

The
BOOK
of Books

For Eleanor,
daughter,
friend

and for Judy,
colleague,
friend

brilliant teachers
both of them

The
Book
of Books



Trevor Dennis

Illustrated by David Dean

LION



Text copyright © 2003 Trevor Dennis
Illustrations copyright © 2003 David Dean
This edition copyright © 2003 Lion Publishing

The moral rights of the author and illustrator
have been asserted

Published by
Lion Publishing plc
Mayfield House, 256 Banbury Road,
Oxford OX2 7DH, England
www.lion-publishing.co.uk
ISBN 0 7459 3625 3

First edition 2003
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

All rights reserved

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Typeset in 13/18 Elegant Garamond BT
Printed and bound in Finland

Contents

Acknowledgments 11

Introduction 13



Chapter 1: In the Beginning 17

God Makes the World 18

God Plants a Garden 22

Things Get Nasty 27

The Great Flood 31

Babel Babble 36



Chapter 2: God's New Family 40

Abraham and the Great Promise 41

Sarah's Cunning Plan 43

Hagar and the God Who Sees 45

Sarah Overhears the Promise 48

Hagar and the God Who Saves 50

Abraham and Isaac 53

A Tricky Twin and a Bowl of Stew 56

Jacob Steals a Blessing 58

The Gate of Heaven 62

Face to Face with God 65

Face to Face with Esau 68

Jacob and His Sons 69

Joseph the Slave 72

Joseph the Prisoner 73
Joseph in the Palace 75
Joseph and the Famine 78
A Strange Discovery 81
Benjamin 82
The Reunion 86



Chapter 3: Moses and the Mountain of God 88

The Brave Midwives and the Pharaoh 89
Moses' Brave Mother and Sister 93
Moses Meets God in the Desert 96
God and the Pharaoh 100
God Splits the Sea 103
The Mountain of God 106
More Teaching from God's Mountain 110
The Golden Calf 111
Making a New Start 115
The Death of Moses 117



Chapter 4: Living in God's Land 118

The Fall of Jericho 119
Eluma, a Woman Despised 123
Hannah, a Woman Without a Child 127
'Samuel! Samuel!' 130
King Saul 133
David the Shepherd Boy 137
David and Goliath 140

David on the Run 145
David and Bathsheba 150
David and Nathan 154
Elijah and the Contest on Carmel 156
Elijah on the Run 163
Elijah, Ahab and the Vineyard 169



Chapter 5: The People of God under Threat 173

‘Let Justice Roll Down Like Water’ 176
Hosea and the Love of God 183
Jerusalem will Never be Taken! 186
Jeremiah Speaks the Truth 188
Jerusalem Falls 194
Sad Songs of Lament 197
Dreaming of Home 203
A Valley Full of Bones and a New Garden of Eden 209
Rebuilding Jerusalem 214
Daniel: God in the Flames 222
Daniel in the Lions’ Den 229



Chapter 6: Fine Stories, Fine Poems 235

Ruth, Naomi and Boaz: Love Wins the Day 236
Jonah, a Big Fish, a Great City and the Forgiveness of God 252
The Book of Job: Shaking a Fist at Heaven 261
Songs of Light 278



Introduction to the New Testament 284



Chapter 7: The New Beginning: Jesus is Born 287

Disgrace Turned Quite All to Grace 288

Gifts Fit for a King 290

Mary Meets an Angel 297

Mary's Song 299

Jesus is Born 301

Jesus' Real Home 304



Chapter 8: Who was Jesus? 307

John Baptizes Jesus 309

A Reading in the Synagogue 311

Peter, James and John 313

Photina: the Woman at the Well 317

Commander of the Dark Forces 321

A Madman Among the Tombs 324

The Hungry are Filled 326

A Man Sees for the First Time 330

A Woman and a Girl are Brought Back to Life 334

Peter Gets it Right; Peter Gets it Wrong 339

The Light of God 342



Chapter 9: Jesus the Storyteller and Poet 345

A Lost Sheep, a Lost Coin and a Lost Son 346

The Good Samaritan 353

The Workers in the Vineyard 357

The Beatitudes 361
Other Sayings and a Prayer 363



Chapter 10: Jesus is Killed: Jesus is Risen 368

Riding into Jerusalem 369
Mayhem in the Temple 373
Jesus is Anointed Messiah 376
Betrayal 379
The Last Supper 380
Arrest 383
The Unfair Trial 386
Peter's Denial 388
Pilate 389
Jesus is Crowned King 393
Crucifixion 394
'Mary' 398
Thomas Gets it Right... in the End 400
Peter Goes Fishing 402



Chapter 11: From Jerusalem to Rome: The Church Begins 405

The Full Truth 406
Wind and Fire 407
Stephen is Killed 410
Paul Meets the Risen Jesus 414
Paul and Ananias 415
Escape in a Basket 417
Peter and a Soldier Called Cornelius 419
Paul and Barnabas Get Mistaken for Gods 424

A Riot in Ephesus 427
A Riot in Jerusalem 432
The Threat of an Ambush 434
Paul Asks to See the Emperor 436
Shipwreck 438
Paul Reaches Rome 441



Chapter 12: Letters to Churches and a Final Vision 444

Quarrelling Christians 445
Paul's Hardships 448
'You are the Body of Christ' 450
Love is the Greatest of All 451
Life After Death 454
A Beautiful Hymn 455
A Final Collection 456
Visions of Heaven 458



Bible References 462

Acknowledgments

About this book and how it came to be written

It all began with other people. Philip Law and Lois Rock, both editors at Lion Publishing, had the idea that I should write a Bible for younger readers. I wasn't sure at first that I would be able to write the kind of book they described, but they persuaded me to have a go and I am very glad they did.

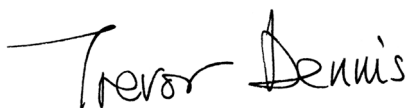
Lois became my editor. She was always encouraging, and the suggestions she made for improvements, both large and small, were always intelligent and perceptive.

I'm also grateful to Olwen Turchetta, who did a great job of copy-editing the book.

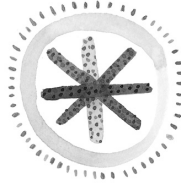
There are two other people I have to thank specially. One is my eldest daughter, Eleanor, and the other is Judy Davies, the Education Officer at Chester Cathedral. Eleanor and Judy have much experience of teaching and working with children and young people. They agreed to read everything I wrote, and whenever I came to the end of a chapter, I showed it to them first. They were extremely helpful and encouraging all the way through, and I am so grateful for the trouble they took, that I have dedicated the book to them.

My wife, Caroline, and our other children, Sarah, Jo and Tim, and our son-in-law, John, also took a great interest in the book. Writing it was an exciting but daunting task, and I needed their love and encouragement also to keep me going. I'm glad of this opportunity to say how much I owe them.

There are many other people who helped produce this book and made it possible for you to have a copy. These include: David Dean, who illustrated the book; Jacqueline Crawford, who designed it; and Sarah Toulmin, who advertised it. Without them my work wouldn't have come to anything, and you wouldn't have this book. I hope you enjoy it!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Trevor Dennis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left of the name.

Trevor Dennis, CHESTER CATHEDRAL, JANUARY 2003



INTRODUCTION

'Who are we? Where did we come from? What makes us different? Why are we so special? Are we special?' Everyone asks those questions. Two and a half thousand years ago the people of Israel asked those questions, and other questions too, such as: 'Why are we having such a hard time? What's gone wrong? What is God up to?' They lived in a small country at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, and a very powerful people called the Babylonians had invaded, destroyed their towns and cities, killed a lot of them and taken thousands more into exile in Babylonia, hundreds of miles away to the east. They had taken their cattle, their goats and sheep as well, and ruined the crops, so the people left behind also had a terrible time.

The Babylonians said they were the best. The Babylonians said their gods were the best too. The Babylonians said the Israelites ought to think like Babylonians, live like Babylonians, feel like Babylonians, worship like Babylonians.

Some of the Israelites said, 'We've got to do something, or this will be the end of us!' 'Let's write a story,' some others replied, 'our story, the story of our people, our land and our God. Let's collect together the stories we've been telling our children, and the stories we learned when

we were children. Let's weave them together, and write some new ones, and tell a tale that our children will tell their children, and their children will tell their children, and so on and so on, for ever and ever!

And so they did, and we have that story still. It's in the Bible and stretches from the book of Genesis to the second book of Kings.

We don't know the names of any of the people who first told this story. Parts of it are very old, perhaps as old as three thousand years, perhaps older, but often we don't know the century when the individual stories were first composed, let alone the year. Some of them may have been composed by women, but it is clear that most of the storytellers were men. Unfortunately, there are no pieces by children. Most of the storytellers would have lived in the cities. Some of them were priests; some of them were merchants or landowners. A few of the stories may have come originally from the villages. The whole story can't have been finished till some time after the Babylonians invaded and took so many people into exile. We can be quite sure of that, because that is where it all ends.

But the Bible doesn't end there, and nor will this book. The people of Israel, or the Jews as they came to be called, told other stories and recited wonderful poems. Among the poets were prophets – men and women who claimed to be able to see things as God saw them, and to speak with God's voice. The people treasured the finest of their poems and passed them down from one generation to another. Some prophets, as we shall see, saw catastrophe coming and tried to help the people face up to it. During the exile in Babylon other prophets had marvellous visions of how God would rescue them and take them back home. After the exile had ended, the people rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. A Jew called Nehemiah organized the rebuilding of the walls of the city and left behind his account of it for us to read. Nearly three hundred years after that, another foreign king threatened to wipe

out the Jewish religion. In the book of Daniel we find stories told at that time about God coming to the rescue of his friends once again.

There are love stories in the Bible too, such as the tale of the remarkable friendship between two women called Ruth and Naomi, and of how Ruth came to marry a man named Boaz. And funny stories, such as the tale of the hopeless prophet called Jonah, who simply could not accept the truth about God's forgiveness. There is also poetry. An anonymous poet, perhaps the finest poet in the whole Bible, wrote about a man called Job who lost almost everything and suffered a terrible illness, but finally saw God and was transformed by the vision. And in the temple in Jerusalem they sang sacred songs now known as psalms, some very old, some composed afresh after the exile.

You will find these stories and some of the poems and songs in this book.

When we have gone through those, we still won't have reached the end. We will be leaving behind what Christians call the Old Testament, or Jews Tanakh (for all these writings so far belong to the Jews' Bible as well as the Christians' Bible). But then we will come to four more Jewish storytellers, called Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who wrote about a Jew named Jesus of Nazareth. They claimed that the coming of Jesus marked a new beginning, not just for their fellow Jews, but for the entire world. 'If you want to have the clearest picture of what God is like,' they said, 'then look at Jesus, look at the way he lived, and particularly the way he died, and listen to the stories he told.' Their books are called the Gospels, and for most Christians they are the most important books in the Bible.

Luke added a second volume to his story, and in the book of Acts told how the number of Jesus' followers grew after his death and spread to more and more places. That part of his story is mostly concerned with two men: Peter, who had been one of Jesus' followers