

Simply The Bible

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Illustrations by Jonathan Williams



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The books

What is it?

It's a library. Or it's an anthology. Anyway, it's not just one book, it's an anthology of many different kinds of books or writing, including history, poetry, stories, legal codes, proverbs and sayings, apocalyptic visionary descriptions, hymns, letters... It's a book full of books. That's where the name comes from, from the Greek – *ta biblia* – meaning “the books”.

Surprise me



The chapters and verse of the Bible were not in the original text. Our system of chapters dates back to the thirteenth century AD; the verse divisions to the sixteenth century AD

What's in it?

Sixty-six books bound into one volume.

These are grouped into two sections:

The Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures (39 books)	The New Testament or Christian Scriptures (27 books)
The Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures (39 books) – containing writings sacred to both Jews and Christians. This section contains history, prophecy, wisdom and what some people call the “Pentateuch” or the “Books of the Law”. The books in this section were originally written in Hebrew, with some passages in Aramaic.	The New Testament or Christian Scriptures (27 books) – containing writings sacred only to Christians. The New Testament is divided into two main sections: the Gospels and Acts, and the Letters, from people such as Paul, John, and Peter. The books in this section were originally written in Greek, with occasional phrases in Aramaic and Latin.



ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book aims to give you a bite-size introduction to every book of the Bible. (With a nibble-sized introduction to each book of the Apocrypha thrown in for free.) But when you've read about the book, why not have a go at reading the Bible yourself? There are lots of good modern translations available. And to get you started, for each book we've even included some suggested readings to help you explore it – what could be more simple!

Apocrypha

Some Bibles feature a third section known as the Apocrypha. Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include these texts, but most Protestant Bibles do not.



- The books in the Bible were compiled and written by many different people and across thousands of years. “Testament” means “promise”. Christians believe that the Old Testament tells the story of God's promise to the Israelites, while the New Testament of his promise to all people.
- The first Christians did not have “the Bible” as we know it. When the early Christians talked about scripture, they were talking about the Hebrew Scriptures, or what we know as the Old Testament. The early Church probably sang Psalms and read the prophets to see how they pointed to Jesus.
- To help people find their way around the text, each book of the Bible is broken down into chapters; and each chapter into verses. In total there are 1,189 chapters and the whole thing rolls in at well over 750,000 words.

Surprise me



The first person to use *ta biblia* to describe the scriptures was Clement of Alexandria, writing around 215 AD. And he was only talking about the Hebrew scriptures. The first recorded use of *ta biblia* to include both Christian and Jewish Scriptures comes from around 223 AD. Jerome, writing in the fourth century AD, used the term *bibliotheca* which means ‘library’ or ‘collection of books’ and this was the common term used for centuries among Latin speakers.

Why does it matter?

The Bible is the most important book ever written. No book has exerted more influence on the world – certainly the western world. Art, literature, politics, architecture, history, law – they've all been influenced by the Bible. More importantly, as the basis of two of the great religions of the world, its writings are considered sacred. Christians believe that the Bible is inspired by God, which means that the people who wrote it were passing on messages from God – messages that were not only for the people of their time, but for all people, everywhere and in any time.

The Bible is all about the big issues in life. It addresses fundamental questions: why we're here, where we all came from, what we're supposed to be doing with our lives, how we should treat other people. It talks about real people with real problems – and although they lived a long time ago, they faced exactly the same kind of problems that we face today.

Most of all, Christians believe the Bible speaks to us. It is one of the ways that we hear from God and understand more about him.

In the beginning

What is it?

Very big and very old. It's the opening scene, the start of everything. If this were a film it would be one of those special-effects-driven epics. This book has it all: worlds being created, cities being destroyed, cataclysmic floods, people turned into pillars of salt, famine, death, and disaster.

What happens?

We start with the earth, formless and shapeless. Then God speaks and the whole thing is created ❶. Adam and Eve are told they can eat anything, except for the fruit of one tree – so of course that's what they do, inspired by a strange being described as a serpent. After that, creation is broken and they have to leave Eden ❷. We then see the beginnings of civilization: cities get built; music and technology are invented. But sin spreads and the world is evil, so God sends a flood to wash it clean ❸. That's the first part of the book.

In the second part God works through several key figures known as “the patriarchs”, which means “the fathers”. The first of these is Abraham ❹. God makes promises (known as “covenants”) with them ❺. God gives the land of Canaan to Abraham. God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, but Abraham's nephew, Lot, is rescued (although his wife is turned into a pillar of salt) ❻. Abraham's grandson, Jacob, is a trickster who cheats his brother out of his inheritance. On the run, he has a vision of a ladder reaching up to heaven ❼.



Starring: Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, Jacob, Judah, and Joseph



@ GENESIS

In the beginning: God. The epic story of the origins of the human race, their fall and how God starts the rescue plan. This book has everything!

Later, returning home after many years, he wrestles with God and is given the name “Israel” ❸. His son Joseph is hated by his brothers and secretly sold into slavery in Egypt ❹. However, he rises to power and, when famine hits the land many years later, his brothers and their father go to Egypt, where Joseph provides for them ❺.

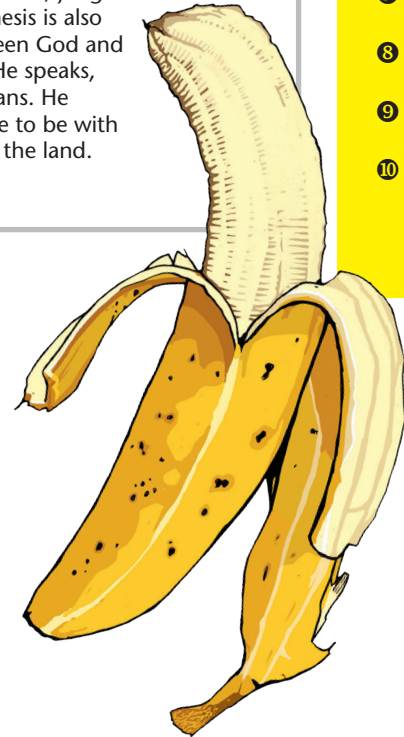
Why does it matter?

Genesis is a “why” book. It's about where we came from and why we are here. It's one of the most important books of the Bible because it introduces many of the themes that run through the entire Bible story: creation, sin, love, sacrifice, judgment – they're all in here. But Genesis is also about the relationship between God and humanity. God is personal. He speaks, he thinks, he relates to humans. He makes a covenant or promise to be with his people and to give them the land.



Surprise me

Although traditionally identified as an apple, the fruit that Eve and Adam eat is never defined. It could have been a banana for all we know.



IN TEN

10

- ❶ Creation: 1:1 – 2:4
- ❷ Adam and Eve: 2:7 – 3:24
- ❸ Noah: 6:5 – 9:17
- ❹ Abram's calling: 12:1–7; 13:14–18
- ❺ Covenant: 15:7–21; 17:1 – 18:15
- ❻ Sodom and Gomorrah: 18:16 – 19:29
- ❼ Jacob's ladder: 28:10–22
- ❽ Call me Israel: 32:1–31
- ❾ Joseph: 37:1–36; 39:1–21
- ❿ In Egypt: 41:1 – 50:26

Exit from Egypt

What is it?

It's an escape story. The title of the book means "Exit". (It comes from the Greek title *Exodos Aigyptou* which means "departure from Egypt".) Moses leads his oppressed people out of Egypt to freedom. It's action-packed, but it also contains the giving of the Law and instructions for worship.



Starring: Moses, Miriam, Pharaoh, Pharaoh's daughter, Aaron, and Joshua



@ EXODUS

This way out. With the Israelites enslaved in Egypt, God sends Moses to the rescue. Out in the desert, God gives the Law. But the people still worship idols.

IN TEN

10

- 1 Slavery: 1:1–14
- 2 Moses: 1:15 – 2:25
- 3 Burning bush: 3:1–21
- 4 Moses vs Pharaoh: 5:1–21
- 5 Plagues: 7:14 – 11:10
- 6 Passover: 12:1–42
- 7 Over the sea: 14:1–31
- 8 Manna: 16:1–26
- 9 Ten Commandments: 19:16 – 20:17
- 10 The golden calf: 32:1–35



What happens?

Exodus starts in Egypt, where the Israelites have become slaves 1. To curb the Israelite population, Pharaoh has instructed that every Hebrew baby boy is to be killed. But one mother takes her baby, puts him into a basket and sets him afloat to take his chances on the Nile. He is rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, who raises him as her own. She calls him Moses.

When he grows up, he sees an Egyptian master beating a Hebrew slave. Angry, he kills the bully, but the crime is discovered so he has to flee into the desert 2. There, working as a shepherd, he sees a bush, which appears to be on fire but remains whole. God calls to Moses from within the fire and gives him the task of rescuing his people 3. Moses returns to Egypt and confronts Pharaoh, who refuses to free the slaves 4. So God inflicts a series of plagues on the Egyptians 5. Still Pharaoh resists, so God sends one final, terrible plague: at midnight the angel of death will pass over the land, and the eldest sons of the Egyptians will die (and the eldest offspring of their livestock as well) 6. Pharaoh relents and Moses leads the Israelites to freedom. But then Pharaoh sends chariots after them. Moses leads his people safely across the sea, but the pursuing chariots are drowned 7.

In the desert, God provides food for his people in the form of quail and manna 8. Three months after leaving Egypt, they come to Mount Sinai, where God gives Moses the Law by which he wants the Israelites to live 9. At the bottom of the mountain the people worry that Moses isn't coming back, so they persuade Aaron to cast them a golden calf that they can worship. Moses rushes down the mountain, smashes the stone tablets on which God has inscribed the Law, and destroys the golden calf 10. God gives Moses two new tablets, which he places in the ark of the covenant.

Why does it matter?

Exodus tells the story of how a group of escaping slaves become the people of God. This "rescue" becomes a core Bible theme. God also makes a covenant with them. Because he has rescued them, they agree to follow him and obey his laws.

Exodus includes some passages that still influence our lives today. Around the world, many legal systems are based on the Ten Commandments; millions of Jews still celebrate Passover.

The book also gives us a unique insight into God's character: he cares for his people, rescues them, and shows them how best to live. And he reveals to Moses his name: Yahweh, or "I am".



Surprise me

The Hebrew title of the book, *Shemot*, is an abbreviation of "These are the names", which is the first line of the book.