

What is the Bible?

Prepared by the Adult Ed. Committee
St. Thomas the Apostle Church Ottawa

The English word "Bible" comes from the Greek *ta biblia* which means *the books*, or *library of books*, a name well chosen since most scholars consider the Bible to be a collection of many individual works written over a long period of time and not the product of a single author. In ancient times a book was often considered a work of suitable length for inclusion in a papyrus or vellum scroll. Longer works were sometimes divided into two scrolls or books.

Scholars look for ways the stories tie together and we as Christians believe that the Bible is above all God's *revelation*, a source and record of God's self communication to the world he created- and that makes it of absolute importance to our lives. We view the Old Testament as the relationship of God's earliest revelation to Israel with the further revelation in Christ found in the New Testament. We believe in the New Testament proclamation of the life and message of Jesus Christ as "good news" for all peoples and see in Jesus the continuation and fulfilment of the Old Testament hopes of a Saviour and Messiah. The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are made up of chapters, each containing many verses. When you want to look up something in the bible you can look up its *reference*. Genesis 1:10, for example, refers to the first chapter of Genesis, tenth verse.

The Old Testament or Hebrew Testament: The books of the **Old Testament** can be dividing them into four groups for easier study and organization:

- The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) are referred to as the Pentateuch or the Books of the **Law**. These books tell how God repeatedly called His people from various entrapments and bondages and restored them to freedom, asking only that they obey His laws.
- The **history** books are Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ruth and Esther. The same themes are repeated here, with several stories of how God's people, pursuing their own ways, eventually became divided and carried away by their enemies. Yet God continued to be faithful hold his promise of the greatest king/leader of all time before them
- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon are referred to as the poetry books or books of **wisdom**. They tell of the greatness of God and offer good advice on how to live a life pleasing to God.
- The remainder of the Old Testament contains the books of the **prophets**. God sent messages to His people through special messengers called prophets. Many times the message was a warning to obey God's laws or bear the consequences.
 - Lamentations, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are considered the Major Prophets. The Minor Prophets include. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The Apocrypha Councils of the early church decided that several books, while of value and not heretical, offered little that was new or unique. As Anglicans we acknowledge 17 apocryphal books, often printed between the Old and New Testaments.

The New Testament: The New Testament tells how God's promises were realized in Jesus and what those promises can mean to everyone.

- The **Gospels** tell us about Jesus' life and work (his ministry). They tell how the prophets' came true in his life, death and resurrection. They include Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

According to common scholarly view the Gospel of Mark was written about 70 CE offering an account of Jesus life and words. Scholars date Matthew and Luke about ten to twenty years after Mark. These two Gospels include much more of the Jesus tradition, especially by way of sayings. Still another form of the Jesus tradition found expression in John's Gospel, dated at around 90-100 CE. This Gospel is quite different.. Some scholars believe it to be a product of the early church's development of its theology after the division from Judaism. The overall import of the four Gospels is to preserve for all time a memory of Jesus that did not perish when the eyewitnesses died.

- The Acts of the Apostles is the only New Testament book considered to be **History**. It continues the story after the Gospel of Luke, showing how Christianity spread following Jesus time on earth'
- The **epistles** deal with the needs of particular individuals and communities at particular times. As far as we know, the first Christian literature to be written was letters: mainly designed to answer immediate problems. Many, but not all, were written by Paul of Tarsus, a travelling apostle who proclaimed Jesus in one town and then moved on to another continuing to advise his people by letter. Thus in the 50s of the first century Paul produced the earliest surviving Christian documents: 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans. Other epistles were written to the Ephesians and Colossians. Letters to individuals (pastoral epistles) include 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Still other letters are generally acknowledged to be the work of other followers of Jesus. These include the Epistles to the Hebrews, James, 1st and 2nd Peter, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John and Jude.
- The book of Revelation is "apocalyptic" or **prophetic**, responding to the challenge of what is under Gods control by presenting visions that encompass what is happening on heaven and earth at the same time.

References

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