with humanity, modelled on other Middle-Eastern flood myths, but that it shouldn't be taken literally. Genesis 8.4 says that the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. Some Christians, guided by this verse, claim to have found the remains of Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat in Turkey. On the other hand, others argue that the verse refers to an entire mountain range rather than one specific location.

G

GENTILE (PRONOUNCED JEN-TILE')

Essentially, someone who isn't Jewish. The term comes from the Latin word *gentiles*, which means 'one of the nations'. The attitude of the Jewish people to Gentiles when the Bible was written was mixed. On the one hand, Jews insisted that God was the Lord of all and Gentiles were welcomed into the synagogues. On the other hand, Jews were not allowed to sit at table with Gentiles, were not supposed to marry them and they were certainly not allowed into the Temple.

This tension continued into the early Christian community. The apostles Peter and Paul seem to have cut a deal to divide the **Church's** missionary work between them. Peter focused on converting Jews, while Paul became known as 'the apostle to the Gentiles' because of his wide missionary work among non-Jews (Galatians 2.8, 9.).

GNOSTIC, GNOSTICISM (PRONOUNCED 'NOSTIC' AND 'NOST-IS-ISM')

Gnosticism is a modern, umbrella term for a series of religious movements that were spin-offs from the mainstream Church during the first three centuries CE. The term comes from the ancient Greek word *gnosis* (knowledge) as these believers ('Gnostics') often claimed to possess secret religious knowledge. Although the individual movements were different, they often had views in common.

One was a belief in opposites. The spiritual world and the soul were good, while the created world and the body were bad. They often believed in two gods – a Supreme Creator who ruled the spiritual world and a lesser being called the 'Demiurge' who made the material world (sometimes identified as the God of the Bible). Further, they believed that in the beginning, there was just one sex, not two. Any division between male and female, therefore, was abnormal. Salvation for Gnostics was to find the Supreme Creator within them and to escape the material world at death.

Jesus was often described as the one who passed on these secrets, usually to a close favourite (e.g. to Thomas, James, **Judas**, **Mary Magdalene**). These beliefs set them apart from the mainstream of Christianity. During the second century CE, they decided to improve on the four gospels by producing a whole host of **Gnostic texts** that suited their unusual views about Jesus. For them, Jesus was a ghostlike spiritual teacher – not a flesh-and-blood Jewish carpenter. Although the Gnostic movement didn't really get going until the second century CE, its origins can be traced as far back as the first century CE when the **New Testament** was written (1 Timothy 6.20, for example, slates 'falsely called knowledge').

3.0 DIRECTORY

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.

GNOSTIC TEXTS, GNOSTIC GOSPELS

A series of texts that were written from the first century CE onwards by **Gnostics**. The texts claim both to reveal and explain secret teachings of **Jesus**. For centuries, scholars only really knew about their existence because they were quoted in the works of early Christian writers (who criticised them), although a few complete manuscripts also survived. However, that all changed in 1945, when 12 papyrus books in Coptic (as well as some extra pages) were discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt.

These books contained 50 Gnostic works and have become known as the **Nag Hammadi texts**. They are often viewed as an important find, almost on the level of the **Dead Sea scrolls**. The texts are a mix of different types of literature - **apocalypses**, **gospels**, **epistles**, **acts**, sermons, prayers and hymns. Some texts appear to be attempts to supplement the four biblical gospels. Often, they claim to contain extra information about the teaching of Jesus, usually said to have been passed on to a favourite apostle after the **resurrection** (a period not really covered in the four biblical gospels). This technique of 'filling in the blanks' made it easy to place second century Gnostic teachings in the mouth of the first century Jesus.

Some scholars claim that the Gnostic texts are more authentic records of what Jesus said and did. The novel (2004) and film (2006) *The Da Vinci Code* took up this idea – and in doing so brought the texts to the attention of a wider audience. However, other scholars maintain that the texts tell us a lot about the Gnostic movement during the second century CE – but precious little about the historical Jesus. Some scholars argue that the Gnostic texts show that there was no set understanding of Jesus within early Christianity. According to them, a wide range of views about Jesus were tolerated until the mainstream Church started a clamp-down towards the end of the second century CE. On the other hand, others point out that even the earliest letters of the New Testament (written between 50–60 CE), show that there was no such 'free-for-all' when it came to beliefs about Jesus (Galatians 1.6; Romans 6.17).

Some of the better known Gnostic texts are the gospels of Philip, Mary, **Judas** and Thomas. The gospel of Thomas is one of the most controversial of the Gnostic texts. Some scholars claim that it is an original 'sayings' gospel that was written at the same time as – or even before – the four biblical gospels. Others scholars, however, describe it as a mish-mash of earlier **New Testament** material, with all the characteristics of a Gnostic work (which means it was written during the second century CE).

GOSPEL, GOSPELS

The term now usually refers to an account of the life of **Jesus** that was written to encourage people to believe in him. There are four gospels in the Bible – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The original Greek word for gospel is *euangelion*, which means 'good news' (gospel comes from 'godspel', an Old English word for this phrase). 'The gospel' originally referred to the preaching of Jesus or the apostles, which was passed on by word of mouth. Exactly when gospel

came to mean 'written record about Jesus' is a matter of debate, but recent studies suggest that it was earlier than previously thought, in the late first century CE.

Some scholars claim that the reason why only four gospels were chosen to be included in the Bible was political. In their view, there were many gospels that were cherished in the early Christian movement. This included, for example, works that are now known as the **New Testament apocrypha** as well as the **Gnostic texts**. However, during the second century CE some of the views included in these documents became unpopular among certain Church leaders. This motivated these leaders, it is claimed, to rubbish gospels that they didn't like and to promote those that they did. In other words, only Matthew, Mark, Luke and John made the grade – the rest were binned.

Other scholars, however, point out that the key test for including gospels in the canon or not (regardless of whether the views they contained were popular) was whether they were *apostolic*. This means that to be accepted, a life-story of Jesus had to be either written – or directly authorised by – an apostle. In keeping with this, one of the first descriptions of the gospels is as 'the recollections of the apostles'. Scholars who hold this view maintain that the 'gospels' found among the later New Testament Apocrypha and the Gnostic Texts did not have this apostolic stamp of approval.

Further, some scholars argue there were not many gospels in wide circulation, but a single collection of four that was simply called 'the Gospel', which was 'according to Matthew', 'according to John' etc. Some biblical scholars doubt whether the gospels were actually written by the people whose names they bear. Others, however, think that there are tell-tale signs within the gospels that they *were* written by the apostles (see **6.6, Did the apostles really put pen to papyrus?**).

In terms of the four biblical gospels, scholars have noted differences of emphasis among them. Matthew was probably written for Jewish Christians, so it's arranged in five sections like the **Pentateuch**. It focuses on Jewish interests such as the temple, the need for righteousness and the importance of the **Prophets**. Mark's gospel was understood to record the preaching of **Peter** to non-Jews. It is shorter and more fast-paced than Matthew. Luke is believed to be a doctor and friend of the **apostle Paul**. Therefore, his gospel reflects a lot of Paul's thinking, including a focus on the non-Jewish audience and on women. Many theologians view John's gospel as much deeper and more meditative than the others. It tends to cover different ground to the other three and includes long mystical sayings rather than **parables**.

GOOD FRIDAY

The annual recollection of the death of **Jesus**, which takes place the Friday before **Easter Sunday**.



HEBREW(S)

A term originally used by foreigners for the Israelites and later for those Jews who had not been influenced by Greek culture. The term also refers to the languages used by the Hebrews, whether that was classical Hebrew, or the related language Aramaic (which **Jesus** spoke). The **New Testament** includes a letter to the Hebrews, which was probably written for Jewish Christians.

HERMENEUTICS (PRONOUNCED 'HERMAN-YOO-TIX')

Interpretation of the Bible, from the Greek word *hermeneueien*, which means 'interpretation'. The word originally comes from the name of the Greek god Hermes, who was viewed as the interpreter for the rest of the gods.

HOLY COMMUNION

See the entry on **Eucharist**

HOLY SPIRIT, HOLY GHOST

The third person of the **Trinity**. In terms of the Bible, the concept of the Holy Spirit developed (or was revealed) over time. The **Old Testament** generally describes the Holy Spirit as if it was the creative power of God (e.g. Genesis 1.2; Psalm 104.30). However, **Jesus** and the **apostles** spoke of the Holy Spirit in more personal terms (e.g. John 14.16; 1 Corinthians 2.11). The Holy Spirit is said to have descended on the first Christians during the festival of Pentecost. In older translations of the Bible, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the *Holy Ghost*.

HOMOSEXUALITY

The current discussion of the issue of homosexuality and what the Bible might have to say about that is a sensitive one that quickly polarises opinion. For centuries, many Christians insisted that the Bible frowns on homosexuality, pointing to various biblical texts in support of this position (e.g. Genesis 19.1–13; Leviticus 18.22; Romans 1.26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6.9; 1 Timothy 1.10). However, a number of theologians have approached the Bible in our own time with a different perspective. They point out that among the many books of the Bible, there are only negative references to same-sex sexual relationships in these small number of passages. As far as they are concerned, upon closer inspection these texts criticise homosexual rape, gay prostitution and orgies - rather than loving, committed relationships between those of the same gender.

Other theologians would take a different view. They maintain that even when they are more carefully translated, these passages do criticise homosexual behaviour in general and not just specific forms of it. As far as they are concerned, any reinterpretation of these texts is driven by a desire to write them off, rather than to take them seriously. An issue that frequently comes up within this debate is the interpretation of the law against homosexuality found within the book of Leviticus. Some point out the inconsistency of insisting

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.

I

on that particular part of the law of **Moses**, while disregarding other elements (e.g. laws on stoning those who don't keep the **Sabbath**, mixing fibres in clothing etc). Others maintain that the entire law of Moses was either abolished or changed by Jesus, with only some of the laws (e.g. about occult practices, honouring parents and homosexuality) being carried forward for Christians to keep.

Nevertheless, there are very few verses that refer (or are understood by some to refer) to the subject of homosexuality. Given that there are at least 31,000 verses in the Bible, some argue that this makes the issue a very minor part of the biblical message. The real crux of the matter is that, rightly or wrongly, the issue of homosexuality has become a lightning rod for a wider discussion on how the Bible should properly be interpreted and understood (i.e. how far cultural context should be considered, whether revisionist interpretations are appropriate etc.). No matter where they stand on this issue, however, the majority of Christians would agree that when Jesus said to 'love your neighbour as yourself', that would include those who identify themselves as homosexual (Mark 12.31).

INCARNATION

The belief that God became human and was born to Mary, who named him **Jesus**. It comes from the Latin word *incarnatio*, which means 'to take flesh' and draws upon John 1.14, which states that 'the Word (i.e. Jesus Christ) was made flesh'. It's usually linked with the idea of the **virgin birth**.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN (ID)

(SEE ALSO 'CREATIONISM')

The idea that the universe and the species within it are far too complicated to have arisen by complete chance. The order and organisation throughout the universe is understood to point strongly to the existence of an intelligent designer, identified as God. The underlying thinking for this could be broadly described as biblical, although the drive to emphasise the idea over against the theory of evolution is a modern phenomenon.

Reference is sometimes made to certain biblical texts that illustrate aspects of the idea, such as Romans 1.19, 20 and Hebrews 11.3. Particularly within the United States, although increasingly in the UK, the promotion of the concept within schools has become controversial. Some view the concept as fundamentally unscientific, while others maintain that it is a legitimate counterbalance to what they see as the often unquestioned teaching of evolutionary theory.

J

JEHOVAH, YAHWEH

The English translation of the name of God as it appears in the **Old Testament**. The four Hebrew letters of this name (known as the 'tetragrammaton') are YHWH, from which the English equivalents Jehovah or Yahweh are reconstructed. At some stage, the Jewish people began to stop using the name, to avoid accidental blasphemy.

The translators of the Greek **Septuagint** replaced the tetragrammaton with the word 'Lord' throughout the text. Most modern translations translate the word as LORD in capital letters throughout the Old Testament. The modern religious movement of Jehovah's Witnesses, however, has revived the use of this name, which is something they believe to be especially important.

JESUS, JESUS CHRIST

The central figure of Christianity and a great **prophet** within the religion of Islam. Jesus is understood by Christians to be the **messiah** (or 'Christ'), the Son of God and the second person of the **Trinity**. The word Jesus comes from the Greek name *Iesous* used for him in the **New Testament**. His Hebrew name was probably *Yehoshua* (Joshua). This is likely because when Joshua from the **Old Testament** is mentioned in the New Testament, he is referred to as *Iesous* (Acts 7.45; Hebrews 4.8).

People who are reluctant to believe the **gospels** sometimes doubt whether Jesus ever existed. However, mentions of Jesus by Jewish and Roman historians show that he was a real historical figure, even if 'who he was' was still a matter of debate. On similar lines, some scholars who take an historical-critical approach to the Bible (see **biblical criticism**) also have their doubts about who Jesus was. They are often keen to make a distinction between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith'. Their 'quest for the historical Jesus' has led to an endless series of reconstructed men bearing that name.

This approach has been criticised for its assumption that the gospels are not reliable. Others have questioned the reasons for its distinction between Jesus the man and Christ the saviour. Popular fascination with the **Gnostic texts**, which describe Jesus in otherworldly terms, suggest that the question of 'who Jesus was' remains of great interest to many people.

JOHN THE BAPTIST / THE BAPTISER

A relative of **Jesus** and a public preacher who gained a following during the first century CE. John was known as 'the Baptist' because his mission focused on a 'baptism of repentance', that took place in the river Jordan. Scholars have described John's baptism as a symbolic act that people went through at the time to show they wanted to be part of a changed Israel (a bit like wearing a Live 8 wristband back in 2005 CE).

John is mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus as well as in the gospels. He reportedly had an 'in your face' style of preaching, which made him popular with the public but won him enemies in high places. It's possible that he may at some point have been connected with

the sect of the **Essenes**. Some scholars suspect this because both John and the sect emphasised the text of Isaiah 40.1–3, they both carried out ritual washings and he spent a lot of time out in the desert, near the headquarters of the Essene community.

On the other hand, there are differences. John's father was a priest in the Temple of Jerusalem – which the Essenes avoided – and he baptised in the river Jordan, which the Essenes viewed as unsuitable for ritual washings. Some explain the inconsistency by viewing John as an ex-member of the sect. John was eventually executed by King Herod Antipas. The biblical story about how this happened was immortalised and embellished in Oscar Wilde's 1894 CE play, *Salome*. Some modern scholars have alleged that Jesus acknowledged John the Baptist as his superior, but this idea rests on a dubious interpretation of Luke 7.28.

JUDGMENT DAY

The teaching that in some shape or form, all humans will face a public trial by God at the end of time. In Old English, it was known as 'doomsday' (which is where the *Domesday Book* gets its name). In the **Old Testament**, such an impending trial was known as the 'Day of **Jehovah**' or the 'Day of the Lord'. In the **New Testament**, Jesus is described as the one who will be the judge.

JUDAS ISCARIOT

One of the 12 **apostles**, who eventually betrayed Jesus. His surname Iscariot probably means 'man of Kerioth' (Kerioth was a village in Judaea of the time). Over the centuries, Judas became notorious as the 'baddie' of the group. The gospels describe him unfavourably as a 'thief', a '**devil**' and as the 'traitor' who infamously betrayed **Jesus** with a kiss (Matthew 26.47–50; Luke 6.16; John 6.70, 71; 12.4–6). Jesus reportedly said that it would have better for Judas not to have been born (Matthew 26:24). The Bible describes how Judas eventually committed suicide, unable to face up to his actions (Matthew 27.3–10; Acts 1.17–19).

Much later, because his name in Greek (*Ioudas*) was the same as the word for 'Jew', he became a symbol of Jews in general, who had become viewed as collectively guilty for betraying Jesus (see **Anti-Semitism**). In recent times, there has been an interest in reassessing the biblical portrait of Judas and in improving his public image. This was fuelled by the publication of the rediscovered **gospel** of Judas in 2006 CE and a later novel based upon it by Jeffrey Archer in 2007 CE. These works portrayed Judas as a close, trusted friend of Jesus – rather than as a turncoat.

However, most New Testament scholars believe the gospel of Judas to be a second century **Gnostic text**, rather than a work written by Judas himself. In other words, Judas was simply being used by the **Gnostics** as a tool to promote their ideas, along with other random figures. Their concern was not really to give him a makeover.

K

KING JAMES VERSION (KJV)

Also known as the *Authorised Version (AV)*, it's a translation of the Bible into English that was completed on the orders of King James I and published in 1611 CE. Fifty-four scholars worked on the translation, using available Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. Since it was 'appointed to be read in Churches', it soon became the official version of the Church of England and the most popular English Bible.

The King James Version has by far and away been the most influential Bible in English. It is used widely today in the USA (where it is the most owned version) and in Africa, largely because it is perceived as a reliable and noble version of the Bible. Critics of the version argue that sometimes it includes inaccurate translations and that it relied on medieval rather than ancient Greek manuscripts. They also say that many of its words and phrases have dropped out of everyday use or changed in meaning, making it hard to understand.

Defenders of the version point to the lasting value of its majestic style and argue that it is a word-for-word translation. In their view, this makes it more accurate than modern, paraphrase versions. Within the USA in particular, some churches will only use the King James Version. The King James Version has been updated several times over the years, once in 1769 and again in 1885 (when the *Revised Version* was produced).

L

LAST DAYS

(ALSO KNOWN AS THE 'END-TIMES')

The final period of world history. In the **Old Testament** the term usually refers to the age of the **Messiah**, which would involve some kind of final **judgment**. Christians disagree among themselves about when the last days began. Some consider that the last days began fairly recently, such as with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. They point to certain sayings of Jesus about events that would happen in the last days, which they claim are eerily similar to the situation in the world today (e.g. Matthew 24.3–14; Luke 21.24–27).

Others emphasise texts where the apostles seem to suggest that the last days had already begun in their own time (Acts 2.16, 17; 1 Corinthians 10.11; 1 John 2.18). Others have used an analogy with World War II to explain the concept of the last days more clearly. The Normandy landings on D-Day marked the beginning of the end of the Second World War in Europe, but not until VE Day the following year did that actually happen. Similarly, the last days are believed by some to mark the final chapter of life as we know it, even if the end is not yet in sight. It's worth noting, however, that Christians in every age have often thought that the end was near.

LAST JUDGMENT

See the entry on **judgment day**

M

MARY MAGDALENE

Mary Magdalene (or Mary of Magdala) has risen from relative obscurity to international stardom over the past few decades. This is mostly because some feminist theologians have asked questions about her significance, which were then popularised in the book and film *The Da Vinci Code*.

The gospels mention two Marys (other than the Virgin Mary) – Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany. Some in the early Christian movement thought there were good reasons to believe that these two were one and the same. After identifying the two together, they then linked this joint character with the 'loose woman' mentioned in Luke 7.36-8:2. This was because it sounded similar to a story about Mary of Bethany in John 12.3. A number of scholars now think this was possibly a case of mistaken identity, rather than deliberate slander. There are those, however, who do still believe that the two Marys are identical and it remains an open question.

Some have claimed that the early Church undertook a propaganda campaign against Mary Magdalene, to hide the fact that she was actually the honoured wife of Jesus. However, the fact that early Christians believed Mary Magdalene to be a reformed sinner does not mean that she was looked down upon within the early Church. The early Christian writer Hippolytus, for example, spoke about her positively as the first witness to the **resurrection of Jesus**.

The gospel of John does suggest that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were close – after all, when she met him in the garden, Mary Magdalene wanted to give Jesus a hug (John 20.16,17). And if Mary Magdalene is the same as Mary of Bethany, then Jesus often visited the house she shared with her sister Martha and brother Lazarus (Luke 10.38–42; John 11.1–3; 12.1–3). There is no real evidence, even in the **Gnostic texts**, that Mary was married to Jesus.

MASORETIC TEXT (MT), MASORETES

Texts of the Hebrew Bible (**Old Testament**) produced by the 'Masoretes' (Jewish copyists), who worked roughly between 600 – 950 CE. The Masoretes (which means 'transmitters') worked painstakingly on a range of manuscripts over the centuries with the aim of preventing mistakes creeping into the biblical text.

When translating the Old Testament into modern languages, scholars aim to base their work on Masoretic texts and then compare them with other biblical manuscripts from among the **Dead Sea scrolls** and the **Septuagint**. In the past, many scholars believed that the Masoretic texts were always more reliable than the Septuagint, although recently this idea has been called into question.

3.0 DIRECTORY

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.



MESSIAH

The royal saviour of Israel that was prophesied in the Old Testament. The word means 'Anointed One' in Hebrew (*mashiach*). The Greek translation of this word is *christos*, which is why **Jesus** is known as 'Christ'. Christians believe that Jesus is the foretold Messiah; Jews, however, believe that the Messiah has not yet come.

MILLENNIUM

The 1,000 year period mentioned in Revelation 20.1–7. As far back as the second century CE, there were mixed views among Christians about what this passage referred to. Some believe that when **Jesus** returns at the end of the world, he will set up an earthly kingdom in Israel that will last for 1,000 years. Others believe that it refers to a golden era of 1,000 years for the **Church**, after which Jesus will return. Still others hold that the number 1000 is symbolic (as is the number 666) and refers to the spiritual reign of Christians through the Church.

MOSES

The man who led the **Hebrews** out of slavery in Egypt to the land of Canaan. Moses is understood by Christians and Jews to have been a great **prophet**. The Bible describes how he miraculously parted the Red Sea during the exodus and received the **ten commandments** directly from God. He is traditionally believed to have been involved in the writing of the **Pentateuch**.

NAG HAMMADI TEXTS

A collection of 12 papyrus books (as well as a few extra pages) written by **Gnostics**, found in 1945 CE at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. For more information, see the entry on **Gnostic** texts.

NAZARENES, NAZOREANS

The term was first used in Acts 24.5 as an outsider's term for the Christian movement within Judaism. It comes from the Greek word *nazaraïos* ('of Nazareth'). Eventually, it became a term for Jews within the Christian movement in general. Some scholars think that **Ebionites** was an alternative name for this group, while others argue that a Nazarene was simply a Jew who believed **Jesus** to be God.

A **gospel** of the Nazoreans was quoted by Christian writers from the end of the second century CE onwards. It was probably produced by Jewish Christians around that time. Some Christians (e.g. Syriacs or some in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition) currently use the term 'Nazarene' or 'Nazarenes' to refer to their **denomination**.

NEW TESTAMENT

The Christian term for the collection of 27 books that were written by Christians following the death of **Jesus** and were understood to be inspired by God. It includes four **gospels**, one book of **Acts**, twenty-one **epistles** and an **apocalypse** (the book of Revelation). The term 'New Testament' was first used in Latin at the beginning of the third century CE by a Christian writer called Tertullian.

It means that the writings discussed a new agreement (testament or **covenant**) between God and humanity. Before then, the collection was known by a variety of names, including 'the Lord's Scriptures' or 'Gospel and Apostles'. The exact collection was more or less finalised towards the end of the second century CE but only decisively settled in the fourth century CE.

O

OLD TESTAMENT

The Christian term for the Hebrew Bible, which is first found as a phrase in Greek at 2 Corinthians 3.14, 15. The term means that the writings took place under a previous agreement (testament or **covenant**) made between God and humanity. Jewish people refer to the Hebrew Bible as the Tanakh. This word was developed using the first letters from the three biblical categories that make up the Old Testament - the **Torah** (the Law), **Nebiim** (the **Prophets**) and **Ketubim** (the Writings).

ORIGINAL SIN

The teaching that the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden (**the fall**) was the original cause of human imperfection. This imperfection is sometimes understood to have been passed on biologically by Adam and Eve down through the generations to their descendants. Catholic Christians understand it to involve an absence of God in the soul as well as a weakened human condition in general. They believe that when a person is baptised, this inherited alienation from God is removed from the soul.

Other Christians may believe that we have in some sense inherited a tendency to sin from the first humans, but would be less likely to call this 'original sin' or to believe that baptism addresses the problem. Others are not convinced that inherited sin is a biblical concept. They prefer to emphasise how the story in Genesis chapter 3 is the story of Everyman and Everywoman.

Some argue that the idea was invented by the Christian writer Augustine in the fourth century CE. Others, however, maintain that the concept of inherited sin from Adam is found in Christian literature written before Augustine, such as the **apocryphal** book of the **Apocalypse** of Ezra. They also insist that it is genuinely present in the Bible, at Romans 5.12–19 (although this is disputed by others).

P

PARABLE

Usually, a story that was told by **Jesus** to make a moral or religious point. The stories were about everyday life in first century Judaea, including subjects as varied as farming, family relationships and even cooking. Some of the parables are given symbolic meanings – and this was extended to all of the parables in later Christian thought. Two of the most famous are the parable of the good **Samaritan** (Luke 10.25–37) and the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11–32).

PASSION

The word comes from the Latin *passio*, which refers to the sufferings experienced by Jesus during his arrest, torture and eventual death. The term is most widely known outside Christian (and specifically Catholic) circles by its use in the title of the 2005 film *The Passion of the Christ*.

PASSOVER

The yearly Jewish festival in April/May that recalls and retells the story of how the Israelites were rescued from Egypt. The name (in Hebrew, *pesach*) comes from the idea that God 'passed over' the houses where Jewish people lived during one of the plagues of Egypt, but not those of Egyptian families. It involves eating a special roasted lamb during a family meal. In the past, it also included pilgrimages to the temple of Jerusalem, where a Passover lamb was also sacrificed.

PASTORAL EPISTLES

A series of personal letters written by the **apostle Paul** to Timothy and Titus. Some scholars think that they weren't actually written by Paul himself but by someone later writing under that pen name (e.g. perhaps his assistant Luke). This is because their style, subject matter and language tend to be different to Paul's general letters to the churches of Rome, Corinth and Galatia.

Others, however, point out that Paul's general letters were not just written by him, but by others such as Silas, Timothy and another assistant called Tertius. So the style of his personal letters may be his own, while the style of the general letters to the churches may be that of others plus Paul.

PAUL

An educated Jewish man who had a vision of **Jesus** on the road to Damascus and then became a Christian. He was later considered one of the **apostles** and wrote many of the letters included in the **New Testament**. Tradition has it that he was executed in Rome for refusing to abandon his Christian beliefs.

3.0 DIRECTORY

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PENTECOST, PENTECOSTAL

Originally, the Greek name for the Jewish festival of Weeks (Leviticus 23.15–16). This harvest celebration took place 50 days after the festival of the **Passover** (*pentekoste* means 'fiftieth'). **The Holy Spirit** is understood by Christians to have first descended during the festival of Pentecost (Acts 2.1–13). Therefore, the **Church** later developed its own festival of Pentecost, to mark this new beginning.

The Christian Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after **Easter** and is sometimes known as Whitsun (from 'White Sunday', because those who came forward for **baptism** wore white on that day). Certain Christians who emphasise the role and gifts of the Holy Spirit call themselves *Pentecostals*. Elsewhere, Pentecost is also used to refer to other eras of blessing within the Church.

PENTATEUCH

The first five books of the Bible, from the ancient Greek word *pentateuchos* (which means 'five books'). The Pentateuch is closely linked with **Moses**, who was previously understood by scholars (and still is by some, with qualifications) as the author or editor of the books within this collection.

PETER

A Jewish fisherman who was chosen by **Jesus** to be one of the 12 **apostles**. Two of the books of the **New Testament**, 1 and 2 Peter, are named after him. Tradition has it that like **Paul**, he too was executed in Rome because of his beliefs. He is often viewed as the source behind Mark's **gospel**. Catholics understand Peter to have been the first Pope.

PROPHET

Men or women that were understood to have been in direct touch with God, often in dreams and visions. A prophet's main task was to pass on messages from God to the people. This could, at times, involve predictions about what was to happen in the future, but it also involved acting as a consultant about God's view on a particular issue. The prophets spoke frankly about political, religious and personal matters, which often made them unpopular.

They had various ways of getting their messages across. This included public preaching, shock-tactic publicity stunts as well as putting pen to papyrus. The words and deeds of the prophets are recorded in the collection of books that later became known as 'the Prophets' (see **Old Testament**). In the Old Testament, prophets were also known as 'seers' (because they saw visions). In the **New Testament**, the ongoing role of 'prophet' seems to have been generally accepted within the Church.

PSALM

Hymns and prayers that were (and are) used by Jews during worship (both public and private) as well as during state occasions. Five books of them (150 psalms in total) were collected together in the biblical collection of Psalms (from the Greek word *psalmoi*, which means 'songs'). Some of these psalms are said to be written by King David, while others are thought to have been written by temple musicians. Later musicians carried on writing psalms, such as Psalm 151, which most Orthodox Christians include in their **canons**. The Psalms were later used in worship by the first Christian communities.

PSEUDEPIGRAPHA (PRONOUNCED 'SOODIP-IGRA-FA')

Jewish writings that never made it into either the Hebrew or Greek collections of the Bible that were used by Jews. The term means 'falsely ascribed writings', because the works were usually said to be written by a famous figure (such as **Moses**). The term 'Intertestamental Literature' is a broader and less loaded term for writings of that era.

The works were written in Hebrew or Greek and included poetry, **apocalypses**, legends and **psalms**. Some of the more famous are the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the book of *Jubilees*, the book of *Enoch*, the *Assumption of Moses* and the *Sybilline Oracles*. This body of literature is helpful in terms of understanding the background of teachings current within Jewish thought of the time.

Q

Q

A theoretical collection of sayings of Jesus used as source material by the gospel writers Matthew and Luke. The name is thought to come from the German word *Quelle* which means 'source'. It is thought by some to be an early Christian handbook of the teachings of Jesus. On the one hand, some scholars point out how the existence of such a document would explain why the gospels of Matthew and Luke are sometimes remarkably similar. On the other, no such document has ever been found and others account for the similarities by simply suggesting that Luke later copied Matthew. For more information, see **Synoptic problem**.

R

RAPTURE

A belief among some Christians that when **Jesus** returns at the end of time, believers will suddenly be snatched up to heaven to join him, leaving everyone else behind to muddle through in very difficult circumstances. This teaching is based primarily on the passage of 1 Thessalonians 4.13–18, where the return of Jesus is discussed (although other texts are also often quoted). It began in its modern form during the nineteenth century CE.

The word rapture comes from a word used in the Latin translation of this text, *rapimur*, which means ‘snatched’. An American Christian minister called Tim LaHaye popularised the concept in the *Left Behind* series of books, as well as in a film and a video game of the same name. Other Christians, who don’t believe in the Rapture, believe that this passage refers to Christians joining Jesus in his return to earth on **judgment day**.

REDEMPTION

Paying a price to release someone from an obligation (from the Latin word *redemptionem*). In the Old Testament, redemption often involved paying for the freedom of slaves. It later came to refer to rescue from other sticky situations, such as famine, death and war. In the **New Testament**, the death of **Jesus** on the cross is often referred to as a ‘redemption’ as well as an **atonement**. Many Christians understand the **crucifixion** to have been the price paid by Jesus to release people from their sins.

RESURRECTION OF JESUS

The belief that **Jesus** came to life again after having been crucified to death and buried in a rock tomb. It is often viewed as the foundational teaching of the entire Christian faith. The resurrection of Jesus is understood to involve him entering a new plane of existence. Although the resurrected Jesus is quoted as saying that he could be physically touched, it was also said that he could move through locked doors (John 20.19, 24–28).

Some scholars argue that the resurrection of Jesus did not involve the physical resuscitation of his corpse. Rather, they believe that it involved personal visions of Jesus, with the disciples believing him to be alive in their minds and hearts. They hold that the Greek word *opthe* that 1 Corinthians 15.8 uses to describe the resurrection (which is usually translated ‘he appeared to them’) usually described a vision rather than a real event.

On the other hand, other scholars insist that the language of the **New Testament** does appear to describe a bodily resurrection of Jesus (e.g. he had ‘flesh and bones’ – Luke 24.39). They also highlight examples of the use of the word *opthe* which do not involve visions but face-to-face experiences (e.g. Moses ‘appeared’ to two people in Acts 7.26).

The 2007 discovery of what was sensationally described as ‘*The Lost Tomb of Jesus*’ (the family tomb to which the remains of Jesus were supposedly moved) made headlines, but failed to impress many scholars. The resurrection of Jesus is celebrated by Christians on **Easter Sunday**.

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD/BODY

The teaching that on **judgment day**, people who have died will be raised out of the graves to stand trial before God. There are different understandings among Christians of what exactly this will involve and also on the timing. **Paul’s** letter to the Corinthians (chapter 15) goes into detail about the resurrection. It reveals that Christians of his time also had questions about how this would work. Some Christians understand the statement in that chapter that those raised from the dead will have ‘spiritual bodies’ to mean that they will no longer be physical. Others insist that ‘a spiritual body’ is still a real physical body, but a supernatural one.

Some Christians believe that the resurrection will be a staged process (some first, others later). Others believe that everyone will experience it at the same time. Some hold that everyone who has ever lived will be resurrected. Others think that it will only be a select few. However, Christians do not generally understand the resurrection of the dead to be a return of zombie-like creatures as in so many horror movies. They usually believe that it means entering a fuller level of existence, in the same way that Jesus is believed to have done after his own resurrection.

3.0 DIRECTORY

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S

SABBATH

Saturday or Sunday as a day of rest and worship. The term comes from the Hebrew word *shabbat*, which means either 'to cease' or 'seventh'.

It was part of the law of **Moses** that everyone, even animals, had to rest from work on Saturday, the Sabbath day (Exodus 20.8–11). The thinking behind this was that since God had 'rested' from creating the world on the seventh day, his worshippers should too. Keeping the Sabbath was a serious matter – and it even included giving the fields a rest once every seven years (Exodus 23.10–11). The Sabbath day began not at midnight, but at sunset on Friday evening and continued until sunset on Saturday evening.

Within the early Christian communities, the first day of the week (i.e. Sunday) became a special day for worship (Acts 20.7). This was partly because Sunday was the day on which they believed Jesus to have risen from the dead. Some Christians believe that **Jesus** or the **apostles** transferred the Sabbath rest from Saturday to Sunday. Others believe that worship on Sunday replaced rest on Saturday and that the apostles phased out the Sabbath concept altogether.

Seventh Day Adventists, on the other hand, believe that the seventh day (Saturday) should remain the Christian Sabbath. Christians differ among themselves about whether – and how – people should rest on Sundays. Sunday, understood as the Sabbath or not, is often known as 'the Lord's Day', a phrase first found in Revelation 1.10. Many Christians, regardless of their beliefs about the Sabbath, do agree that the principle of resting one day out of seven is important in terms of maintaining a work/life balance.

SACRAMENTS

Christian ceremonies understood to have been introduced by Jesus and mentioned in the Bible. Catholic and some Orthodox Christians believe that there are seven – **baptism**, confirmation (or chrismation), the **eucharist**, reconciliation (or penance/confession), holy order, marriage and anointing of the sick (or holy unction). Orthodox Christians sometimes refer to them as *mysteries*.

Other Christians often believe that there are only two, baptism and the Lord's supper, which may also be called holy communion or the eucharist. They may also refer to these as *ordinances* rather than sacraments. However, there are some Christians, such as High Church Anglicans, who would also value the ceremonies of confession and confirmation.

Christians also differ on whether the sacraments are symbolic ceremonies, or whether they actually 'do what they say on the tin' by actually producing a spiritual change within people. The Salvation Army, on the other hand, does not believe that sacraments are essential for Christians.

SAINTS

In the Bible, a term used for people who belong to the holy community of God. The Hebrew and Greek terms originally meant 'holy ones'. Later 'saint' was used to refer to particularly holy individuals who were held up as role models. Many churches are named after saints in this sense, such as St. **Paul's** Cathedral in London or St. **Peter's** Basilica in Rome. 'All Saints' is a festival that takes place in some churches on 1 November.

SAMARITAN, SAMARIA

The term is best known in English from the **parable** of the good Samaritan (Luke 10.25–37). The Samaritans were a Jewish sect who lived in the region of Samaria. They had different beliefs to those of mainstream Judaism, including an emphasis on Mount Gerizim as a sacred place, rather than Jerusalem. As such, mainstream Jews would have nothing to do with them. This made the parable of Jesus all the more shocking. In his story, it was an enemy Samaritan, not a mainstream Jew, who proved to be the more charitable.

SATAN

Satan is a Hebrew word, which roughly means 'opponent' or 'accuser'. In the **Old Testament**, Satan is generally portrayed as a lawyer-angel, who spends his time prosecuting sinners. It isn't entirely clear from these texts, however, whether Satan is a good or an evil figure. When the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek, the word *satan* was translated as *diabolos*, which in ancient Greek means 'evil opponent' or 'slanderer'. So by that point, Satan was clearly beginning to be understood as a more sinister person.

By the time the **New Testament** was written, the devil (*diabolos*) is described far more clearly as an evil person and as the leader of the fallen angels. Some interpreters would therefore say that there is a contradiction between Satan as described in the Old Testament (particularly in the book of Job) and the devil as described in the New Testament. Others would say that there is no contradiction, merely a clearer understanding of the nature of this person as time went on.

On the other hand, some do not believe that the devil is a literal individual. In their view, the devil is merely a personification of our own wrong desires. The Bible certainly never describes the devil as someone who wears red, has horns or who carries a pitchfork. Nor does it give such a being the name Lucifer. It was later Christian writers who applied the Latin text of Isaiah 14.12 (which refers to the king of Babylon as 'Lucifer', meaning 'light-bringer'), to the devil.

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

Theology may once have been described as ‘the queen of the sciences’, but many consider that it has long been removed from this throne. The relationship between the Bible and science has been characterised in several ways over the centuries. There are those who see the two as fundamentally in conflict. Some think that they just ask different questions (how versus why). Others argue that in fact, they are complementary.

Disagreements

Those who see them as enemies tend to emphasise disagreements. There are a number of issues upon which science and the Bible have been said to conflict. These include whether the earth is billions of years old, whether the universe began with a Big Bang, the theory of evolution, how and when dinosaurs fit into the biblical creation story, heliocentricism (the belief that the earth revolves around the sun), the possibility of miracles and the impact of neuroscience on the belief in a human soul.

It’s true that differences do exist between *certain* scientific theories and *certain* interpretations of the Bible. Christians who believe in **creationism** often argue that the Bible does not allow for evolutionary theory, or for an earth older than 6,000 years or for the Big Bang. They argue that a plain reading of Genesis 1 and 2 leads to a belief in special creation and an earth that was created in six literal days a few thousand years ago. On the other hand, other Christians who either don’t believe in creationism – or who believe the issue is a bit of red herring – tend to interpret the Genesis accounts more symbolically (although this doesn’t necessarily mean mythically). For further background, see the entries on **creationism** and **intelligent design**.

Galileo

The ‘classic’ case study for those who see science and religion as opposites is the argument between the scientist Galileo and the Catholic Church during the sixteenth century CE. Galileo claimed that he had evidence that the earth revolved around the sun. However, the popular medieval understanding, drawn from the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, was that the earth was stationary and at the centre of the universe. The **Church** had largely bought into this idea and interpreted Bible verses such as Psalm 96.10 and Ecclesiastes 1.5 in ways that were consistent with it.

Since Galileo criticised such biblical interpretation, he ended up in trouble with the cardinals and the pope. However, a cardinal named Robert Bellarmine wrote to Galileo, saying that if he had real proof that the earth did revolve around the sun, then ‘passages of Scripture which appear to teach the contrary’ would have to be reviewed. So the issue was not really ‘science versus the Bible’, but whether there was a scientific case for abandoning Aristotle’s views, which at first glance seemed to fit better with the Bible.

Miracles

In the past, it was also often assumed by critics that the miracles described in the Bible were impossible because they ‘broke’ the ultra-predictable laws of physics which had been observed by scientists (e.g. the law of gravitation would have made the ascent of

Jesus to heaven impossible). However, others argue that the rise of quantum mechanics and Einstein’s theory of relativity have challenged this idea that the universe runs uniformly and like clockwork. More recently, the rise of neuroscience has raised questions about the traditional Christian beliefs in the immortal **soul** and human free will. Some neuroscientists have asserted that we are merely physical creatures who will not survive death and that we possess no more free will than do animals. However, the fact that there are Christian neuroscientists shows that such a belief is far from being a done deal. For their part, theologians have been prepared to review the biblical concept of the soul. They have also been prepared to revise long-held ‘dualist’ ideas about its interaction with the brain.

Complementary

On the other hand, there are theologians and scientists who disagree that there is – or should be – a pitched battle between the two disciplines. They argue that both tend to approach issues from different starting points. In other words, scientists ask ‘how’, while theologians ask ‘why’. This view was first articulated clearly in the sixteenth century CE by Francis Bacon, who is considered by many to have been a major contributor to the rise of observational science. Bacon’s view was that God had revealed himself through ‘two books’ – the Scriptures and the natural world – and that both contained important truths.

This idea was later characterised in two very different ways. The first emphasised that science and theology were two very distinct fields – so never overlapped. The second argued that although there may at times be some overlap, essentially the two were complementary. Neither of these two perspectives are without problems, but many view them as closer to the truth than the idea that science and the Bible should always be at each other’s throats.

The fact remains that a large number of Christians, whether within the scientific community or without, do not agree that the Bible and scientific research are necessarily in conflict. For many, the underlying issue is that the real conflict is between atheism and theism, rather than science and religion.

SCRIPTURE(S)

From the Latin word *scriptura* (writing), it’s a term for the sacred books of the Jews and Christians. It’s now used for the holy books of other religions too. Catholics often refer to ‘Sacred Scripture’ rather than ‘the Bible’.

SECRET MARK

An alternative version of the **gospel** of Mark, allegedly quoted in a letter by an early Christian writer called Clement of Alexandria. The gospel is said to be an 'improvement' on the basic one found in the Bible. It's said to contain secret teachings of Jesus that were only passed on to 'advanced' Christians.

The publication of the letter in 1973 CE was controversial because it suggested that the Jesus movement may have originally had homosexual undertones. Some biblical scholars believe that Mark did write a more developed version of his gospel. Others however, argue at length that either Clement's letter was a modern-day fraud or that 'Secret Mark' was a much later invention by a **Gnostic** group.

SEPTUAGINT

(ALSO KNOWN AS 'LXX' AND PRONOUNCED 'SEP-TOO-AH-GINT')

A series of Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible that took place in Egypt during the third century BCE. The Greek **Old Testament** is known as the Septuagint (which means 'seventy' in Latin) because legend has it that either 70 or 72 Jewish scholars living in Alexandria did the translation work. It is often abbreviated in Roman numerals to LXX. The Septuagint sometimes differs from the text of the Hebrew Bible (particularly the **Masoretic Text**), in terms of order, wording, length and content.

SEXISM

The portrayal of women in the Bible can be an emotive subject. Some feminist scholars take for granted the view that the Bible is essentially a sexist book. It was, they point out, written almost entirely by men, for men, using masculine language. These scholars view it as a 'power tool' that has been used down the centuries by mostly male leaders to keep women 'in their place'.

For most of Christian history, biblical interpretation has often been associated mostly with men rather than with women. Seeming statements that wives should submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5.22), women should not take the lead in church (1 Corinthians 14.33–35) and that bearing children seems to be their role in life (1 Timothy 5.11–14) can and do grate on the ears of many.

However, other feminist scholars look at the Bible with different eyes. They maintain that the Bible is made up of many texts and therefore to dismiss it all as sexist is simplistic. As far as they are concerned, when properly considered, the Bible outlines a positive view of women and their relationships with men. They point out that it is entirely possible that women may have had a hand in writing the Bible (Ezra 2.55 refers to someone with a surname of Hassophereth, which means 'female scribe').

Feminist scholars have also emphasised the strong female voices in the books of Proverbs, Lamentations and Song of Songs. The liberating attitude of **Jesus** towards women is also often discussed. John 4.27, for example, shows that Jesus broke social conventions that discouraged conversations with women. Similarly, the gospel of Luke has long been referred to as the

'gospel of women' for its strong positive portrayal of women in the life of Jesus.

In the light of such insights, apparently sexist texts within the Bible have come in for greater scrutiny. Against this backdrop, the issue of the ordination of women into leadership roles within Church organisations continues. Debates rage over whether texts that appear to exclude women from certain types of Church leadership roles actually do. Discussions over the roles played by women such as Phoebe (Romans 16.1), the context of Paul's statement of equality in Galatians 3.28 and why Jesus only chose male **apostles** are now well-worn.

The understanding of these verses depends, in the final analysis, on a deeper question about the role and interpretation of the Bible in the present day (see also **7.6 Lost in translation** for a discussion of possible sexism in Bible translation).

SIX HUNDRED AND SIXTY SIX (666)

People have always been interested in the significance of the number 666, which is mentioned in Revelation 13.18 as 'the mark of the beast'. The number is probably a type of ancient code called *gematria*, based on adding up the numerals of someone's name. There were many examples of this in Roman times; this reference seems to be a Christian take on the idea.

Many biblical scholars think that the number 666 refers to the first century Roman emperor Nero, because the code works for that name in Hebrew (and the later alternative in some texts of 616 works in Latin). Some modern fundamentalist Christians, however, believe that 666 refers to a potential microchip or electronic device that all will be forced to use before the end of the world. The concept of the number as a birthmark, or as the sign of the Devil, comes from the 1974 CE film *The Omen*, rather than the Bible.

SLAVERY

Slavery is an issue that's often mentioned when discussing changing interpretations of the Bible. The subject raises interesting questions about how ancient texts are to be understood and applied in the modern world. However, it's important to consider the issue without equating the transatlantic slave trade with the slavery mentioned in the Bible.

The 'slavery' described in the **Old Testament** was actually bonded labour, rather than chattel slavery (which is where someone 'owns' another). This means that for the most part, it was voluntary and people weren't owned by a master. People freely bonded themselves to an employer for a set period of six years, usually as a way of paying off their debts. This 'golden handcuffs' arrangement was a bit like modern-day military service (where once people have freely enlisted, they cannot just go AWOL).

Unlike the transatlantic slave trade, freedom was guaranteed after six years under what was called the 'jubilee law'. That's not to say that there were still aspects of the bonded labour system that most people now would have moral problems with. Employers were still allowed to physically punish their bonded

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.

labourers, for example. And many are convinced that bonded labour itself is exploitative and inhuman. However, the simplistic idea that 'the Old Testament endorses slavery' does need to be rethought.

When it comes to the **New Testament**, the context is different. Chattel slavery was legal and widely practised throughout the Roman Empire. **Jesus** referred matter-of-factly to its existence (Matthew 10.24–25; Luke 12.35–48). Yet he also said that part of his mission was to set captives free (Luke 4.18).

What the **apostles** made of this is a matter of debate. Some scholars argue that they seem to just accept and even endorse the existence of slavery. They highlight how the apostles insisted that slaves obey their masters – whether Christian or not (Ephesians 6.5–9; Colossians 3.22–25; 1 Timothy 6.1–2; 1 Peter 2.18–20).

On the other hand, Roman law made it extremely difficult for slave-owners to free ('manumit') any slave under the age of 30. Since few slaves lived beyond the age of 30 (as shown by studies of their tombstones), this made releasing them a real problem. So others argue that faced with such legal constraints, the apostles took a more practical solution. They demanded that Christian owners revolutionise the way they treated their slaves. They were forbidden to threaten them or to treat them unfairly (Ephesians 6.9; Colossians 4.1).

Scholars disagree about other New Testament texts that mention slavery. There was debate as far back as the fourth century CE about whether 1 Corinthians 7.21 encouraged or discouraged slaves to seize freedom (it depends on how the verse is translated). There is similar discussion about the letter to Philemon. Was Paul sending the runaway slave Onesimus back to slavery under his master Philemon? Or was he heavily hinting that Philemon should free Onesimus? Not everyone agrees.

As Britain colonised the world, however, many quoted biblical references to slavery (both from the Old and New Testaments) to justify the transatlantic slave trade. Genesis 9.24–27 in particular was pressed into service to justify shipping millions of black Africans abroad and forcing them to work as slaves.

For their part, abolitionists such as William Wilberforce during the nineteenth century pointed out that both 1 Timothy 1.10 and Revelation 18.13 appear to condemn the slave trade. Whether the Bible is read for or against slavery depends very much on an interpreter's starting point and how far they are prepared to take the cultural context of individual texts into consideration.

SYNOPTIC GOSPELS, SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

The synoptic **gospels** are Matthew, Mark and Luke. They are called 'synoptic' (which means 'of one eye') because they cover roughly the same stories, occasionally in the same order and sometimes their wording is even identical. John's gospel is almost entirely different, so it is usually studied separately. The 'synoptic problem' is the term used to describe the study of how these three gospels relate to each other (e.g. which was written first, did one copy the other etc.).

Biblical scholars have come up with various solutions to this problem. Traditionally, the **Church** insisted that Matthew was written first, followed by Mark who abbreviated Matthew and then Luke who used them both as sources. With the rise of modern biblical criticism, this view was challenged and the two-source theory developed and became popular. According to this theory, Mark (as the shortest) was written first and then used as a source by both Matthew and then Luke. Matthew and Luke also both used a common source, dubbed '**Q**', (as well as their own sources) as they put their gospels together.

The two-source theory remains the most popular, although it has been challenged by recent studies. Some scholars would accept the two-source theory but would question the existence of Q. A smaller number believe that Luke wrote first or that Matthew was originally written in Aramaic and was therefore the earliest.

SOUL

The word means various things in the Bible, depending on the context. Sometimes it means a living, breathing person (like in the phrase SOS, 'save our souls'). At other times, it appears to describe the non-physical part of humans that is understood to survive death. There is some overlap in the Bible between the words for soul and spirit. Some Christians think that soul and spirit are the same thing; others think that they are different.

T

TEN COMMANDMENTS

(ALSO KNOWN AS 'THE DECALOGUE')

The ten laws that God is understood to have given to **Moses** on tablets of stone. The laws are recorded in both Exodus 20.1–7 and Deuteronomy 5.6–21. The Bible actually describes them as the 'ten words' rather than the 'ten commandments' (Exodus 34.28).

The formal term decalogue comes from the ancient Greek phrase *deka logous* ('ten words'). Neither does the Bible number or divide the commandments; that only happened later. As a result, Catholic and Lutheran traditions number them differently to those in Jewish and other Protestant traditions.

TEXTUS RECEPTUS

A version of the Greek **New Testament** that was the standard one during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries CE. The phrase is Latin for 'received text' and was used to describe the version in the prefaces of certain editions. The Textus Receptus was the Greek text used as the basis for the **King James Version** of the Bible.

THEOLOGY, THEOLOGIAN

(PRONOUNCED 'THEO-LOW-JUN')

Theology literally means 'the study of God'. The term for someone who studies/studied theology is 'theologian'. There is no such word as 'theologist'.

TORAH

A Jewish word meaning 'instruction' or 'law'. Sometimes, it just means the Jewish law in general. Often, it's used to refer to the first five books of the Bible - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (i.e. those books otherwise known as the **Pentateuch**).

TRINITY

The Christian teaching that there is one God in three 'persons': God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. While the Bible does not spell out the teaching of the Trinity in so many words (or even use the term), many theologians agree that the basic elements of the teaching (i.e. that there is only one God, but that somehow the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are distinct yet also God in their own right) are to be found within its pages.

The Christian writer Theophilus of Antioch was the first to use the term (in Greek) at the end of the second century CE. As such, some scholars insist that ancient Greek language about God got inappropriately smuggled into Christianity in the centuries following the completion of the **New Testament**.

On the other hand, others argue that the use of foreign religious terms is common even within the Bible itself (e.g. it was the ancient Babylonians who first called certain angels 'cherubim' and the term 'conscience' came from the ancient Greeks). Nevertheless, the extent to which technical terminology about God from ancient Greece (e.g. 'trinity', 'person', 'consubstantial' etc.) should still be used today remains a matter of debate among some Christians.

U

UNCIAL

(PRONOUNCED 'UNSYUL')

An uncial (or majuscule) text of the Bible is the usual term for one copied onto parchment and written in elaborate capital letters. Later copies of the Bible were written in minuscule (lower case).

V

VEIL

For various reasons, the issue of women veiling themselves as part of their faith has become a matter of public concern among some within twenty-first century Britain. Israelite women in biblical times rarely wore face veils (except as brides), although they often covered their heads. Within Greek and Roman society, married women usually covered their heads when out in public but face-veiling was uncommon when Christianity got off the ground.

As far as the Bible is concerned, there is very little mention of veiling, except to say that unlike **Moses**, Christians are all to go about with their faces unveiled (2 Corinthians 3.12–18). There is, however, an extended discussion of women wearing head-coverings/veils in 1 Corinthians 11.1–16. This passage is understood differently among Christians. Some believe that it requires all women to wear a head-covering during worship services as a sign of modesty. This interpretation has a long history, especially in the past within Catholicism.

Others believe, looking to a particular translation of 11.10, that the passage actually empowers women to make a decision for themselves on this point. Still others would argue that it refers to the ancient Roman custom of wives wearing a shawl on their heads when out in public (called a *palla*), to show that they were married (the equivalent activity in our time would be wearing a wedding ring).

VELLUM

A fine type of parchment. To make it, the skins of sheep, goats, calves or antelopes were scraped and stretched into something like paper. Many biblical books were originally written on, or copied onto, vellum.

Sometimes, to save money, a scribe would scrape off the original writing on a piece of vellum and then reuse it. Manuscripts with two layers of writing like this are called *palimpsests*. Often, the writing underneath is more important to scholars than the later writing on top. Nowadays, the half-erased under-writing can be read using ultra-violet photography.

VIOLENCE

Some of the violent behaviour described in the Bible could rival that of any horror film. There are many stories about harsh penalties for what seem like petty crimes, tens of thousands being struck dead as punishment for their sins, gory tales about violent rape and dark desires expressed about killing babies (Numbers 15.32–36; 16.42–50; Judges 19.22–30; Psalm 137.8,9). Many therefore find it hard to understand how a Bible with such ‘toxic texts’ could possibly be the book of a loving God.

Many Christians (not to mention others) are often deeply uncomfortable with some of the more brutal commandments of God found in the **Old Testament**. One in particular is the command to ‘ethnically cleanse’ the land of Canaan, leaving no man, woman or child who refused to leave alive (Deuteronomy chapter 20). This command was known as the *herem* (which means ‘the ban’). Some argue that the *herem* was supposed to deter the Israelites from violent conquest, since it also forbade them to take booty in war. Later Jews did not view these texts as condoning violence as normal behaviour. The book of Wisdom (12.1–22) shows that the lesson to be drawn from the conquest of Canaan was the importance of being merciful and only using violence as a last resort. Recent studies have also shown how the prophet Amos appears to condemn breaches of human rights during warfare, such as torture, slavery, murder of refugees and disrespect for the dead (Amos 1.1–2.3).

Some biblical scholars have traced the origins of sacred violence within Christianity to the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis chapter 4). On the one hand, some view it as the first story of a religious disagreement that ended in violence. On the other, some argue that at the heart of the issue was the human tendency to use others as scapegoats. They argue that **Jesus** fundamentally undermined such a concept of sacred violence when he died on the cross.

Much of the criticism of violence in the Bible (and specifically, the Old Testament) appears to revolve around what it says about the character of God. The book of Isaiah describes violent punishments as ‘out of the ordinary’ or ‘alien’ for God (Isaiah 28.21, 22). The book of Chronicles relates how Solomon – not David – was to build the temple, the central focus for Jewish worship. The reason was that David had been a bloody warrior, whereas Solomon was to be a man of peace (1 Chronicles 22.7–10). This is interpreted by many to mean that God and violence are fundamentally incompatible. The God of the Old Testament, although he might sometimes punish, is essentially presented as one of ‘tenderness and compassion’ who is ‘slow to anger’ (Exodus 34.6–9).

3.0 DIRECTORY

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.



VIRGIN BIRTH

The Christian teaching, drawn from **gospel** texts such as Matthew 1.18–25 and Luke 1.26–38, that Mary miraculously conceived and gave birth to **Jesus**, although she was a virgin. People sometimes mistakenly think that the term *immaculate conception* also refers to the virgin birth. In fact, the immaculate conception is a Catholic teaching that Mary was born without **original sin**.

VULGATE (PRONOUNCED ‘VUL-GAYT’)

The name now used for the Latin translation of the Bible completed by the biblical scholar Jerome at the turn of the fifth century CE. The term comes from the Latin word *vulgata*, which means ‘commonly-used’. In his translation work, Jerome used mostly Hebrew, rather than Greek manuscripts. This was because he thought that the Greek **Septuagint** was unreliable and he doubted whether the extra books it contained were **canonical** Scripture.

The Vulgate became the official Bible of the Catholic Church after the Council of Trent in 1546 CE. It was the basis of a series of translations of the Bible into English, including Wycliffe’s Bible of 1380 CE and the Catholic Douai-Rheims version of 1582 CE. It was revised in 1590 CE and then in 1592 CE on the orders of Popes Sixtus V and Clement VIII. It remains an important text in terms of the overall history of Bible translation, since Jerome had access to Hebrew texts which have not survived.

WAR

What the Bible might have to say on the subject of war and **violence** is of keen interest to many in a world where conflicts hit the headlines almost every day. The **Old Testament** certainly describes many wars in detail. This includes, for example, the many battles involved in Israel’s conquest of Canaan and also those fought by King David (Joshua 12; 2 Samuel chapter 8). Yet the common wish was for Israel to be given rest from all its enemies around about (Deuteronomy 12.10; Joshua 23.1; 1 Chronicles 22.9). This suggests to some that there was a greater interest in defence rather than aggression. Another common theme among the **prophets** was a desire for the **messiah** to come to end war and establish peace (Isaiah 9.1–7; Micah 4.1–4; Zechariah 9.10).

Christians believe that **Jesus** was that messiah. Some of them believe that Jesus was a pacifist, or at least a peacekeeper. They point to a series of texts which suggest that the message of Jesus was essentially one of peace and non-violence (Matthew 5.9, 39; Luke 1.76–79; John 14.27; 20.21). There is also a long history of interpreting the story of Jesus telling Peter to lay down his sword as a rejection of armed conflict (Matthew 26.51–54). On the other hand, other Christians believe that war can be morally acceptable, especially in self-defence. They point to statements in the **New Testament** which appear to suggest this. This includes the reference in Hebrews 11.32–34 to people whose faith motivates them to fight in battle and to the need to obey governments who wield the sword (Romans 13.1–5).

Mirroring these two perspectives, there were disagreements among the early Christians about the morality of war. Eventually, however, the majority view became that war was acceptable in some circumstances. This led to the development of the concept of the ‘just war’, which was mapped out in detail by Thomas Aquinas, a medieval theologian. The changing nature of warfare, however, has led many to look again at the biblical data. The invention of the atomic bomb, the immediacy of terrorist threats and the desire for Christians and Muslims to peacefully co-exist have been some of the main issues driving this renewed debate.

Y

YAHWEH

See the entry on **Jehovah**

Z

ZIONISM, ZIONISTS

The term comes from the word Zion (in Hebrew, *tsiyon*). Zion was an ancient name for the city of Jerusalem. Zionism is the belief that the Jewish people have a God-given right to live in the land of Israel. Christian Zionism is the belief that the Bible requires Christians to support this idea. This usually involves spiritual, material and political support for the current State of Israel.

Many Christian Fundamentalists and a number of Evangelicals (particularly in the USA) believe in Christian Zionism. They interpret a series of texts from Genesis (e.g. 12.1–3; 15.18–21; 17.8) to support this teaching. They believe that God has permanently given the land of Israel to the descendants of **Abraham** and that it is their right to be there. Biblical prophecies about the resettlement of the Jewish people in the land of Israel are also often quoted as proof that God favoured the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 CE. Some Christians interpret 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 to mean that the temple of Jerusalem will be rebuilt. They believe that this will ignite a clash with Islam and cause a war in the Middle East. This conflict will result in **Armageddon**.

Many other Christians are sympathetic to the right of the Jewish people to a homeland. Nevertheless, they disagree with the idea that the territory should belong unconditionally to them. In August 2006 CE, the bishops of Jerusalem rejected Christian Zionism as an unbiblical teaching. Texts such as Leviticus 25.23 are sometimes quoted to support the idea that the Jews no longer have an exclusive right to Israel. In their view, the promise of the land of Israel to Abraham was only conditional. Further, many Christians believe that God no longer favours the Jewish people over others.

3.0 DIRECTORY

This section is an A-Z of biblical terms or issues that are either often featured in news stories or frequently misunderstood.

4.0



**QUESTION TIME:
WHAT DOES THE
BIBLE MEAN?**

4.1 STARTING POINTS

The technical terms for interpreting the Bible are **hermeneutics** and **exegesis**. Biblical interpretation involves trying to find out what a biblical text means. And what the Bible 'means' is something Christians don't always agree on. This is sometimes because they are approaching biblical interpretation from different starting points or working with very different methods.

In summary, there are three different starting points for interpretation that people often use – what the author may have originally meant, what the text actually says and also, how the reader interprets it.

4.0 QUESTION TIME: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN?

This section provides an overview of interpretation of the Bible, looking at different starting points and the variety of methods people use.

STARTING WITH THE AUTHOR

Traditionally, Christians have believed that *what the biblical author meant to get across* is what people should consider. Sometimes this approach is described by the term 'authorial intention'. Those who approach hermeneutics this way believe that the author's meaning is captured within the biblical text. By studying the historical and literary context of a saying or story, they say, we can discover what was originally meant.

They may also draw a distinction between *what a text originally meant* and *what significance it had* for those who read it later. However, others question this approach on several grounds. For example, sometimes it's unclear who the original biblical authors were. And even if we did know who they were, how could we possibly get inside their heads and discover what they intended to communicate?

STARTING WITH THE TEXT

Another line of thinking is that the Bible should be interpreted as literature. This is sometimes known as the 'literary' or 'formalist' approach to interpretation. This view holds that texts, like supermarket trolleys, have minds of their own, regardless of what authors or readers may want them to mean. Therefore, they should be studied as stand-alone units of literature.

This type of interpretation focuses on narrative features such as characters within a text, plot development, genre (see **3.3, Different types of literature within the Bible**), context and key words used by an author. Critics of this view, however, argue that it's impossible for texts to stand alone in this fashion, suspended in time and space.

STARTING WITH THE READER

Others believe that what a biblical text 'means' *depends on who is reading it*. They argue that readers don't simply take in information; they actively manufacture meaning as they read a text. This is sometimes known as 'reader-response criticism' or 'reception theory'. The Bible has been read differently over several thousand years and in many religious, ethnic and geographic contexts. From the perspective of the reader, there are a wide range of possible 'meanings' for any part of it.

Some people would say that the Bible, like works of art, can validly be read in different ways. Nevertheless, there are different ways of characterising reader-response criticism. Some go as far as to insist that we always need to 'read between the lines' and look at what a text *doesn't say* as much as what it does. Others prefer to talk about the imaginary reader that the author had in mind when he or she wrote the text. However, reception theory has been criticised by some for involving 'creative reconstruction' rather than valid interpretation.

4.2 WAYS OF INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

Over the centuries, Jewish and Christian scholars have developed different ways of interpreting the Bible. Jewish rabbis living around the time of Jesus developed an elaborate set of rules to help them interpret their sacred texts. Among early Christian writers, there were two main schools of thought about biblical interpretation. Those who studied the Bible in Egypt tended to favour more symbolic interpretations. Those who studied in what is now Turkey, however, preferred more literal, historical readings.

A monk called John Cassian (360–435 CE), took the discussion to the next level by bringing both kinds of interpretation together. He identified four ways in which the Bible could be understood. By the Middle Ages, these four methods of interpretation (or 'senses') had become fairly standard among Christians. Broadly, they are:

LITERAL

One approach is to take biblical texts at face value. This doesn't necessarily mean *absolutely* literally (e.g. that the rivers really should 'clap their hands' as the song of Psalm 98.8 has it). Generally, it means that texts should be read in their 'natural' or 'historical' sense. Because it deals with actual events, actual people and actual statements, the literal method is often – but not always – considered the most important kind of interpretation of the Bible. However, some Christians prefer a more simple distinction between 'the spirit and the letter' – i.e. spiritual versus literal readings, rather than the four traditional methods.

SYMBOLIC

Another way to read biblical texts is on a deeper, more symbolic level. This was often known as the allegorical or typological method. The Bible itself includes a clear example of this. The **apostle Paul** wrote that the story about **Abraham** and his two wives, Hagar and Sarah, could be read allegorically. He interpreted it to refer to the difficult relationship between Jewish people and Christians of his time (Galatians 4.22–31).

This type of interpretation was popular in the early Church. Many, for example, gave Christian meanings to details from the book of Joshua (e.g. 'crossing the river Jordan to the Promised Land' was about **baptism**, the 'red rope of Rahab' symbolised the blood of Christ etc.).

ETHICAL

A third way of interpreting the Bible is to look for an 'ethical' meaning. This is sometimes known as the moral or tropological sense. It involves reading between the lines of a Bible passage or verse to see how it applies to daily life. In Jewish circles this was (and is) known as **midrash**. 1 Corinthians chapter 9 in the **New Testament** contains an example of midrash. The apostle Paul quotes a saying from the **Old Testament** (9.9, 10) about oxen and then 'explains' what the text actually implied on an ethical level (i.e. that apostles have the right to financial support).

MYSTICAL

A fourth kind of interpretation finds mystical or **eschatological** meaning within Bible texts. Mystical in this sense usually involves interpreting texts to reveal something about the future. For example, the book of Revelation uses the word 'Jerusalem' to refer to the heavenly future of Christians (Revelation 21.2). Therefore, wherever some interpreters found the word Jerusalem elsewhere in the Bible, they concluded that it also had something to say about heaven.

Another kind of mystical interpretation involves finding secret codes that deal with the here and now. The 'Kabbalah' method of interpretation within Judaism finds coded meaning (in numbers and symbols) within the words of the Torah (e.g. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are said to stand for the emotions of love, fear and mercy respectively). Similarly, the 1997 publication of the **Bible Code** claimed to unlock mystical codes about world history hidden within the biblical text.



4.0 QUESTION TIME: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN?

This section provides an overview of interpretation of the Bible, looking at different starting points and the variety of methods people use.

4.3 DIFFERENT TYPES OF LITERATURE WITHIN THE BIBLE

The Bible contains many different types of literature, known as *genres*. This includes history (as it was understood in ancient times), songs, letters, biographies, poetry, legal documents and parables. Simply put, the Bible contains material where God is understood to address people (prophecy and law), material where people address God (songs, poetry, prayers) and material where people address each other (narratives, letters, etc.).

This range of literature means that the question of whether the Bible should be taken 'literally' or not is a bit misplaced. It would be a mistake to ask whether poetry or symbolic stories in the Bible should be taken literally. Arguably, some literature in the Bible was never meant literally in the first place, but that doesn't lessen its significance.

For example, the novel *Animal Farm* by George Orwell is not a literal story about animals on a farm. It was meant as a critique of real events in the Soviet Union, but its animal characters are symbolic. Some scholars would say that a number of books in the Bible could fall into this literary category of being symbolic descriptions of real events (whether past, present or future).

4.4 OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT?

Most Christians believe that the Old Testament should be interpreted in the light of the New Testament. Augustine, an influential theologian from the fourth century CE, put it this way: 'The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old is made accessible by the New'. One of the reasons for this is that sometimes, the New Testament seems to give a different spin to passages from the Old Testament.

For example, Matthew 2.15 quotes Hosea 11.1, which says 'Out of Egypt I called my son'. Approaching the text from the standpoint of the author, Hosea seems to be referring to the rescue of the Jewish people from Egypt. Matthew, on the other hand, seems to understand the text to refer to the journey back from Egypt of the child **Jesus**.

To get round this problem, some theologians have developed a concept called *sensus plenior* (Latin for 'fuller sense'). This means that while the human writers of the Bible may have had one thing in mind as they wrote, God (the ultimate author) also meant the words to have a deeper meaning that he would later reveal. On the other hand, some maintain that Old Testament writers like Hosea and David may have had several levels of meaning in mind in the first place (cf. Acts 2.25–31).



IN SUMMARY:

- Interpretation of the Bible can focus on what the author originally meant, how it reads as literature or how the text is understood by the reader;
- The Bible has been interpreted on several levels – literally, symbolically, ethically and mystically;
- Different kinds of literature in the Bible require different kinds of interpretation;
- Most Christians believe that the Old Testament should be interpreted in the light of the New.

5.0



**PUBLIC OR PRIVATE:
WHAT'S THE BIBLE FOR?**

5.1 BIBLE APPLICATIONS

The Bible has been - and is - used by Christians on both a private and public level. A quick consultation of the social networking world, however, shows that Christians can have very different views about how best to do this. The following are real Facebook groups or applications that illustrate different ways that the Bible is used on a personal level.

THE BIBLE AS A WAY OF GETTING THE BIG PICTURE ON LIFE

HEAR THE VOICE.

The Voice is a fresh expression of the timeless narrative known as the Bible. Stories that were told to emerging generations of God's goodness by their grandparents and tribal leaders were recorded and assembled to form the Christian Scriptures. The Bible is the greatest story ever told, but it often doesn't read like it. The Voice brings the biblical narratives to life and reads more like a great novel than the traditional versions of the Bible that are seldom opened in contemporary culture.

THE BIBLE AS A WAY OF HAVING A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF JESUS

THE BEST LOVE LETTER IS THE BIBLE.

The Bible is a love letter from **Jesus**. If you are ever wanting a love letter from a guy/girl, just read the Bible. It talks all about Jesus loving you.

THE BIBLE AS A RELIGIOUS ENCYCLOPEDIA

THE BIBLE: ANSWERS TO LIFE'S GREATEST QUESTIONS AND YOUR BIGGEST DILEMMAS.

Ever wonder who we are, and why we're here? Is there purpose or are we trivial beings? What is life, or death, or existence? And how should we live? Who is Adam? Who is **Abraham**? Who is Jesus Christ? Who is God? Why Does It Matter? These are all questions that are fully answered in the Bible. Besides holding vast amounts of history and revelation, the Bible also offers top-notch insight to your biggest problems in daily life, be it dating, family matters, disputes with friends, or virtually any other moral decision.

THE BIBLE AS A PRAYER BOOK

LECTIO DIVINA.

Lectio Divina means 'divine reading' and if you want you're meant to use the application to lead you in meditation, contemplation and prayer; to think not about yourself or your circumstances but to focus on others and on the divine. Find a quiet moment, or listen to something gentle with no words on your iPod, and while gently breathing, really read the words, then reflect – what does that mean for me, for others, for God.

THE BIBLE AS AN ETHICAL GUIDEBOOK

THE BIBLE – LIFE'S GUIDEBOOK?

'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path' Psalm 119.105
In this group we learn, teach & help each other about the Bible...so that we can understand its teaching through prayer and use it in our everyday lives... until the end of time! Amen. B.I.B.L.E. = Basic. Information. Before. Leaving. Earth.

5.0 PUBLIC OR PRIVATE: WHAT'S THE BIBLE FOR?

This section explains how Christians have different views about what the Bible is, what it's for and how it should be used.

5.2 THE BIBLE: A STATUS UPDATE

However, the Bible is not merely understood by Christians as a private religious text. Many Christians view it as a sourcebook for developing religious beliefs. However, there are several ways of understanding the role that the Bible has in this process:

THE BIBLE IS THE ONLY AUTHORITATIVE SOURCEBOOK FOR RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS

Many Christians view the Bible as their final authority when it comes to deciding whether or not something is a teaching from God. On the one hand, this can mean that if a religious idea is found within the Bible's pages, it definitely gets the thumbs up. On the other, it can involve excluding any religious teaching not found within its texts.

Christians who hold this view often believe that the Bible alone is the text through which God has revealed himself and that its meaning can be grasped easily by prayerful people. They tend to believe that most Christians are united on the Bible's essential teachings, although they may have differences on less important matters. Those who hold to this view are often open to engaging with the questions raised by modern **biblical criticism**, but they tend to hold that the Bible's meaning is not something that can be changed. Many Christians, from a range of **denominations**, view the Bible along these lines (although they may explain it differently).

THE BIBLE IS THE ULTIMATE SOURCEBOOK, BUT DOES NEED TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN THE LIGHT OF REASON, DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SCIENCES AND WIDER CHANGES IN SOCIETY

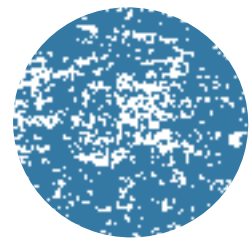
Some other Christians would agree that the Bible is the ultimate sourcebook for religious teachings, but that other factors need to come into play to guard against fundamentalist interpretations. These factors include consensus across the Church as well as rational discussion about how the Bible should or shouldn't be applied today. Recent scientific and biblical research, it is believed, should also guide proper interpretation of the Bible.

Christians who hold this view are often more open to the idea that the Bible may contain factual mistakes and/or outmoded teachings that we now need to move on from (see **8.0, Sacred Editorial**.) This position is most associated with what's broadly called 'liberal' or 'progressive' Christianity.

THE BIBLE NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN THE LIGHT OF CHURCH TRADITION, WHICH IS JUST AS IMPORTANT

Catholic and Orthodox Christians believe the Bible to be not only a sourcebook but also a community document. From their perspective, it's only properly understood in the light of 'Tradition' (the stream of teachings passed on in the Church down the centuries) and when compared to the writings of the early Church. The leaders of the Church are understood as custodians, whose role is to guard the Bible and to interpret it for others.

For them, **Scripture** and Tradition are together understood to be the Word of God, each being as important as the other. Christians of this position tend to use the Scriptures more for prayer and reflection and are sometimes less inclined to consult the Bible to decide whether a particular teaching is right or wrong.



This section explains how Christians have different views about what the Bible is, what it's for and how it should be used.

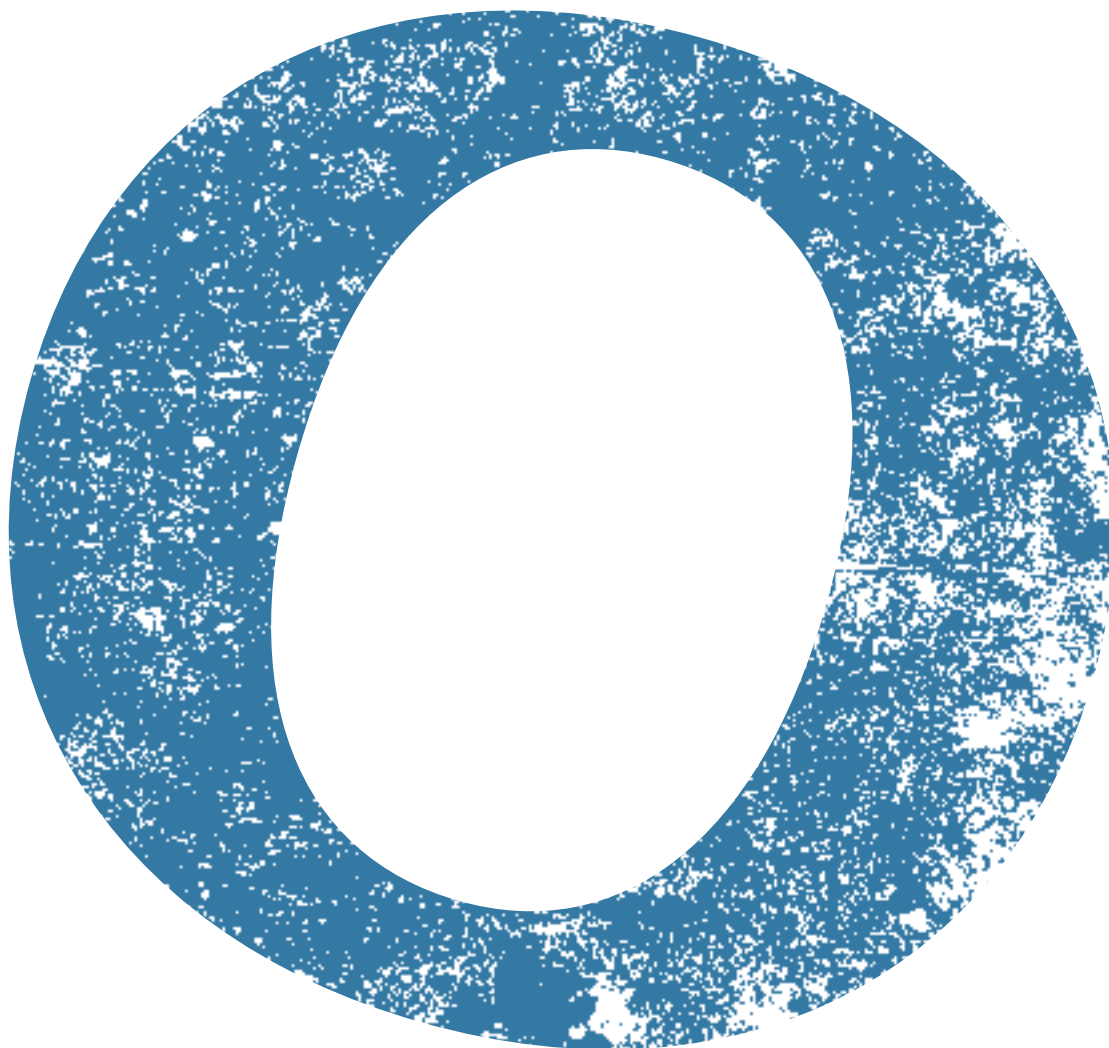
5.3 THE BIBLE IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Many Christians understand the Bible to have not only personal and religious meaning, but political and social significance too. Biblical scholars have become increasingly aware of political undercurrents within the Bible. The law of **Moses**, for example, contained both civil and religious law. The books of Kings are themselves political chronicles. Even Jesus chose politics as his pet theme, often speaking about 'the kingdom of God'.

How or whether the political aspects of the Bible should apply today is a matter of hot debate. Some politicians go so far as to use the Bible to support specific policy positions. For example, Margaret Thatcher referred to the parable of the good Samaritan to justify the principles of entrepreneurship and wealth creation. And in 2007 CE, Gordon Brown publicly quoted a saying of Jesus about welcoming children to lend support to his child poverty agenda.

Other politicians look to the Bible for broad principles, rather than complete, flat-pack solutions. Those on the political right may emphasise certain biblical values, such as the need for personal accountability, a strong family structure and a robust judicial system. Those on the left may prefer to talk about the biblical values of personal freedom, the importance of helping those in need and of stewardship of the environment.

Wider still, Christians often look to the Bible for guidance on how they should personally respond to pressing social issues, such as fair trade, gun crime, third world debt, ethical business and an ageing society.



6.0



DESIGNER COLLECTIONS

6.0 DESIGNER COLLECTIONS

This section explains how the Old and New Testaments came together – and why Christians have different views on the number of books in the Bible.

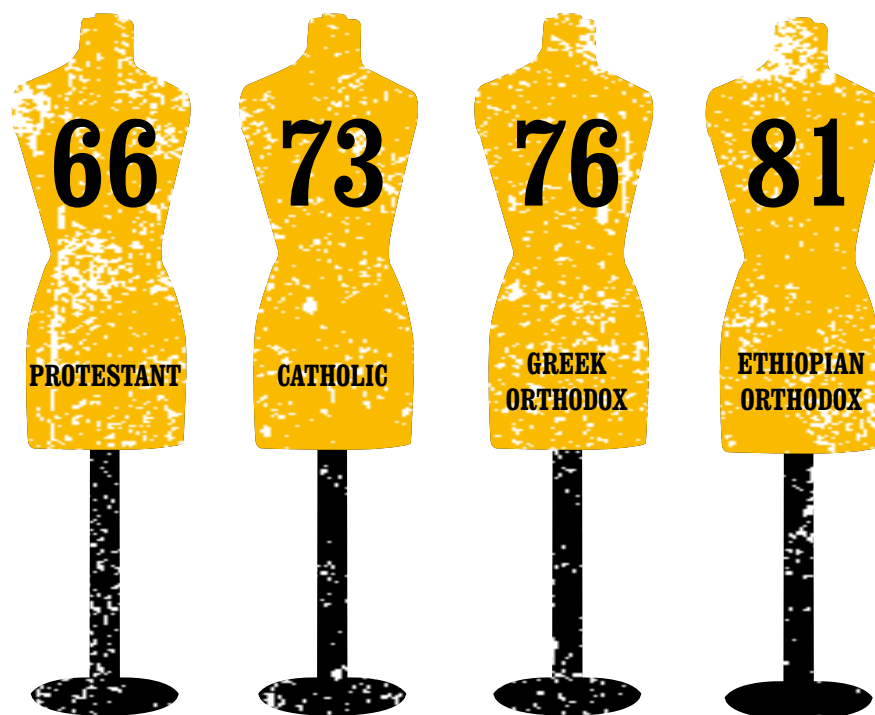


Figure 1: Number of books in the Bible

HOW THE BIBLE CAME TOGETHER

Christians understand the Bible to be made up of two collections – the **Old Testament** and the **New Testament**. The vast majority of Christians agree on 66 books of the Bible, which includes 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. They do, however, have differences over whether other books should form part of the Old Testament. Catholic and Orthodox Christians include other books in the Old Testament, which means they have more books in their Bibles in total (73 or more).

6.1 RETRO REFERENCE

HOW THE OLD TESTAMENT CAME TOGETHER

The 'Old Testament' is the term which Christians use for the sacred books of the Jewish people. Although there is substantial agreement, Christians do have different views about exactly how many books belong in the Old Testament. This disagreement came about for two reasons. Firstly, because of the way the canon of Bible books developed over time. And secondly, because of some of the ideas found in the disputed books. They do agree, however, that God somehow had a hand in the process of designing the Old Testament – rather than it being simply a human undertaking.

Exactly how the Old Testament came together as a collection is an area of great debate. However, many scholars say that it happened in a series of stages, roughly like this:

THE FIRST COLLECTION OF BIBLE BOOKS WAS KNOWN AS 'THE LAW'

The first five books of the Bible, known as 'the Law' (or 'the **Torah**') were the first to come together as a collection. These five were what we now call Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The collection was known as the Law because it contained a large amount of legal material. Later it became known as the **Pentateuch**. At least some parts of the Law were written by **Moses** and because of this, the books were given special status. Other parts of the Law may be based upon earlier written sources.

We don't know exactly when the books were joined into one, but by the seventh century BCE people had begun to view at least the book of Deuteronomy as a sacred text. By the fifth century BCE, the Law was a definite collection and was known as 'the book of Moses' (Ezra 6.18). A master copy of the Law was kept in the temple of Jerusalem by the priests (Deuteronomy 17.18; Joshua 24.26; 2 Kings 22.8). Some scholars think that over time, the Law was edited by scribes, who added new material and updated out-of-date terms.

NEXT 'THE PROPHETS' COLLECTION DEVELOPED AND WAS FINALISED

Later other books were added to the Law collection under a new category called 'the **Prophets**'. This collection contains a lot of material about the lives and public pronouncements of the prophets (as well as the kings) of ancient Israel.

First written were the seven 'former prophets' (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings). Later, 15 books known as the 'latter prophets' were written (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi). Some of these works may have had several authors and/or were edited over time (e.g. the prophet Jeremiah had a secretary called Baruch to write for him, Isaiah may have been written by a school of his **disciples**).

The Prophets category seems to have grown as it went along, since Zechariah 7.12 refers to the earlier books as 'the former prophets'. We don't know exactly when the Prophets collection was finalised, but this had definitely happened by the second century BCE. We know this because Sirach, a book written at the time, refers to the two book collections by the joint expression 'the Law and the Prophets'. Some scholars think that the Prophets collection may have been finalised as far back as the fifth century BCE, by the religious reformers Ezra and Nehemiah, but there is limited evidence for this.

6.0 DESIGNER COLLECTIONS

This section explains how the Old and New Testaments came together – and why Christians have different views on the number of books in the Bible.

THIRDLY, ‘THE WRITINGS’ COLLECTION DEVELOPED

Parallel to the development of the Law and the Prophets, a third collection began to grow that later became known as the Writings or Hagiographa. This catch-all collection included history books, temple songs, advice material and religious stories. There was broad agreement among Jewish leaders that 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Daniel belonged in this collection.

However, people did differ on whether some other books should also belong in the Writings category – and this was only settled relatively late (see **6.2**). We know that at least two books in the Writings category (Psalms and Proverbs) were edited down as early as the start of the seventh century BCE (2 Chronicles 29.30; Proverbs 25.1). Nevertheless, by the time of Jesus, it was generally agreed that there was a Writings category, although the exact number of books within it was an open question.

WHO DECIDED WHICH BOOKS WENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT COLLECTION AND WHICH DIDN'T?

The simple answer is that some books shone by their own light, while others were more deliberately selected by scribes or Jewish leaders. The books of the Law were associated with Moses, so pretty much spoke for themselves. The books within the Prophets collection probably also only made the grade because people thought they were written by – or approved by – individual prophets or their followers. Exactly which books went into the Writings collection, however, was decided by Jewish rabbis and later by bishops of the Church.

6.2 FINALISING THE WRITINGS COLLECTION

The exact content of the Writings collection remained up in the air for several reasons. One of the main issues was that there were various different collections of Bible books in circulation when Jesus lived. One, in Hebrew, tended to have less books in the Writings category. Another, called the **Septuagint**, was in Greek and had extra books in the Writings category (Sirach, Wisdom, Tobit, Baruch, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees). Still other books, such as 3 & 4 Maccabees and 3 & 4 Ezra got added later. In fact, the Septuagint did not even follow the traditional division into 'Law, Prophets and Writings'. It had its own arrangement (see **6.5, Designer labels**).

To make things even more complicated, the **Essene** sect who are thought to have lived on the shores of the Dead Sea had their own collection of Bible books. On top of that, some rabbis also wavered over whether Esther and the Song of Songs should be included in the Writings category. The point is, there really was no set list of books in the Writings category before Christianity began.

Along came the Christians, who used both the Hebrew and Septuagint collections, depending on where they lived and the language they spoke. At the end of the first century CE, Greek-speaking Jewish people decided to stop using the Septuagint – mainly because Christians often quoted it to support their claims about Jesus. The Jewish people then settled on the Hebrew collection, with fewer books in the Writings category, as the genuine one. They also gave Song of Songs and Esther the final thumbs-up.

Among the Christians, however, there were still mixed views about the extra books in the Septuagint. Generally, they were included in Christian collections of Bible books, but individuals still had their doubts. Essentially, there was still no set list as yet.

6.3 ACCESSORISING WITH THE APOCRYPHA

The situation came to a head when a biblical scholar named Jerome made a new Latin translation of the Old Testament (the **Vulgate**) at the turn of the fifth century CE. Jerome had some doubts over whether the extra books found in the Septuagint should be part of the Bible. Initially, he wanted to stick to the Hebrew collection. However, the bishops of the time (including the influential theologian Augustine) insisted that the Septuagint collection, with the extra books, was genuine. Jerome eventually bowed to their judgment but in the end only translated two of the extra books, Judith and Tobit, along with the rest.

Shortly afterwards, in 405 CE, Pope Innocent I was asked by a French bishop to provide a definitive list of Old Testament books. He included an extra seven books from the Septuagint in this list. Pope Boniface I then confirmed the same list, which had been agreed on during the second Council of Carthage in 419 CE. From then on, seven extra Septuagint books were generally accepted within the Latin-speaking churches. However, Christians who spoke other languages (such as Greek or Coptic) tended to cherish still other books as well.

The question came up again during the Protestant Reformation during the sixteenth century CE. Most of the Protestant reformers decided not to use the Septuagint collection with the extra books. It suited the Catholic agenda to reference these books, because they supported certain Catholic teachings. It suited the Protestant agenda, on the other hand, to solve this problem by rejecting the authority of these books. They sided with Jerome's opinion and insisted that the shorter Hebrew collection was the authoritative list of books.

Protestant translations from then on tended to include the extra books in a separate section, labelling them **apocrypha** (a term borrowed from Jerome), or left them out altogether. For its part, the Catholic Church insisted at the Council of Trent (in 1546 CE) that the extra seven books in question were genuinely part of the Bible and they then became known within Catholic circles as **deuterocanonical**.



Figure 2:
Number of books in
the Old Testament

6.0 DESIGNER COLLECTIONS

This section explains how the Old and New Testaments came together – and why Christians have different views on the number of books in the Bible.

6.4 BECAUSE THEY'RE WORTH IT TOO

Orthodox Christians have different canon traditions to Protestants and Catholics. This stems from the fact that there were sometimes even more books in the Septuagint collections (used by Christians in the East) than the extra seven accepted by the Catholic Church. Greek Orthodox Christians use the term **anagignoskomena** ('worth reading') to describe the extra books that they believe to be part of the Bible.

As well as the extra seven books included in the Old Testament by Catholics, Greek Orthodox Christians add 1 Esdras, the Prayer of Manasseh and 3 Maccabees to the list. They also have an extra chapter (151) within the book of Psalms. Orthodox Christians within the Russian, Armenian and Syriac traditions also include a few other books in their own collections (such as the Apocalypse of Ezra or 2 Baruch). Ethiopian Orthodox Christians have the most, with 54 books in their Old Testament.

6.5 DESIGNER LABELS

The Old Testament we are most familiar with today sometimes follows the Septuagint and sometimes the Hebrew Bible in terms of the names and order of books. Most Bible translations nowadays don't follow the original Hebrew format of grouping books into the collections of Law, Prophets and Writings. Instead, they follow the order in which these books are found in the Septuagint (organised into the **Pentateuch**, histories, wisdom books and the Prophets).

On the other hand, the names of books found in today's Bibles sometimes come from the Septuagint and sometimes from the Hebrew Bible. For example, the books of the Torah are usually called Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These are the Septuagint names for these books. In the Hebrew Bible, they are called Bereshith, Shemoth, Wayiqra, Bemidbar and Debarim. Most Bibles today, however, contain 4 books which go by the Hebrew names of 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 2 Kings. Within Orthodox traditions, however, these books are known by the Septuagint names of 1, 2, 3 and 4 Kingdoms.

STAGES IN FINALISING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Fifth century BCE

The Law collection is finalised

Second century BCE

The Prophets collection is finalised

First century CE

Two Writings collections exist – one short, one long

Second/third century CE

Jewish people finalise the shorter Writings collection

Fifth century CE

Catholic Church defines the longer Writings collection

Fifth - ninth century CE

Orthodox Churches develop their own lists of books

Sixteenth century CE

Protestant Reformers revert to the shorter Writings collection

Sixteenth century CE

Catholics insist on the longer Writings category



IN SUMMARY:

- There are different schools of thought among Christians about how many books belong in the Old Testament.
- A smaller collection of 39 books in the Old Testament is accepted by many Christians.
- A medium-sized collection of 46 books in the Old Testament (with extra material included on top of that in the books of Daniel and Esther) are accepted by most Catholic Christians.
- Larger collections of 49 books or more (also with the extra material featured in Daniel and Esther) are accepted by Orthodox Christians.

6.6 NEW WAVE

HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT CAME TOGETHER

When it comes to the New Testament, the vast majority of Christians today agree that the New Testament contains twenty-seven books (four **gospels**, the book of **Acts**, twenty-one **epistles** and the book of **Revelation**). However, the settling on this particular collection wasn't as straightforward as you might think. As with the Old Testament, theologians and historians disagree on exactly how this happened. However, broadly it goes a bit like this:

BOOKS BEGIN TO BE COLLECTED TOGETHER

The New Testament itself tells us several things about how it began as a collection. It shows that many accounts of the life of **Jesus** had been written and that all the letters of the **apostle Paul** had been collected together. Luke's gospel and Paul's letters were both quoted as 'scripture' (Luke 1.1–3; 2 Peter 3.16; 1 Timothy 5.18). So the first century CE saw the beginnings of a collection of Christian scriptures, with two types of document – accounts of the life of Jesus and letters.

THE COLLECTIONS CRYSTALLISE INTO 'GOSPEL AND APOSTLE'

During the early second century CE, these two types of New Testament document became known as 'Gospel and Apostle' (like the Old Testament categories 'Law and the Prophets'). 'The Gospel' became the name of a single collection of four written accounts of the life of Jesus that were attributed to the apostles Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Church historian Eusebius said that by 118 CE, missionaries were carrying copies of 'the Scripture of the divine gospels' with them. 'Apostle' became the name for the collection of the letters written by Paul and then later, for those works written by the other apostles too.

THE WRITING OF NEW MATERIAL FORCES THE CHURCH TO EXCLUDE BOOKS

As the New Testament started to take shape in the middle of the second century CE, groups on the fringe of the Christian movement started to come up with their own versions of the Bible. They wrote their own gospels and letters and gave them official-sounding names such as the gospel of **Peter**, the gospel of Thomas and the third letter to the Corinthians. One fringe leader, named Marcion, even axed all Bible books apart from the gospel of Luke and the letters of Paul. This really began to muddy the waters.

It forced the mainstream Church to be clearer about which works were from the apostles – and which weren't. The Muratorian Fragment, which was written during the late second century CE, is the first list of accepted New Testament books. It contains pretty much the same books as we have now, although it left out a small number of works that were considered more 'borderline'.



This section explains how the Old and New Testaments came together – and why Christians have different views on the number of books in the Bible.

A LIST IS FIRST SETTLED ON AT THE COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE

The books that were more borderline were the Revelation of John, James, Hebrews, Jude, 2 Peter as well as 2 and 3 John. This was because people sometimes wondered if they really did come from the apostles. However, eventually all of these were accepted. There were other books on the borderline list, such as the Acts of Paul, the Didache, the letter of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas and the Apocalypse of Peter – but in the end these were all rejected because it was felt there wasn't enough evidence linking them to an apostle.

A bishop named Athanasius, in a letter written in 369 CE, was the first to list the 27 books currently in the New Testament and insist on only those. This list was first insisted on at an official level during the Church Council of Carthage in 397 CE.

DID THE APOSTLES REALLY PUT PEN TO PAPYRUS?

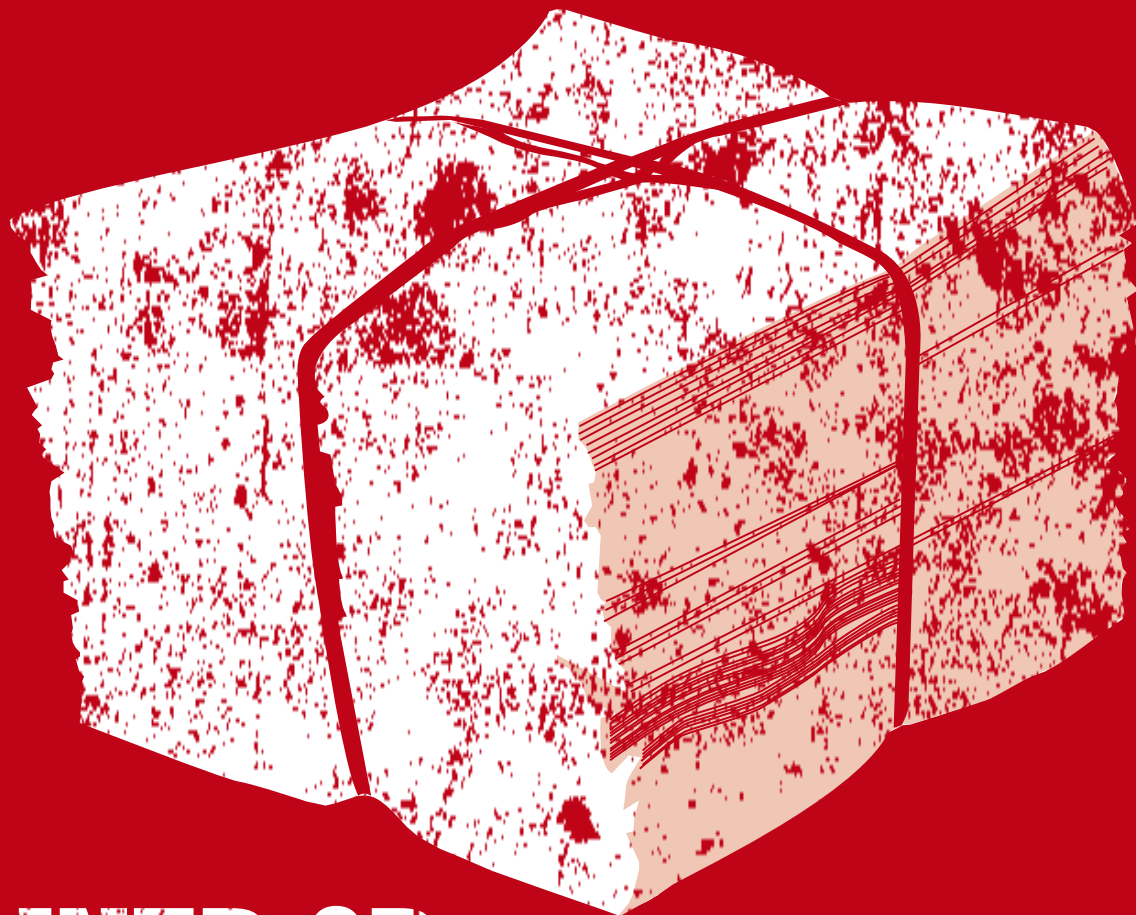
Some modern scholars have raised serious questions about the decision-making process that determined which books went into the New Testament and which didn't. They argue that some of the New Testament material (e.g. the Gospel of John, the letter to the Hebrews, some of Paul's letters, Jude, 2 Peter and Revelation) were in fact written *pseudonymously*. This means that they were written under the pen name of an apostle, as a widely accepted form of poetic licence of the time. If this was true, then excluding a book from the Bible 'because it wasn't written by an apostle' would be a mistake.

Others scholars, however, insist that it remains a valid test. They point out, for example, that Mark and Luke (authors of two of the gospels) were nobodies in the early Church. It would have made far more sense to write those gospels under the pen names of the apostles Peter and Paul (who were viewed as the respective sources for Mark and Luke) if they were pseudonymous. The fact that such a short letter as Philemon is included in the New Testament, while other respected works, such as the Shepherd of Hermas or the Didache, were left out also shows how seriously early Christians took the 'was it linked to an apostle' litmus test.

WHEN WAS THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITTEN?

Most scholars agree that some of the letters of Paul (e.g. Galatians, 1 Thessalonians) were the earliest books of the New Testament to be written, between 50 and 60 CE. Next come the gospels with a wide variety of dates, starting from as early as 40 CE by some and as late as 95/100 CE (in the case of the gospel of John) by others. Almost everyone thinks that the New Testament books as we have them were (by and large) done and dusted by the end of the first century CE.

7.0



**BERLINER OR
BROADSHEET?
TRANSLATING AND
PRODUCING THE BIBLE**

This section looks at issues around Bible translation and production from the perspective of history, as well as popular formats and versions in use today.

7.1 TRANSLATION OVER THE CENTURIES

'CHAMELEON EFFECT' FOR TIMELESS TEXTS

Bible translated to blend into new surroundings

The **Old Testament** began to be translated from Hebrew into Greek during the third century BCE. The resulting translation, which was used by Jews who spoke Greek, became known as the **Septuagint**. It was later used by the early Christians and prompted a debate about the limits of the **canon**. (see **6.0, Designer Collections**).

Later, in the first and second centuries CE, the Old Testament was translated into Syriac. This version was known as the Peshitta (which means 'simple'). This was because it didn't contain any notes or explanations. These translations were written on leather or papyrus manuscripts.

The **gospels** were first translated into Syriac in the second century CE by a scholar called Tatian. He produced a harmony of them called the *Diatessaron*. Translations were made into Latin as early as the end of the second century CE. But it was in the

early fifth century CE that a groundbreaking Latin translation of both the Old and **New Testament** was made by a biblical scholar named Jerome.

This translation, called the **Vulgate**, eventually became the standard Bible of the Catholic Church and was used as the basis of translations into many other languages. At this point, biblical texts were usually written on **vellum** pages and often bound together in **codices**.

The 'translation' of the Bible into works of art began in the third century CE, when persecuted Christians were forced to worship underground, in the secrecy of the catacombs. They often painted biblical scenes, such as Noah and the ark, Daniel in the lions' den and the **resurrection** of Lazarus on the walls of the catacombs. Biblical characters also began to be sculpted in stone and as churches began to be built, they were often decorated with mosaics of biblical scenes.

FROM PRESENT TO POCKET-SIZE

How the Bible went from massive to miniscule in just 100 years

Between the third and ninth centuries CE, translations of the New Testament emerged in other languages. This included Coptic, Gothic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic and Arabic.

The most popular version of the Bible, however, was the Latin Vulgate. In the tenth and eleventh centuries CE, a fashion developed to produce giant 'gift' copies of the Vulgate. They were designed to emphasise that the Bible was the 'greatest' book ever. Some of these volumes were so large and heavy that they took two people to lift them.

Important people often donated them to monasteries, churches and public libraries. These volumes, often beautifully illustrated, were usually used for public reading of the Bible. Due to their size and beauty, however, they were very expensive. Further, these volumes did not normally contain the entire Bible. People usually owned the Bible as a set of several volumes (e.g. one containing the **Pentateuch**, another, the New Testament).

The growth of monasteries during the twelfth century CE meant that demand for cheaper volumes of the Bible increased dramatically. For the first time, the Bible went up for sale. Monasteries began to sell spare Bibles to each other or struck deals to produce them on demand. This led cash-strapped Christians to ask for smaller Bibles, because they were cheaper.

So by the early thirteenth century CE, the Bible began to be produced in a much more manageable size. At this point, the Bible was also divided into chapters and verses. This meant that for the first time, the entire Bible was included in a single, handy, volume which was easy to reference.

At the same time, new religious communities developed that were keen to use the Bible in public preaching. Friars (wandering monks who were preachers) such as the Dominicans and the Franciscans adopted these new pocket-size, ready-reference Bibles. They travelled all over Europe, preaching in towns and villages. Their sermons were peppered with quotations from the Bible, which helped make the masses more familiar with its contents.

BIBLE TRANSLATED 'AT RATE OF KNOTS'

'Printing, protesting and partnership' the main reasons for growth

Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries CE, translation and production of the Bible really took off. This was for three main reasons:

1. THE INVENTION OF PRINTING

The first important factor was the invention of printing. Copying the Bible out by hand onto vellum was a long job. It made mass production slow and expensive. However, the invention of the printing press meant that the Bible could be churned out quickly and cheaply. Translated Bible texts could now be seen by many more people.

The first printed Bible was in Latin. It became available between 1450 and 1456 CE in Germany. It was printed by Johannes Gutenberg, who invented a process for printing from movable type. The first printed copy of the Bible in English was William Tyndale's New Testament, published in 1526 CE. The first complete printed Bible in English (with Old and New Testament) was Miles Coverdale's Bible of 1535 CE.

2. THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

The religious revolution known as the Protestant Reformation was the second major factor. It took place during the sixteenth century CE. In the run-up to this revolution, the medieval Catholic Church had adopted a multimedia approach towards the Bible.

It encouraged ordinary people to learn about the Bible, but insisted on holding their hand to guide them. As such, it encouraged people to read 'edited' versions of the Bible. The Church also brought biblical stories to life through theatre, music, stained glass and art. However, the Church was far less keen on giving absolutely everyone direct access to the unedited text in their own languages.

The Protestant Reformation, spearheaded by a monk called Martin Luther, changed all of this. The reformers strongly believed that everyone should be able to own a text of the whole Bible, in their own language. They disagreed with the idea that Church leaders should spoon-feed the Bible to people. So in the following centuries, the Bible was translated into many languages. This included: Catalan, Czech, Swedish, Danish, Polish, Icelandic, Slovenian, Welsh, Hungarian, Finnish, Irish, Romanian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Portuguese, Slovak, Norwegian, Modern Greek, Bulgarian and Russian.

3. THE GROWTH OF THE BIBLE SOCIETIES

The establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804 CE was the third significant factor. Its aim was to translate, print and distribute the Bible, without note or comment, both in the British Isles and overseas. Many of its Bibles were produced to support missionary work abroad. The Society grew rapidly, leading to the establishment of other Bible Societies around the world.

From 1946 CE onwards, the Societies joined forces as part of a global federation called United Bible Societies (UBS). For the past 200 years, Bible Societies have been busy translating the Bible into many languages and distributing it across the world. This has had a huge impact. Before the Societies were established, the Bible was available in just 68 languages. Today, parts of the Bible are available in more than 2,400 languages. The entire Bible is available in at least 426 and the New Testament in 1,115.

This section looks at issues around Bible translation and production from the perspective of history, as well as popular formats and versions in use today.

PICTURE BIBLES THE NEW 'MUST-HAVE'

Arty Bibles the latest collectible for the smart set.

Bible picture books hit the market from the thirteenth century CE onwards. They contained the biblical text in Latin and were illustrated with relevant scenes (e.g. the garden of Eden, Jonah and the whale or the last **judgment**). However, they were expensive, so were only really bought by the wealthy and educated. By the fourteenth century CE, the Bible was first translated from Latin into Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

Most of these translations were either paraphrases or selections from the Bible, rather than complete, unedited versions. During the fifteenth century CE, a copy of the Book of Hours was owned by many families throughout Europe, wealthy or not. These were mass-produced prayer books in Latin which mostly contained word-for-word quotations from the Bible. They also included pictures that helped the reader made the link between the biblical text and everyday life.

7.2 MODERN TRANSLATION WORK

THOUSANDS OF LANGUAGES 'STILL WAIT FOR THE BIBLE'

Current translation projects struggle to keep up with global demand

Hundreds of Bible translation projects are currently under-way, spearheaded by the work of the United Bible Societies. The major language groups are well catered for – but more than 4,500 languages still wait for even one book of the Bible. Therefore, the Bible Societies and their partners continue to produce hundreds of new translations to meet this need.

Provision of the Bible continues to have a huge impact on communities all around the world. For example, making the Bible available in new languages can raise literacy standards or help marginalised groups gain new status. Bible translation also includes putting the Bible into formats that work for disadvantaged groups. This includes translation of the Bible into both Braille and audio format, to cater for people who are blind or who can't read.

On top of that, languages continually change over time, with words and expressions going in and out of use. This means that up-to-date translations are always needed across the world.

Many Christian organisations are involved in translating the Bible. This includes the United Bible Societies, Wycliffe Bible Translators and the World Bible Translation Center, to name a few. Bible Societies are involved in Bible translation at several levels:

BY PROVIDING TRAINING

Over 80 translation consultants and advisors work in this area around the world. These experts are highly trained in biblical studies and linguistics. They often have some training in anthropology and sociology. They run seminars and other forms of hands-on training. They also help review and critique the work of other translators.

BY PUBLISHING BOOKS AND JOURNALS ABOUT TRANSLATION

Books are often donated to those involved in official projects. The *Bible Translator* is the flagship journal of the United Bible Societies.

BY PAYING FOR/SUBSIDISING THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF NEW BIBLES

A typical translation project – paid for by one of the Bible Societies – takes many years from start to finish (six years for the Old Testament and four for the New). Translation consultants help produce new translations, train other translators, undertake quality control and develop new computer software to help speed up the process.

7.3 THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH

DYING MONK WRITES 'CHAV' GOSPEL

Gospel of John translated into common English by northern monk

The translation of the Bible into English began in Anglo-Saxon times. In the seventh century CE, a poet named Caedmon translated a series of biblical stories into 'Old English' (Anglo-Saxon) verse. There were copies of parts of the Bible in Old English, the language of the common people, from as early as the eighth century CE.

The monk and scholar Bede translated the gospel of John into Old English in 735 CE, allegedly on his deathbed. In the tenth century CE, a stand-alone edition of the gospels was translated into West-Saxon. Next, at the turn of the eleventh century CE, a priest named Aelfric translated the Pentateuch and other parts of the Old Testament into Old English.

BIBLE-BASHER SLAMS 'CHURCH CORRUPTION'

Oxford don sparks political firestorm with new Bible translation

Many regard John Wycliffe (1320–1384 CE) as the first to translate the entire Bible into English. In fact, he probably only translated some of it. Most likely, the scholars Nicholas Hereford and John Trevisa translated the rest. However, he was probably the mastermind of the operation.

Wycliffe was a priest and noted scholar from Oxford University. He wanted radical reform of the Church and believed it should stay out of politics. He gathered a group of followers who were nicknamed the 'Lollards' (which in Dutch means 'babblers of nonsense'). Wycliffe's outspoken views about Church corruption and his claim that some of its teachings were unbiblical got him into hot water.

Wycliffe believed that people should consult the Bible for guidance - rather than Church leaders. For this, they would need a copy of the Bible in their own language. The Bible he inspired came out between 1380–1390 CE and was a literal translation of the Latin Vulgate. Shortly after his death, his secretary John Purvey produced a revision of Wycliffe's translation.

After the arrival of the Normans in 1066 CE, new forms of the English language developed. A scribe called Eadwine translated the book of **Psalms** into 'Anglo-Norman', the language of the upper classes, in 1160 CE. The hermit and writer Richard Rolle translated the Psalms into 'Middle English', the language of the common people, around 1340 CE. His writings were very popular and were widely circulated.

With this in mind, a number of scholars have argued that English people knew the Bible very well during the Middle Ages. One of the reasons for this is that illustrated Bible storybooks in English (which usually included other stories too) sold like hot cakes across medieval England. It wasn't until the late fourteenth century CE, however, that the entire Bible was translated into English.

The Lollards were sent out across England to read these Bibles to people. Wycliffe hoped that his lay preachers would use them to sweep away what he saw as superstition in the Church. Needless to say, this did not go down well among the Church leaders. They had no time for his religious or political agenda. In 1381 CE, a Lollard preacher named John Ball stirred up the common people by referencing the Bible during the 'Peasant's Revolt' (medieval poll-tax riots).

From then on, owning and reading the Bible in English became associated with religious and political unrest. This led to a clamp-down by the King and the Church. Between 1407 and 1409 CE, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, forbade people to read or own any Bible text that had not been vetted by a local bishop. Lollard Bibles, where found, were confiscated and burned.

However, by then people had become used to seeing and reading the Bible in English. So the issue was to resurface during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

This section looks at issues around Bible translation and production from the perspective of history, as well as popular formats and versions in use today.

SMUGGLED BIBLES ‘HIDDEN IN BALES OF WOOL’

Bishop issues stark warning about illegal Bible trade

The English reformer William Tyndale (1494-1536 CE) was the first person to translate the New Testament directly from Greek to English. Tyndale was a priest and distinguished Oxford scholar who strongly believed that everyone should be able to read the Bible. In 1523 CE, he asked the bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, for permission to translate and print a new English Bible. But the bishop viewed Tyndale as a troublemaker, so said no.

However, Tyndale pressed ahead anyway, with the support of some merchant friends. He moved to Worms in Germany where in 1525 CE, he produced a translation of the New Testament. Six thousand copies of this translation were printed and smuggled into England hidden inside bales of wool and wine casks with false bottoms.

His version of the New Testament angered Cuthbert Tunstall and the then Lord Chancellor of England, Thomas More. They disagreed with the way he had translated certain biblical words and were unhappy with his footnotes, which criticised the Catholic Church. So smuggled copies of Tyndale’s translation were systematically collected and then publicly burned.

His card was also marked by the reigning king, Henry VIII, who at the time was opposed to Bibles in English. Tyndale began to translate the Old Testament, but never managed to finish it. In 1536 CE, he was arrested and executed for heresy. But the story didn’t end there. His priest friend Miles Coverdale picked up the baton and continued his work.

GOOD BOOK GETS THE ROYAL NOD

Henry VIII gives seal of approval to first printed English Bible

Miles Coverdale (1488-1569 CE) joined William Tyndale in what is now Belgium to help him in his translation work. After his death, Coverdale finished off Tyndale’s project by producing a new English translation in 1535 CE. He based it largely on Tyndale’s version, but also on Latin and German translations. Coverdale cleverly dedicated it to King Henry VIII, who by this time had warmed to the idea of the Bible in English. Henry therefore gave his permission for Coverdale’s translation to be circulated across England.

This made it the first complete Bible to be printed in English with official approval. It was also the first English Bible to separate the Old Testament **apocrypha** by placing them in an appendix. Coverdale’s Bible contained certain controversial teachings in its notes and chapter headings. Some Church leaders had issues with these. So in 1538 CE, Coverdale edited and printed a new translation, minus the controversial notes. This version, which was widely used in parish churches, became known as the *Great Bible*.

7.4 LATER LANDMARK TRANSLATIONS IN ENGLISH AND WELSH

ASYLUM-SEEKER PRODUCES ‘RADICAL BIBLE’

Swiss-made translation proves runaway success among radicals

To escape persecution by Mary I in England, many Protestants fled to Switzerland. They sought asylum in Geneva, a centre for Calvinism, a form of ‘no frills’ Christianity. One of the refugees, William Whittingham, produced a New Testament there in 1557 CE. He was also one of the main contributors to a complete revision of the Bible.

This was based on previous versions and a Greek codex kept in Geneva. It was published in 1560 CE and became known as the Geneva Bible. This was the first English Bible printed in Roman type, with verse divisions. Its popular style meant that it went down a storm and made it the most popular English Bible for over seventy years.



BISHOPS HIT BACK AT 'EXTREMIST BIBLES'

*Archbishop of Canterbury masterminds
new 'toned-down' translation*

Because it was produced in a strongly Calvinist city, the Geneva Bible was quite a radical translation. This was a problem for many in the Church of England, who took what they saw as a more moderate approach. Not only that, the Geneva Bible was much more popular than the 'official' version for parishes, the Great Bible.

This led the Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, to undertake a revision of the Great Bible. He worked as editor-in-chief on the project, together with some other bishops and a team of biblical scholars. In 1568 CE, the new work was published and became known as the *Bishop's Bible*. It went through several editions, but never became as popular as the Geneva version.

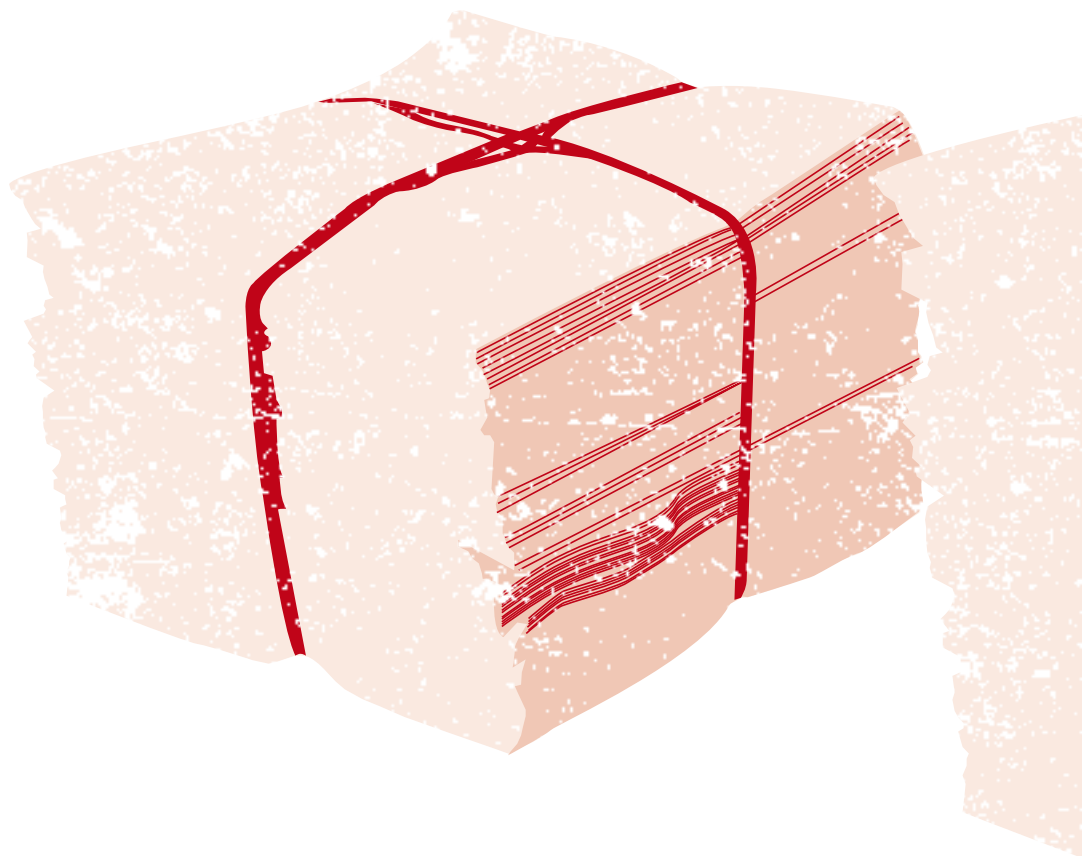
WELSH LANGUAGE 'SAVED BY THE BIBLE'

*Literary translation gives the language
a much-needed boost*

An edited collection of biblical history, called *Y Bibl Ynghymraec* ('The Bible in Welsh'), existed in Middle Welsh as early as the fourteenth century CE. It was only in the sixteenth century CE, however, that the entire Bible, including the apocrypha, was first translated into modern Welsh. It was completed in 1588 CE by a Welsh bishop named William Morgan (1545-1604 CE).

Morgan translated from Hebrew and Greek texts, but also consulted English translations of the time. His was a translation into literary, rather than popular Welsh and was revised slightly in 1620 CE. Many argue that his translation significantly helped Welsh in its struggle to survive. It became a source of unity among Welsh-speakers and the bedrock of later Welsh literature.

In 1800 CE, a Welsh teenager called Mary Jones saved up for six years and walked 25 miles, just so that she could buy a copy of the William Morgan Bible. To help people like Mary, the British and Foreign Bible Society was set up shortly after, in 1804 CE.



7.0 BERLINER OR BROADSHEET?

This section looks at issues around Bible translation and production from the perspective of history, as well as popular formats and versions in use today.

'STUDIO 54' TURN OUT GROUNDBREAKING BIBLE

54 scholars club together on new 'authorised' Bible for King James I

The **King James Version** was issued in 1611 CE. It aimed to settle the argument over which version was best - the Geneva Bible or the Bishop's Bible. The translation was undertaken on the orders of King James I and was later named after him. Fifty-four scholars worked on the project, using available Greek and Hebrew manuscripts.

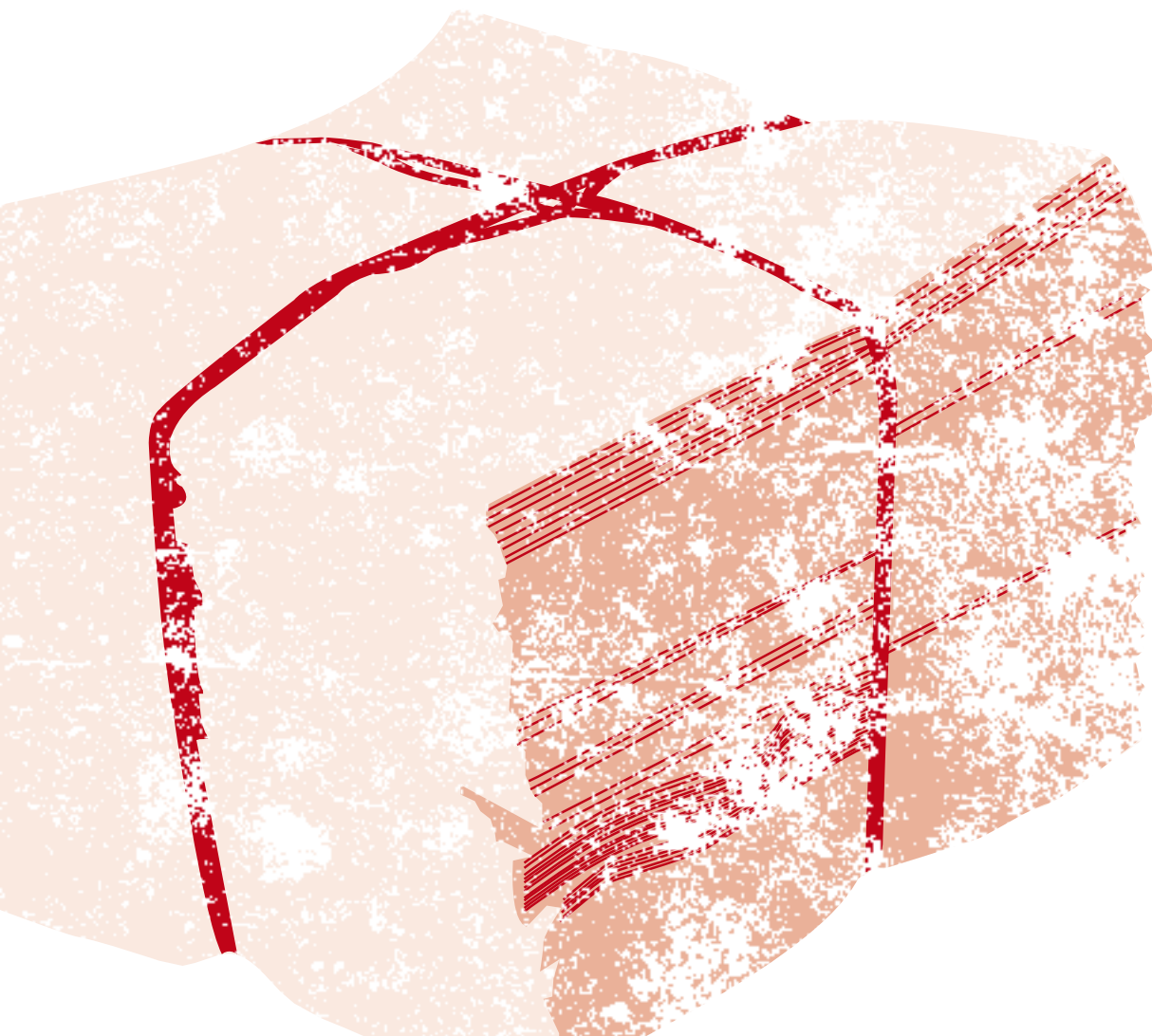
Since it was 'appointed to be read in Churches', it had semi-official status and became the most popular English Bible for hundreds of years. This official status meant that it also known as the *Authorised Version* (AV). Many regard it as a beautiful text and an important part of British heritage, much like the works of Shakespeare.

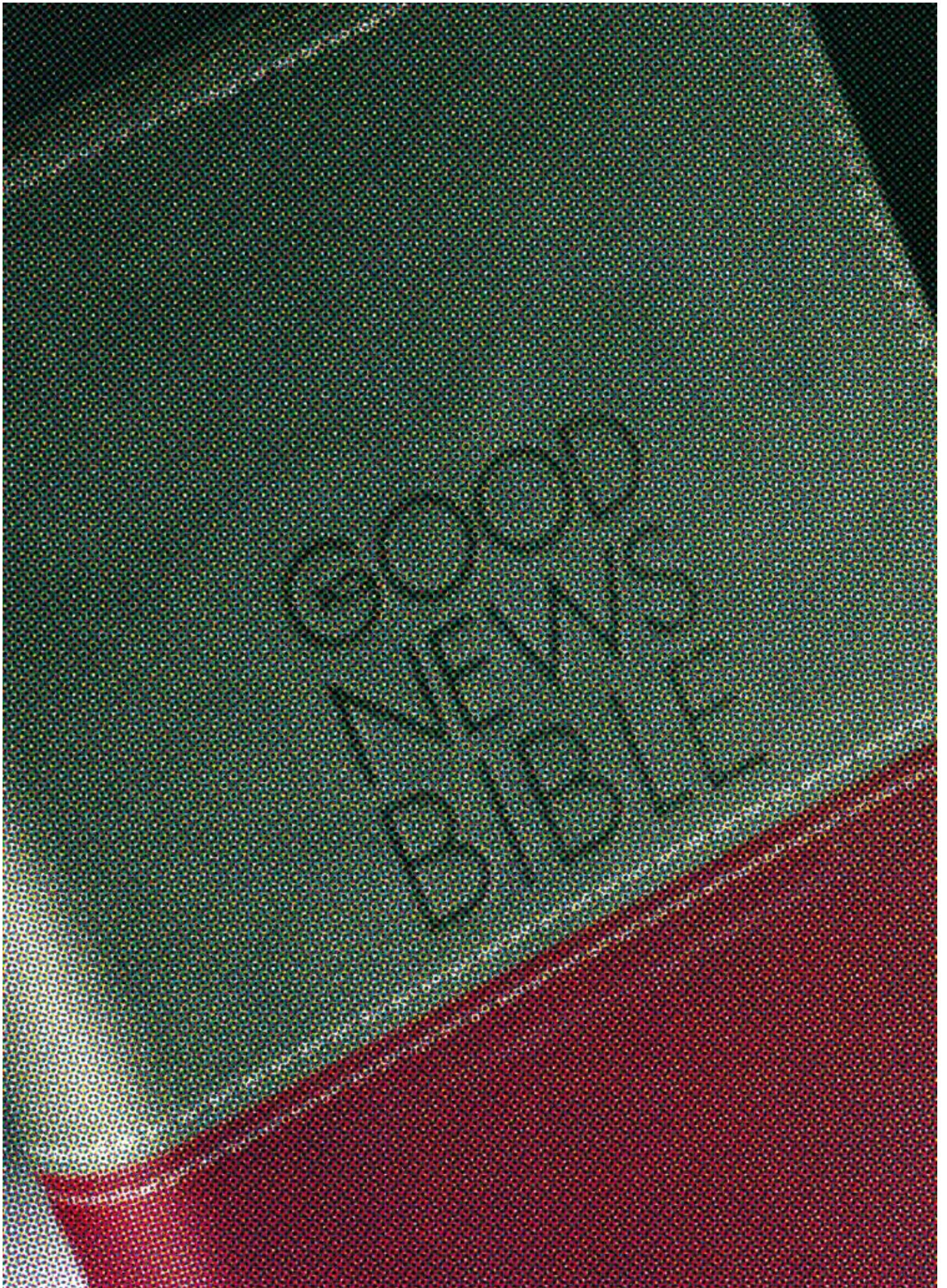
EX-PAT PRIESTS PEN LATIN-STYLE BIBLE

New Douai-Rheims translation hits the spot for English Catholics

The Douai-Rheims translation was part of the Catholic answer to the Protestant Reformation. It came together in stages. The New Testament was translated in 1582 CE at a French training college for priests in Rheims. It was then followed by a translation of the Old Testament, which was completed at a similar college in Douai in 1609 CE.

The complete edition, which came with notes to help readers, was later substantially revised in 1782 CE. The translation was based slavishly upon the Vulgate and became the standard Bible for English Catholics for hundreds of years.





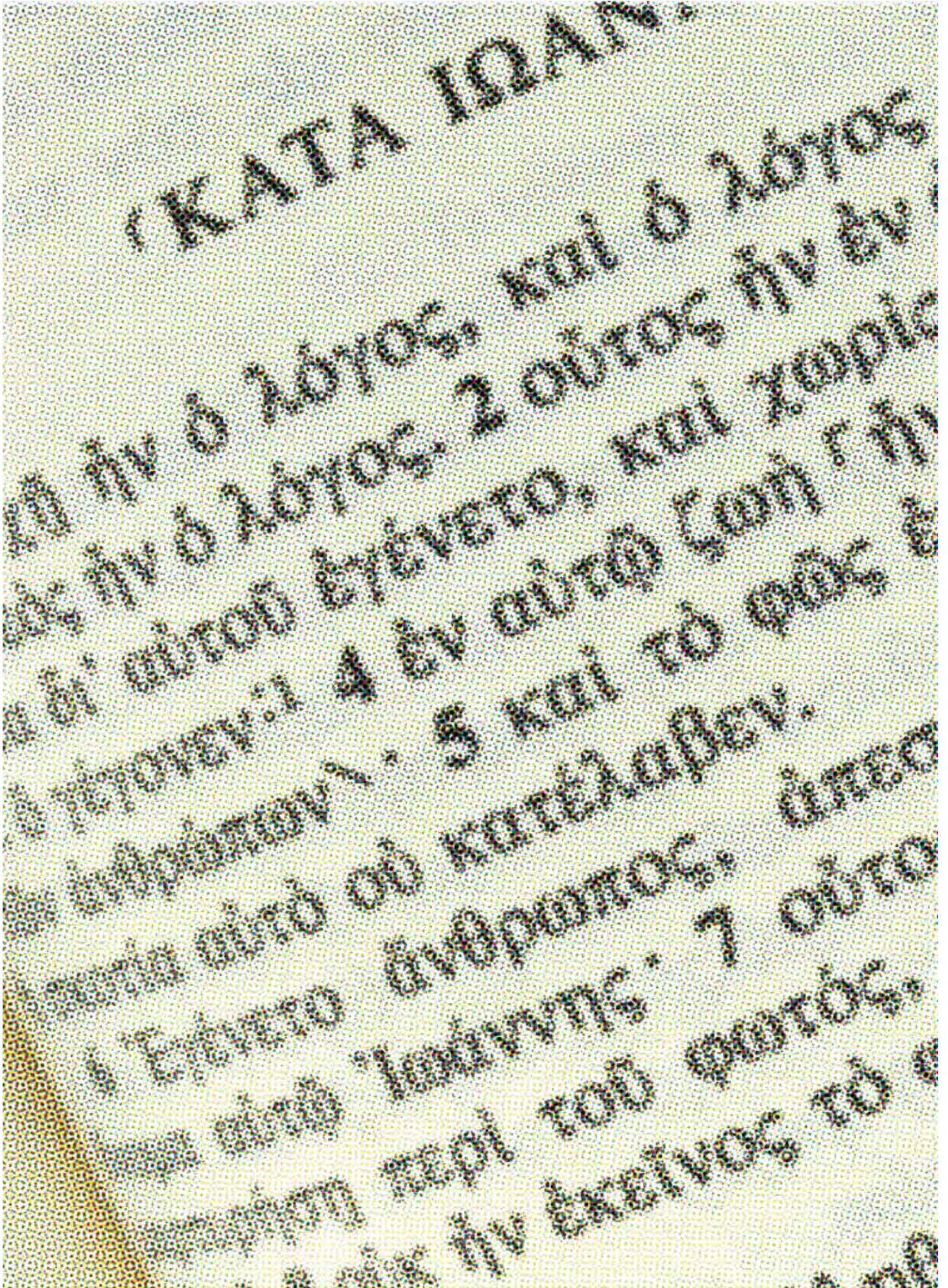
This section looks at issues around Bible translation and production from the perspective of history, as well as popular formats and versions in use today.

7.5 TEN TALKED-ABOUT TRANSLATIONS

SOME OF THE VERSIONS YOU MIGHT COME ACROSS

In the past century, many new translations of the Bible have been made using modern English language and expressions. A few have also been completed in Welsh. Some of those you might hear talked about include:

- The *Revised Standard Version* (RSV), which came out in 1946 CE. It was an updated version of the *American Standard Version*, a previous revision of the *King James Version*. It was itself updated as the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) in 1989 CE.
- The *Good News Bible* (GNB) was published in 1966 CE and updated in 1976 CE. A version in plain English, it's currently the best-selling Bible in Britain and is often used in schools. It's also sometimes known as *Today's English Version* (TEV). The British version was produced by Bible Society.
- The *Jerusalem Bible* (JB) is a Catholic version that was published in 1966 CE, just after the landmark Second Vatican Council. It was updated as *The New Jerusalem Bible* (NJB) in 1985 CE.
- The *New English Bible* (NEB) was first issued as a complete Bible in 1970 CE. It uses contemporary language and rewords ancient phrases. Unlike some of the other translations, it originated in Britain.
- The *New International Version* (NIV) was released in 1972 CE and updated in 1979 CE. A modern English version, it's currently the best-selling Bible in the USA. It was translated by a team of Evangelical scholars from various denominations.
- The *New King James Version* (NKJV) was first published as a whole in 1982 CE. Like the *King James Version* of 1611 CE, it's based upon the **Textus Receptus**. The translation aimed to keep that version's style and structure but removed its old-fashioned language.
- *Y Beibl Cymraeg Newydd / The New Welsh Bible* was issued by Bible Society in 1988 CE to mark the 400th anniversary of the William Morgan translation. It was then revised in 2004 CE. An up-to-date version in modern Welsh, it was the first new translation to be completed in that language since the original William Morgan version of 1588 CE.
- *The Scholar's Version* is an American edition of the Bible released in 1993 CE. It represents the work of the 'Jesus Seminar', a group of biblical scholars who share a particular set of views about early Christianity. The work has attracted criticism. Firstly, it appeared to suggest that other translations were not done by qualified scholars. Secondly, it controversially included the gospel of Thomas as the fifth gospel, for ideological rather than critical reasons.
- The *Contemporary English Version* (CEV) was published in 1995 CE by the American Bible Society. Its main aim was to produce a user-friendly Bible that could be read aloud and easily understood. As such, in 1997 CE the British edition was awarded a Crystal Mark by the Plain English Campaign.
- The *English Standard Version* (ESV) was released in 2001 CE. It's a clear translation in modern English that is especially valued by some Evangelical Christians for its use of precise language.



Some translators think that ancient biblical expressions should be explained in terms people can easily understand today. For others this is a step too far.

7.6 LOST IN TRANSLATION

AND LO, THE WORKMEN DIDST WALK A SABBATH DAY'S JOURNEY. NOW SOME BIBLE TRANSLATORS THINK WE SHOULD JUST SAY THE WORKERS HIKED HALF A MILE. WHO'S RIGHT?

Not all religions believe that their sacred texts should be translated. This is often because they stress not only the holiness of the text, but of the original languages too. However, Judaism and Christianity have both have a history of translating the Bible. They tend to consider the message, rather than the original languages, to be the most important element.

Yet, translating the Bible can be a difficult task. Translators need to have a thorough grasp of the original biblical languages as well as the modern language they are working with. On top of that, they need to be knowledgeable about the cultures in which particular biblical texts were written as well as have a solid understanding of theology.

Broadly speaking, Bible translators aim to produce texts that are both *accurate* and *acceptable*. On the one hand, translations should aim to accurately represent the meaning of the original texts. On the other hand, they also need to be acceptable to their readers. For example, this can mean that they need to sound good on the ear. It might also mean avoiding certain words or expressions that might cause offence. Unfortunately, it's impossible to keep everyone happy. This is because a series of difficult decisions face translators as they go about their work. Some of the questions they have to ask themselves include:

SHOULD APPARENTLY SEXIST LANGUAGE BE CHANGED?

A debate continues about whether Bible translators should or shouldn't use 'inclusive language'. Inclusive language in this context involves using words and phrases that aren't sexist (or at least, don't appear to be). A good example of the use of such language is in translating Psalm 8.4. The *King James Version* (KJV) translates this verse: 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?' The *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), on the other hand, says: 'What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?' This approach broadens out the original Hebrew term 'son of man' (ben adam), to make it sound less masculine. Some people feel strongly that such translations are misleading. Others think that they fairly capture the broad sense of the original text.

7.0 BERLINER OR BROADSHEET?

This section looks at issues around Bible translation and production from the perspective of history, as well as popular formats and versions in use today.

SHOULD ANCIENT PHRASES BE EXPLAINED?

Some translators think that ancient biblical expressions should be explained in terms people can easily understand today. For example, the distance of 'a sabbath day's journey' (Acts 1.12) is translated as 'half a mile' in the *Good News Bible*. Half a mile was the average distance to the synagogue at the time. Similarly, agreeing to pay employees 'a denarius for the day' (Matthew 20.2) becomes agreeing to pay them 'the usual day's wage' in the *New English Bible*. More traditional translators, however, think that this is a step too far.

SHOULD DEBATED SECTIONS BE INCLUDED?

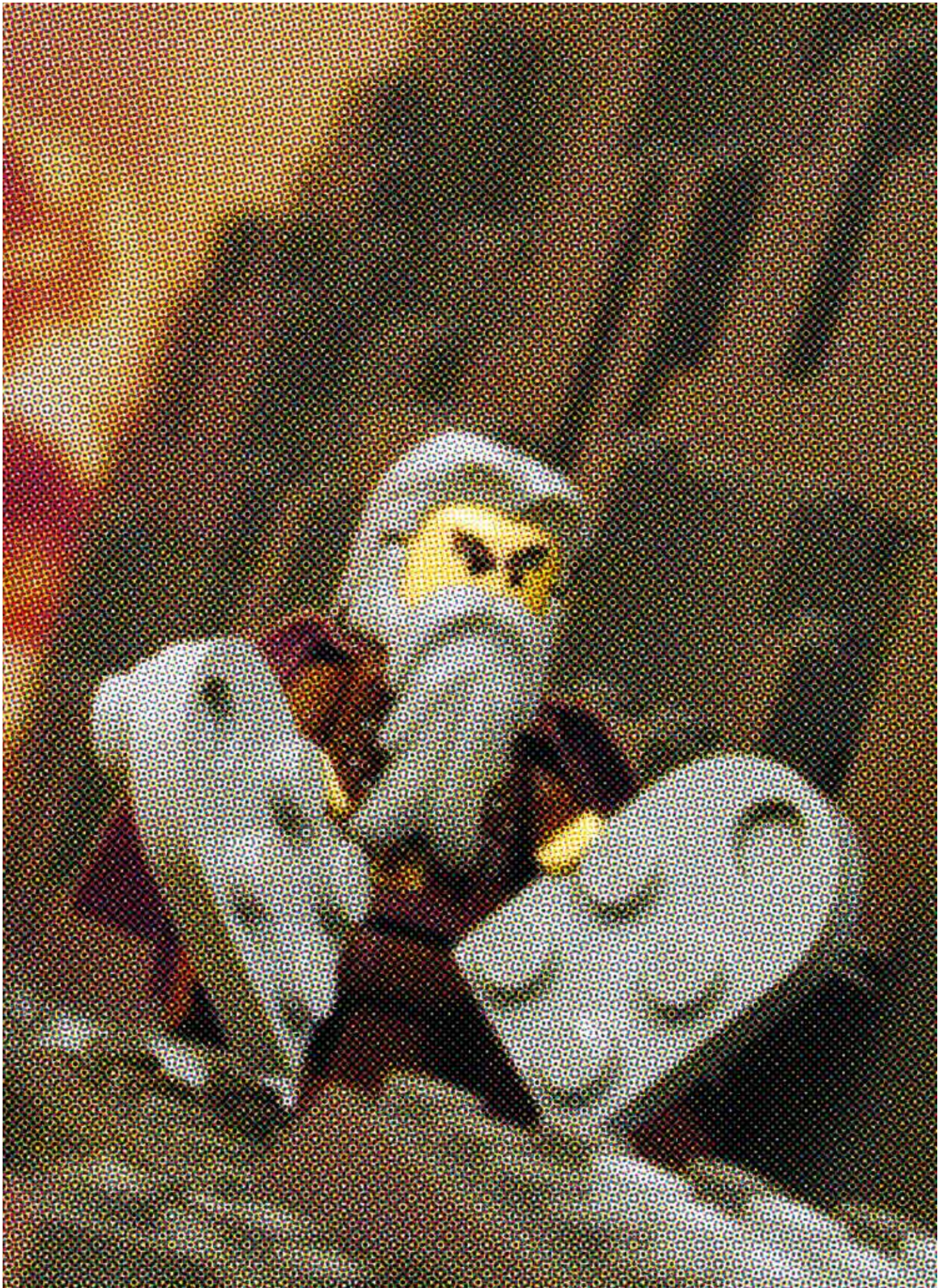
Close study of ancient texts of the Bible reveals that a few passages exist in some manuscripts but not in others. Examples include 1 Samuel 10:27—11:1 (a short paragraph about eye injuries), Mark 16.9–20 (a debated ending to Mark's gospel) and John 7.53—8:11 (a story about a woman who had been having an affair). Translators therefore have to make decisions about whether or not to include them in the Bible. Some include them without any sign that they have a question mark hanging over them. Others mark them out in smaller text, as indented material or include them separately. Still others are brutal enough to leave them out altogether. For more information on debated texts in the Bible, see **9.5 More important changes to the Bible**.

SHOULD TRANSLATIONS BE WORD-FOR-WORD OR THOUGHT-FOR-THOUGHT?

Some translators believe strongly that the Bible should be translated word-for-word, as literally as possible. They think that this is important to prevent the original meaning being distorted. They point out that the biblical writers sometimes insisted on translating words exactly to make their point. On the other hand, other translators adopt a more meaning-based approach. This is often known as 'dynamic equivalence' or 'thought for thought'. It involves trying to get across the original sense of what was said without using the exact words. Those who favour dynamic equivalence often point out that no Bible translation is strictly word-for-word.

SHOULD SCHOLARS MAKE 'THEOLOGICAL' TRANSLATIONS?

Sometimes, the religious beliefs of a scholar can have a direct effect on the translation they produce. For example, some Christians believe that divorce should be allowed in some circumstances. In the *New International Version* (made by Christians who tend to believe this), Jesus says: 'Anyone who divorces his wife – *except for marital unfaithfulness* – causes her to commit adultery' (Matthew 5.32). The Catholic Church, on the other hand, does not recognise divorce. Therefore, in the Catholic *New Jerusalem Bible*, Jesus says in that same verse: 'Everyone who divorces his wife – *except for the case of an illicit marriage* – makes her an adulteress'. Some believe that it is inappropriate for scholars to incorporate particular beliefs into Bible translations. Others argue that although this should always be the aim, it is impossible for any translation of the Bible to be entirely free from theological bias.



The Bible is often creatively presented in computer games, through stage shows, in film, on the catwalk and even in Lego.

7.0 BERLINER OR BROADSHEET?

This section looks at issues around Bible translation and production from the perspective of history, as well as popular formats and versions in use today.

7.7 BACK TO THE OLD SCHOOL

MOSES GOT THE COMMANDMENTS ON TABLETS OF STONE. BUT NOW THE BIBLE HAS EVEN BEEN PRODUCED IN LEGO FORMAT. SO JUST WHY ARE 'REPACKAGED' BIBLES THE LATEST TREND?

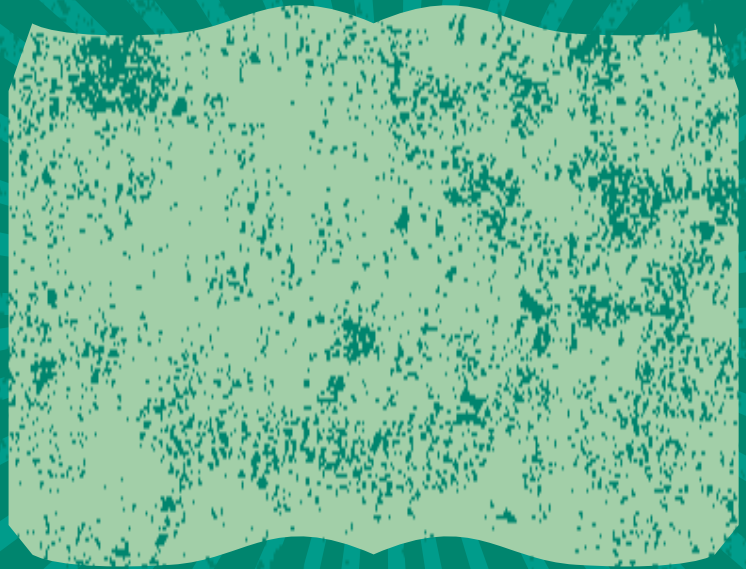
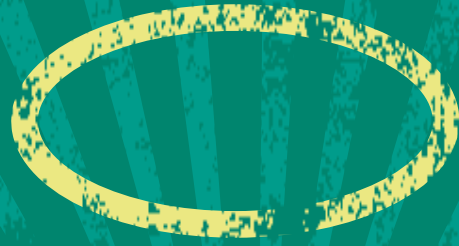
Recently, a number of people have taken the step of creatively re-packaging the text of the Bible. There has also been a return to the multimedia approach of the Middle Ages, with the Bible appearing in a wide range of formats. Often these take the form of more 'edited' versions of the text in popular speech.

At other times, they involve creative initiatives that take their inspiration from the Bible. There are mixed views among Christians about whether this kind of re-presentation is appropriate. Some believe that they help ease people into the Bible gradually. Others think that they are potentially misleading substitutes for the real thing.

- *The Brick Testament* (see picture to the left) was launched as a website in 2001 CE and then as a book series two years later. It depicts selected stories from the Bible in a humorous way, using Lego images (www.bricktestament.com).
- *The Message* was an American work released as a whole in 2002 CE. It presents the Bible in creative, popular language that people can easily understand. It is very much a 'thought for thought' version.
- *The Street Bible* was published in 2003 CE and then updated as *The Word on the Street* in 2004 CE. It's a light-hearted rewriting of much (but not all) of the Bible in 'street' language used within the UK.
- *The 100-Minute Bible* is a biblical booklet that was launched in 2005 CE. It's a collection of edited summaries of the biblical text that can be read in just 100 minutes. However, it was designed to be an introduction to the Bible, rather than as a replacement.
- *The Bite-Size Bible* came out in 2007 CE. Billed as 'the Bible in easy-to-digest chunks', it includes 200 passages from the *Contemporary English Version* (CEV). It also includes explanations of religious terms and examples of art that the Bible has inspired.
- *The Espresso Bible* is a booklet that was issued in 2007 CE and is described as 'the Bible in sips'. It features selections of actual Bible texts. Its aim is to provide a flavour of how the Bible fits together as a whole.
- *The Manga Bible* was issued in 2007 CE. It includes cartoon adaptations of certain stories from the Bible, in a Japanese comic-book style known as 'manga' (www.mangabible.com).

Other innovations include the Bible in audio format, as a download to mobile phones, as an mp3 file and in searchable form on the internet. The Bible is also often creatively presented in computer games, through stage shows, in film and on the catwalk.

8.0



SACRED EDITORIAL

8.0 SACRED EDITORIAL

This section unpacks the different ways that Christians understand the Bible to be a sacred text. It covers the key ideas of 'inspiration' and 'inerrancy'.

THE BIBLE AS A BOOK FROM GOD

The usual way that Christians understand the Bible to be a book from God is to say that he inspired it. The concept of 'inspiration' comes from 2 Timothy 3.16, which refers to the Bible by the Greek word *theopneustos* (which some translate as 'God-breathed'). In Latin this was then translated as *inspirata*, from which we get the word inspiration.

Inspiration is understood to mean that the Bible is not just an ordinary collection of documents. Rather, it usually means that the biblical authors were prompted to write as they did by God. This doesn't necessarily mean, however, that the writers looked to God for ideas. Nor does it mean that what they wrote was necessarily inspiring.

It simply means that God had a hand in the process of writing the Bible. Because of this, some Christians refer to the Bible as a supernatural book by calling it the *Word of God*. Nevertheless, Christians may often have very different understandings of what it means to say that the Bible is 'inspired'.

8.1 WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING INSPIRATION

Some people understand inspiration to apply to the words of the biblical texts themselves. Others believe that inspiration extends only to the messages the Bible contains or to the people who wrote them down. Still others use the term to refer to the process of reading the Bible in the here and now. So there are a range of views about what it means to say God 'inspired' the Bible. To explain in a little more detail:

DICTAPHONE: THE BIBLICAL WRITERS WERE A BIT LIKE HUMAN DICTAPHONES, AUTOMATICALLY RECORDING THE THOUGHTS AND WORDS OF GOD IN THE BIBLE

This literal, mechanical view of inspiration was held by some Jewish writers and others in the early Church. They believed that humans were the mere tools of God in the creation of the Bible. Several compared the biblical writers to passive musical instruments that God 'breathed' into. However, not many Christians nowadays view inspiration this way. For example, if there were no human input into the Bible whatsoever, why are there so many different writing styles? And if the **apostle Paul** was just taking notes from God, why would he say that he couldn't remember how many people he had baptised (1 Corinthians 1.16)?

EDITOR: GOD PROMPTED THE BIBLICAL AUTHORS TO WRITE DOWN THE WORDS HE WANTED, BUT RESPECTED THEIR SKILLS, LIMITATIONS AND ABILITIES

This is a common view about inspiration, held by many Christians from a range of **denominations**. This view means that the authors of the Bible were treated as partners, not as robots. On the one hand, they were free to do their own background research, to write when it suited them and to decide how they would edit material. Some of them wrote grammatically and fluently, while the writing styles of others were pretty bad.

On the other hand, God supervised the biblical authors so that what they wrote was exactly what he wanted. This view has been criticised by some for its apparent contradiction. How can God be said to have respected their freedom if he was still breathing down their neck about what to write? This has led some to argue that God was a bit more hands off. In other words, he just set the writers straight if they were going off on in an unhelpful direction or gave them the right words if they were struggling.

COPYWRITER: GOD INSPIRED THE MESSENGERS, RATHER THAN THE TEXTS THAT THEY WROTE

Some 'liberal' or 'progressive' Christians believe that God certainly did reveal messages to certain people for them to pass on. However, what they then wrote in the Bible was very much their words – not God's. God may have given the biblical writers flashes of religious insight or provided them with a higher state of religious consciousness, but that's as far as it went. To give an example, Ezekiel chapters 1-3 says that God revealed himself in a vision. Ezekiel then described the vision and wrote down what he heard as best he could.

From this perspective, Ezekiel himself was directly inspired, but the text he wrote was not. Critics, however, point out that there are biblical descriptions of visions that do not seem to fit with this idea of inspiration. For example, the book of Jeremiah says that the prophet was told by God: 'Say everything that I ordered you to say, not omitting one syllable.' (Jeremiah 26.2) and 'Take a scroll and on it write all the words I have spoken to you' (36.2).

READER: GOD INSPIRES THE READERS OF THE BIBLE, RATHER THAN THE WRITERS

Some liberal academics have looked at the issue of inspiration of the Bible from a completely different angle. They feel that people have got too hung up on the idea that inspiration was something given to biblical writers that lived thousands of years ago. In their view, God inspires *readers* of the Bible – not those who originally wrote it. This means that God speaks through the text to people, helping them as they read to reshape their thinking. Hebrews 10.15 can be read as reflecting this idea. It begins: 'And the Holy Spirit testifies to us, for after saying... ' and then goes on to quote a passage from the Bible. On the other hand, the classic biblical texts usually quoted on the subject of inspiration (2 Timothy 3.16 and 2 Peter 1.21) appear to describe it as something that happened in the past.

This section unpacks the different ways that Christians understand the Bible to be a sacred text. It covers the key ideas of 'inspiration' and 'inerrancy'.

8.2 GETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT?

The concept of inspiration is often – but not always – linked with another idea called 'biblical inerrancy'. This is the belief that the Bible does not contain errors. There are several views among Christians about this issue.

PROOF-READ: THE BIBLE DOES NOT CONTAIN ANY ERRORS WHATSOEVER

This is often understood to mean that the Bible does not contain mistakes on any issue, factual, religious or otherwise. Christians who hold this view also believe that the Bible is consistent and that it does not contain internal contradictions. Many believe, however, that only the original manuscripts (autographs) of the Bible were error-free, rather than the partially flawed copies we have today. The argument usually runs that since an all-knowing God is the real author of the Bible, it follows that it should not contain mistakes.

Fundamentalist and many (but not all) Evangelical Christians hold this view. It is also the official position of the Catholic Church, although an unofficial debate on the subject continues among Catholic biblical scholars. Other theologians, however, argue that the concept of an inerrant Bible only arose in the late nineteenth century, in fundamentalist circles within the USA. It is true that the specific term 'inerrancy' did only begin to be used about the Bible in the nineteenth century CE. On the other hand, the Christian scholar Augustine argued as far back as the fourth century CE that the Bible did not contain any mistakes, so the concept is not all that new.

CORRECTIONS: THE BIBLE DOES NOT CONTAIN ANY ERRORS WHEN IT COMES TO ITS RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS

Christians who hold this view (which includes some within the Orthodox tradition, the Wesleyan tradition and other Evangelicals) insist that the religious teachings of the Bible are all true. However, they are open to the possibility that it may contain factual errors on historical or scientific matters, as well as internal contradictions. As such, they are more comfortable describing the Bible as 'infallible' rather than inerrant. The Bible states, for example, that the hare chews the cud and that the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds (Leviticus 11.6; Matthew 13.31, 32). These statements have been questioned by some biologists and botanists.

Christians holding a less rigid view of inerrancy are more comfortable with the idea that there may well be errors like this within the biblical text. They emphasise the input that humans had in its writing and argue that the Bible does not ever directly claim to be inerrant in all its details. This is sometimes linked to a debate about whether the Bible is the Word of God, or whether it *contains* or *reveals* the Word of God. Critics, however, argue that it is impossible to disentangle the history and theology of the Bible so neatly. Those who believe in total inerrancy have also developed ready answers to apparent factual errors such as those above.

WIKIPEDIA: THE BIBLE CONTAINS BOTH RELIGIOUS AND FACTUAL ERRORS, BUT IS STILL OF SIGNIFICANT VALUE

Others ('liberal' or 'progressive' Christians) go a step further again and are happy to admit that even some of the Bible's religious and moral teachings are just plain wrong. Because of this, they avoid the term inerrancy altogether. Some of the religious teachings of the Bible that they believe we should reinterpret include its masculine language about God, the creation accounts of Genesis 1–3 and descriptions of Hell as a place of eternal punishment. Some of the moral positions that they reject can include texts about **war**, **slavery** and sex.

Christians who think this way are also more likely to hold revised views about issues such as the **resurrection of Jesus** and the meaning of the **atonement** on the cross. Nevertheless, that's not to say that the Bible should be written off. Rather, those of this persuasion view it as a valuable collection of sacred stories that can inspire people in their own searches for God.

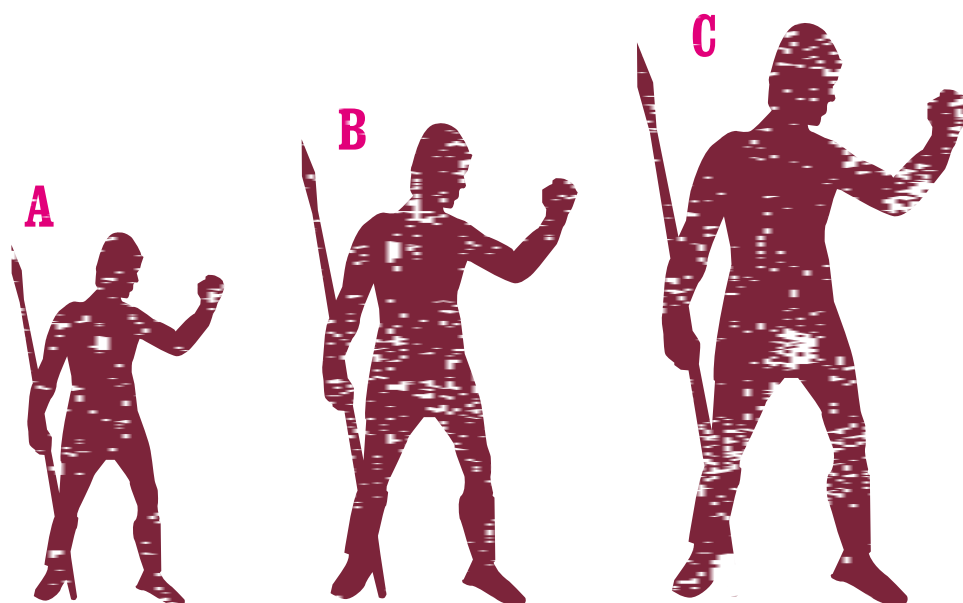
9.0



CHINESE WHISPERS?

9.0 CHINESE WHISPERS

This section provides a short overview of the history of the biblical text and looks at the issue of whether a 'Chinese Whispers' effect really has changed the Bible over the years.



CHANGES TO THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Many people are familiar with the biblical story about how David defeated the giant Goliath (1 Samuel chapter 17). But was Goliath:

- a) 6 feet 9 inches
- b) 8 feet 3 inches
- c) 9 feet 9 inches?

The answer depends on which ancient text of the Bible you consult (see **section 9.5**).

9.1 THE TEXT OF THE BIBLE

The text of the Bible has been copied and studied far more than that of any other book. The technical term used for the study of the biblical text is 'textual criticism'.

Textual criticism is a field of research that involves investigating the history of the biblical text. The aim is either to try to get as close to the original text as possible or sometimes, to investigate how an 'official' version of the text came together. Until the invention of printing in the Middle Ages, the Bible was copied out by hand. Mistakes often crept into copies of the text. Textual critics try to unpick these mistakes by carefully noting variations or corrections among different manuscripts.

HOW EXACTLY DID CHANGES CREEP INTO COPIES OF THE TEXT?

There are a whole series of reasons. These include:

- Mistaking certain words when copying;
- Missing out phrases or words when copying;
- Confusing similar letters, missing out letters, writing letters in the wrong order or adding extra letters;
- Mis-spellings of certain words;
- Trying to correct the poor grammar of some of the biblical writers;
- Trying to harmonise differences (i.e. assuming a previous copyist had made a mistake);
- Trying to clarify historical/geographical or theological problems;
- Certain theological biases;
- Adding in notes from the margin.

WHICH READING IS THE ORIGINAL?

Textual critics use a series of rules of thumb when deciding which text out of several alternatives is closer to the original. They consider criteria such as:

- Which text is earliest;
- Which kinds of text they are;
- Whether the same reading is found in a number of different regions;
- Some scholars tend to prefer more difficult readings because these are less likely to have been 'smoothed out' by a scribe;
- They also tend to prefer the shortest, most straightforward readings.



9.0 CHINESE WHISPERS

This section provides a short overview of the history of the biblical text and looks at the issue of whether a 'Chinese Whispers' effect really has changed the Bible over the years.

9.2 THE TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

To establish the text of the **Old Testament**, textual critics compare a number of different kinds of text. By comparing similarities and differences among these, they can work out how the biblical text looked thousands of years ago.

THE MASORETIC TEXT

Texts of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) produced by the 'Masoretes' (Jewish copyists), who worked roughly between 600–950 CE. **The Masoretic Text**, which was carefully copied from one scribe to the next, is usually viewed by scholars as the 'gold standard' of ancient Bible texts (see also Directory entry).

THE SEPTUAGINT

A series of Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible that took place in Egypt from the third century BCE onwards (see also Directory entry).

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Biblical texts in Hebrew from the first century CE that were discovered, along with other texts, in 11 caves near the Dead Sea in Israel (see also Directory entry).

THE VULGATE

A Latin translation of the entire Bible completed by the biblical scholar Jerome at the turn of the fifth century CE (see also Directory entry).

OTHER ANCIENT TRANSLATIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

This includes the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Aramaic targumim (paraphrases), as well as versions in Syriac, Old Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian and Arabic. Quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament and early Christian writings are also often useful.

9.3 THE TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

To establish the text of the **New Testament**, textual critics do a similar thing. There are three main families of ancient Greek manuscripts (of which there are more than 5,000) in a number of forms. These include papyri, **codices**, minuscule (lower case) scripts and lectionaries (books containing selections from the Bible to be read out at services);

ALEXANDRIAN TEXT

Texts written in in Egypt, probably from the second century CE onwards, most of which are broadly consistent. **Codex Vaticanus** is an example of the Alexandrian Text. Many scholars regard Alexandrian texts as those closest to the originals.

WESTERN TEXT

This family of texts was written mostly in the West during the early centuries CE – in North Africa, Italy and southern France. However, the relationship between them is much looser and there are a lot of differences. **Codex Bezae** is an example of the Western Text.

BYZANTINE/MAJORITY TEXT

These texts were written during the early centuries CE among that part of the Church that spoke Greek (i.e. in the East). Eighty per cent of all New Testament manuscripts in Greek are from this 'family', which is why it's sometimes called the 'Majority' text. Recently, some scholars have argued for a return to readings from the Majority Text.

OTHER ANCIENT TRANSLATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

New Testament textual critics also look at ancient translations of the New Testament in Latin (of which there are 10,000), as well as in Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic and Gothic. On top of these, they also consult quotes from the New Testament in the writings of early Christians.

9.4 CHINESE WHISPERS AND THE BIBLE?

Having compared all of the different text types, scholars can then reconstruct the biblical text. But how reliable is this reconstructed text? Sometimes, people get the idea that the Bible has undergone significant change over the years, as copy after copy was altered. If such a 'Chinese whispers' effect had taken place, the Bible we have now would bear little - if any - resemblance to the original.

With the Old Testament, there is a simple way to check whether the text has fundamentally changed. Biblical texts from the first century CE were found among the Dead Sea scrolls. These were 1,000 years older than the Masoretic texts upon which many modern Bibles are based. By reading biblical texts found near the Dead Sea, scholars are able to tell how much of the Bible has changed over the years.

They have found that, in fact, the Masoretic texts are very close to Hebrew texts written 1,000 years previously, with little significant change. You can see that for yourself here, in three passages from the Old Testament. The passages are quoted both from a modern Bible based mainly on the Masoretic text and from biblical texts found among the **Dead Sea scrolls**. The textual differences are in italics. Notice how the differences are really only a word here, a phrase there.

Much of the text is identical. If you want to look into this further, you can buy an English translation of the biblical texts from the Dead Sea (e.g. Abegg, M. et al. (1999). *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, Edinburgh: HarperCollins).

With the New Testament, textual scholars reveal that it's much the same story. Two thirds of the New Testament hasn't changed at all. The third that has changed involves differences in spelling, word order, or over minor details. To give you a flavour, most manuscripts of Matthew 14.30 say that Jesus calmed a 'strong wind'. A smaller number say that it was just a 'wind'. At Luke 24.3, most manuscripts say that the disciples couldn't find 'the body of Jesus'. A much smaller number say that they couldn't find 'the body' or 'the body of the Lord Jesus'. Colossians 3.13 could read either 'God has forgiven you', 'Christ has forgiven you' or 'the Lord has forgiven you'. None of these differences are particularly earth-shattering.

BIBLE TEXTS FROM AMONG THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

(translated into English in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*)

Numbers 22.9–11

Then God came to Balaam and *said to him*, "Who are these men with you?" And Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent word to me, saying, "See, this people has come out of Egypt and they cover the face of the earth, and *they are dwelling next to me*. Now, come curse them; perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them *out of the land*."

Isaiah 58.1,2

Shout aloud, do not hold back. Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Declare to my people their *rebellions*, and to the house of Jacob their sins. They seek me day after day and are eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practices righteousness and has not forsaken the justice of their God.

Psalms 18.20–22

The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me, For I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not done evil by turning away from my God. For all his ordinances were before me, and I did not turn away from his statutes from me.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

(based mostly on the Masoretic Text)

Numbers 22.9–11

God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men with you?" Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: 'A people that has come out of Egypt covers the face of the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps then I will be able to fight them and drive them away.'"

Isaiah 58.1,2

Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

Psalms 18.20–22

The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord; I have not done evil by turning from my God. All his laws were before me; I have not turned away from his decrees.

9.5 MORE IMPORTANT CHANGES TO THE BIBLE

Most of the changes to the biblical text are on the same level of importance as the height of Goliath. The basic point is the same - Goliath was very tall. Biblical texts from the Dead Sea give one height, some from the Septuagint provide another. Later Masoretic texts say Goliath was even taller. Most Christians don't find his exact height a cause for concern. However, the following kinds of change to the biblical text are a bit more important.

1. TEXTS OF DIFFERENT LENGTH

The first important change revealed by textual criticism is the length of a few of the books of the Bible. For example, the book of Jeremiah as featured in the Septuagint and some of the Dead Sea scrolls is ten per cent shorter than the one included in the Masoretic text. The Western Text of the book of **Acts** is ten per cent longer than other versions. But in actual fact, most of the extra material in the longer version of Jeremiah is actually made up of repeated and rehashed passages from elsewhere in the book. The longer version of Acts, on the other hand, is viewed by many scholars as a less authentic version of the New Testament.

2. TEXTS WITH AMBIGUOUS MEANINGS

The second kind of changes that are considered important are where the meaning of a text may be made more ambiguous. During the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century CE, the key issue was whether justification was by faith or by works. This meant that it's perhaps more significant that James 2.20 could read that faith without works is either 'useless' or 'dead' (James 2.20). Similarly, the text of Luke 2.14, often read out at Christmas, could read either 'peace among those whom God favours' or 'peace, good will among men'. These two readings have very different meanings.

3. TEXTS THAT ARE SOMETIMES MISSING

Thirdly, there are also a small number of entire passages that are found in some manuscripts but not in others. This includes 1 Samuel 10.27—11.1, which is a short paragraph about eye injuries that was discovered in biblical texts found near the Dead Sea. It seems to make more overall sense of the passage. Scholars have different views about whether the last part of Mark's gospel (Mark 16.9—20) is really part of the Bible. Some early manuscripts don't include it and it seems to some to be a rehash of the final chapters of the other gospels. On the other hand, it was quoted as part of the Bible at an early stage. Although it may not have been written by Mark, that's not to say it doesn't belong in the New Testament.

Most scholars agree that the 'Johannine Comma' – a verse describing the teaching of the **Trinity** in 1 John 5.8 – is not part of the original text. Although it was included in the King James Version of 1611 CE, the text only appeared in some later Latin manuscripts. Some textual scholars have tried to make much of these debated passages. Others, however, believe them to be largely irrelevant to the big picture.

9.0 CHINESE WHISPERS

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'The Bible Style Guide is an invaluable resource for journalists reporting a post 9-11 world in which religion increasingly dominates the news agenda. Informative without being patronising, cliché-busting as well as substantial, it's useful for those already in the know - as well as those of us who are hastily having to catch up.'

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