

The New Lion Bible  
Encyclopedia

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# The New Lion Bible Encyclopedia

*Mike Beaumont*



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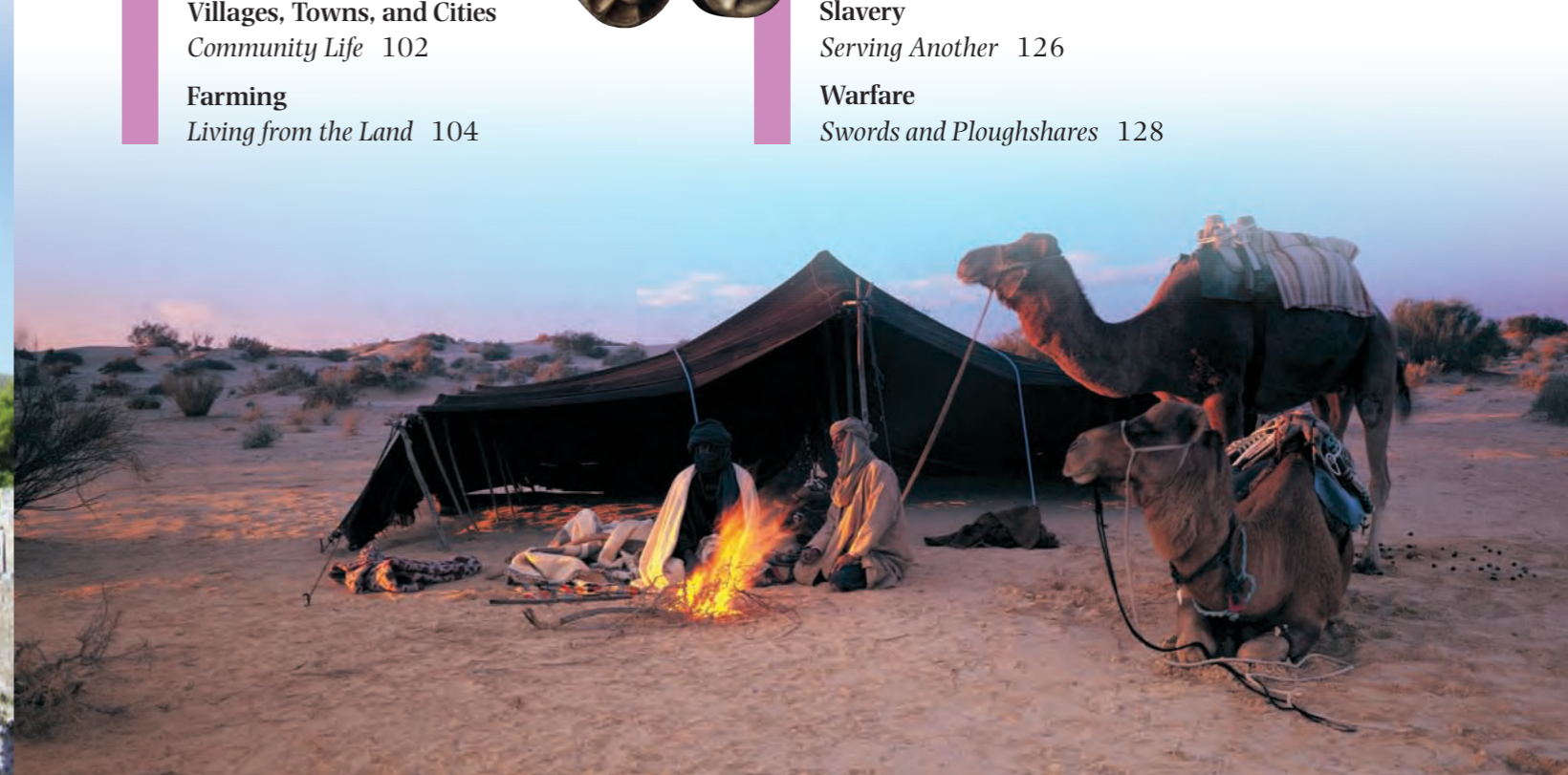
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# Introduction

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**At the heart of my hometown, Oxford, stands Carfax Tower, where the four main roads of this medieval city meet. The tower was once part of St Martin’s Church, demolished in 1896 to ease congestion. While famous with tourists for its delightful figures that strike bells on the quarter-hour, few know its deeper significance. For it was here, in 1528, that Bibles were first burned in Britain. Thomas Garrett, a bookseller secretly peddling Tyndale’s Bible, an early translation of the Bible into English, was caught by the authorities, who opposed the Bible in the vernacular. His Bibles were taken to Carfax and burned on the wood he was made to carry there.**

This story sums up the Bible’s history. Some have loved it, risking everything to share it with others; some have hated it, destroying it and those who love it. Clearly something about this book produces strong reactions. My own journey with it started with my grandfather. One of my earliest memories is of him sitting at the table with his big black Bible as the rest of us went to bed. While fascinated by this, I didn’t understand what he was doing at the time, for it was only many years later that the Bible became special to me, too. I was eighteen years old when I first encountered the message of Jesus in any meaningful way. An invitation to a local church youth club led to my starting to attend church (though more for the girls than for God, it has to be confessed!), and gradually the Bible started to make sense. I became a follower of Jesus and have continued to be so ever since.

One of the things I am grateful for is that I always ended up around Christians who, like my grandfather, loved the Bible – youth leaders at the youth club, members of my university Christian Union, lecturers at seminary who could critique it yet were passionate about it – and it is from them that I “caught” something; that this book, properly understood, is the most exciting and helpful book in the world. Of course, some bits aren’t easy to understand at first: its thematic rather than chronological arrangement doesn’t make grasping its story straightforward; its setting in a worldview so different from ours can be challenging. But the more I dug into its background, the more it made sense of life. So this *Encyclopedia* is written in the hope that it may help the reader to make a bit more sense of the Bible for themselves too by setting the Bible’s story in the context of its time and showing the flow of its story, as it steadily reveals what it claims to be God’s plan for sorting out the mess the human race has got itself into.

While I have tried to use simple language wherever possible to help newcomers to the Bible, there is an inevitable need at times to use technical words, but these are explained in the Fast Fact Finder, which also serves as an index. I also provide Bible references to direct readers to the source documents (indispensable for people wanting to study anything seriously), where they can see both what was said and where and how it was said. The seven clear sections, along with the Index, will help you find your way around, and a “Faith idea” links each article with some aspect of the Christian faith today.

It is my hope that, just as the Bible moved for me many years ago from being a distant book that others loved to one I loved myself, this *Encyclopedia* might help the reader make a similar journey in some way. I have not assumed all readers will share my Christian faith; but I have assumed you’re interested in knowing more about Christianity and its textbook or you wouldn’t be reading this book. For both newcomers and old hands, I trust that it will help the Bible to come alive for you in new ways as it still continues to do for me.

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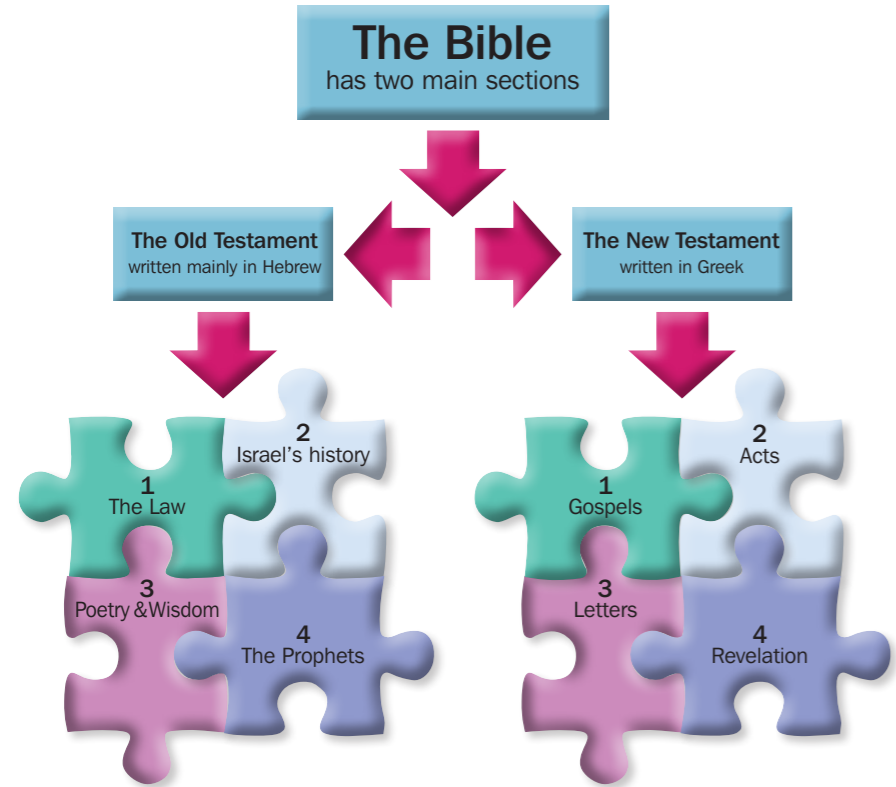
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# The Library Book

## Many Books, One Story

Something that often surprises newcomers to the Bible is that it isn't a book but a *library of books* – written by many authors over a period of around 2,000 years. In the light of that, what is surprising about it is the consistency of its message. For through all its books comes *one* story, Christians believe: God's love for people and his commitment to fixing them and their world.



**What is the Bible?**

The Bible is divided into two unequal halves: the longer **Old Testament**, describing the history of the Jewish nation, and the shorter **New Testament**, telling of Jesus and the church he gave birth to. Yet both halves are part of the *same* story, Christians believe. The diagram above shows how the various parts of that story fit together.

**The Bible as literature**

The Bible's books cannot all be read in the same way. While Christians believe it is God's inspired word, they also recognize it has a human aspect, reflected in the *style* of the writers (for God didn't obliterate their character and personality) and in the *genre* (literary category) they used. So we find history, laws, poetry, wisdom, parables, prophecy, letters – just like

in any library; but instead of being on different shelves, they're all in the one book. Just as we wouldn't read a poetry book as if it were history, nor should we do that when reading the Bible. If we do, we'll read into the text what was never meant to be there.

**The Bible as history**

The Bible is not a series of ad-hoc philosophical principles or religious sayings but a *story revealed through history*. This means we cannot read it "flat", picking random passages to suit our purpose. Get the flow of the history, and you get the sense of the message.

**The Bible as truth**

For Christians, the Bible is much more than literature or history, however: it is God's word, God's truth, his own revelation of his character and purposes, reinforced by Jesus, who said, "Your Word is truth" (John 17:17). While the idea of universal "truth" seems quaint to many nowadays, the Bible claims to both *bring* and *be* God's truth and invites us to test it for ourselves.

**Bible**

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek and Latin word *biblia* ("books"), which in turn comes from Byblos, the Phoenician city where parchment for scrolls was manufactured and exported.

**The canon**

The Jewish list of thirty-nine Old Testament books was finalized some time after Jerusalem's destruction (AD 70), using the tests of *antiquity* (did it agree with the Torah, the most authoritative and foundational of books?) and *authenticity* (did it have prophetic associations?), and this list or "canon" ("measuring rod" in Greek) was adopted by the early



Gutenberg's invention of printing in the 1450s was a huge technological leap forward. His first printed book was the Bible, its text set in two columns because of the limitations of his press. Surprisingly, this two-columned approach has remained the traditional way of printing Bibles to this day.

church. The New Testament's twenty-seven books were determined along similar guidelines: *apostolicity* (was it written by or associated with an apostle?), *orthodoxy* (was it in line with the church's understanding of Jesus?), and *catholicity* (was it aimed at the church at large?). In addition some other inter-testamental Jewish writings slowly came to be accepted by some parts of the church. These "Deuterocanonical" books are interspersed with the main text in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles but are either omitted or inserted between the Old and New Testaments in Protestant Bibles.

**Bible languages**

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, 2,479 languages had at least part of the Bible. Of these, 451 had a complete Bible, 1,185 had the New Testament, and 843 had at least one book. This still leaves around 4,400 languages that do not even have one book of the Bible.

The Bible's books were originally handwritten on scrolls of parchment, papyrus, or leather. But scrolls were awkward and by the second century AD were being replaced by the "codex", an early form of book with folded and stitched pages. This one is the Aleppo Codex.

**Chapters and verses**

To help us find our way around, Bible books are divided into chapters and verses, like this:

**Name of the book** (preceded by 1 or 2 if the book has two halves or if two letters went to the same church)

Chapter  
Verse  
John 3:16

These chapters and verses weren't in the original Hebrew and Greek texts but were added later – the chapters in 1205 by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, and the verses in 1551 by Robert Estienne, a Parisian printer and scholar. While chapters and verses are useful for finding our way around, they can also be a hindrance, as they sometimes hinder the flow of an argument. So when reading the Bible, it's important to remember that they weren't there in the original.



**Why is the Bible important?**

Jews became known as "the people of the book". But why was that book so important to them? Because when God made his covenant with them at Sinai, he gave them a gift, his word – initially, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17) and the "Book of the Covenant" (20:22 – 23:19). They therefore left Sinai as his newly constituted people with two things: *God's presence* (symbolized by cloud and fire) and *God's word* (showing them how to live). The first Christians experienced a similar thing, as the risen Jesus gave them the same two gifts: *God's presence* through the Holy Spirit (John 20:21–22) and *God's word*, initially taking them to the Old Testament Scriptures, showing how they pointed to him (Luke 24:25–27), and later guiding them to write the New Testament.

For Christians *God's presence* and *God's word* remain central to how God works, speaks, and guides, which is why the Bible is so central to their faith.

**Faith idea: God's word**

For Christians, the Bible is God's word, his revelation to us, rather than our attempt to search for him. As such, it is seen as inspired and authoritative, the only true guide for life, with the same Holy Spirit who caused it to be written helping people today to understand it, just as Jesus promised (John 16:13).

**See also**  
The Deuterocanonical Books pp. 16–17  
The Old Testament pp. 14–15  
The New Testament pp. 18–19