

# Bible 101

## Words for the Bible

### Bible



Bible comes from the Greek word *τὰ βιβλία*, *tà biblia*, meaning "the books." The Christian Bible is a collection of between 66 (for Protestants) and 76 (for most Orthodox) books written in three languages over hundreds of years.

### Scripture



Scripture comes from the Latin word *scriptura* meaning "writings" or "things written." Often identified as sacred or holy scripture (*sacra scriptura*), scripture refers to a religion's sacred writings, which is the Bible for Christians.

### Canon



Canon comes from the Greek *κανών*, *kanón*, meaning "measuring rod" (related to the word for cane or reed used for measuring). Applied to the Bible, it is a standard or measure for evaluating Christian belief and practice.

## Biblical Canons

*Note: The Episcopal Church's canon falls between the Protestant and Catholic ones, and its lectionary has selections from Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon, Baruch, Tobit, and 1 Maccabees.*

### Tanakh (Jewish Bible)

24 Books



Tanakh is an acronym for its three subdivisions: the Law (Torah), Prophets (Nevi'im), and writings (Ketuvim). The Protestant Old Testament includes all the content of the Tanakh but orders the books differently and divides some of the books into multiple works.

### Protestant Canon

66 Books



Comprised of 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament.

### Catholic Canon

73 Books



One of the earliest Christian canons. Includes the Protestant Canon plus Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, and additions to the books of Esther and Daniel.

### Orthodox Canon

76+ Books



Catholic Canon plus 1 Esdras, the Prayer of Manasseh, 3 Maccabees, a 151<sup>st</sup> Psalm, and 4 Maccabees (as an appendix). The largest canon is from the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church and includes 1 Enoch, 4 Baruch, 3 Ethiopian books of Maccabees, and Jubilees.

## Timeline of the Bible



## Biblical Authority

There are a number of different approaches to how and why the Bible is authoritative for Christians. Some consider it inerrant, meaning it contains no errors. Some people go so far as to see the Bible as dictated by God without any errors regarding religion, science, or history. Others go the other direction and see the Bible as a collection of books written by fallible humans trying their best to respond to and interpret God's activity in the world. All Christians agree that the Bible is inspired by God, meaning God was especially involved somehow in its creation. Episcopalians generally view the Bible as a collection of books in different genres written by many people guided by God. The Bible records both how God interacted with people in history and how people responded to God (both in good and bad ways). It records God's interaction with humanity throughout history, culminating in God's definitive self-revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## Biblical Genres

### Gospels



Matthew  
Mark  
Luke  
John

### Law



Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

### Wisdom & Poetry



Job  
Psalms  
Proverbs  
Ecclesiastes  
Song of Solomon  
(Wisdom of Solomon)  
(Ecclesiasticus (Sirach))

### History



Joshua  
Judges  
Ruth  
1 & 2 Samuel  
1 & 2 Kings  
1 & 2 Chronicles  
Ezra  
Nehemiah  
(Tobit)  
(Judith)  
Esther  
(1 & 2 Maccabees)  
Acts

### Prophecy



Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Ezekiel  
Daniel\*  
Hosea  
Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah

Nahum  
Habakkuk  
Zephaniah  
Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi  
Revelation\*

### Letters



Romans  
1 & 2 Corinthians  
Galatians  
Ephesians  
Philippians  
Colossians  
1 & 2 Thessalonians  
1 & 2 Timothy

Titus  
Philemon  
Hebrews  
James  
1 & 2 Peter  
1, 2, & 3 John  
Jude

\*may more properly be considered Apocalypse or Apocalyptic (Books in parentheses are Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical)

## Biblical Languages

### Original Languages

The Bible was written in three primary languages: Hebrew, the language of the people of ancient Israel; Aramaic, a language that became the common language of the Ancient Near East; and Koine Greek, the common language of the Roman Empire. In Protestant Bibles, most of the Old Testament's 23,145 verses were written in Hebrew, with just over 250 in Aramaic. All of the New Testament's 7,957 verses were written in Koine Greek.



### The Bible Today

692

Number of languages the whole Bible has been translated into

1,547

Number of additional languages with at least the New Testament translated

1,123

Number of additional languages with some selections and/or stories translated



3,362

Total number of languages with some of the Bible

*Statistics about translations from the United Bible Societies. \*Key facts about Bible access, <https://www.unitedbiblesocieties.org/key-facts-bible-access/>*



# Biblical Geography

## OLD TESTAMENT NEAR EAST



## NEW TESTAMENT NEAR EAST



## NEW TESTAMENT MEDITERRANEAN



The events of the Bible occurred in and around the Fertile Crescent and the Mediterranean Basin, meaning the countries of the modern Middle East, North Africa, and Southern Europe. The Old Testament is set against the backdrop of the ancient Near East's great civilizations: the Sumerians, Akkadians, Elamites, Babylonians, and Assyrians of Mesopotamia; Egypt; the Hittites; the city states of Canaan; and the Phoenicians, among others.

After Persia fell to Alexander the Great in 330 BCE, the center of power drifted north and west. The entire region was deeply influenced by Greek culture after Alexander's death. Rome came to rule the whole Mediterranean Basin by the late first century BCE. It was this Greco-Roman world that Jesus was born into and Christianity emerged out of.

## MODERN MEDITERRANEAN



### MAP KEY

- Modern country
- Ancient region/nation
- Large city
- Other city
- Geographic feature
- ▲ Mountain

Israel/Northern Kingdom (OT Near East)	Herod the Great's Kingdom (NT Near East)
Judah/Southern Kingdom (OT Near East)	Extent of Roman Empire (NT Mediterranean)



# CHOOSING A Bible

There are more than 450 English translations of the Bible. While The Episcopal Church has only authorized fourteen of them for use in public worship, navigating the various editions can still be daunting. Moreover, every translation is also an interpretation, with every one conveying certain theological biases. For instance, the NRSV uses gender inclusive language and the NIV is translated with a more evangelical outlook. Thus, these guided questions can help you figure out which of the most popular translations is best for your needs.

What reading level do you want?



## Elementary/ Middle School

New International Version (NIV)  
Common English Bible (CEB)  
The Message\*

\*The Message is a very popular and accessible translation for personal use, but it is not authorized for use in public worship in The Episcopal Church.

## Early High School

New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)  
New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)



## Late High School/ College

Revised Standard Version (RSV)  
Authorized/King James Version (KJV)



Do you care if your version is common in Episcopal worship?



Yes



New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)†

†While all of the translations presented here (except The Message) are authorized to be read in Episcopal worship, the NRSV is the version you are most likely to encounter in any given Episcopal Church's worship.

Somewhat



Revised Standard Version (RSV)  
Authorized/King James Version (KJV)

No



New International Version (NIV)  
New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)  
Common English Bible (CEB)  
The Message\*

How close to original languages?



## Close to original

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)  
Revised Standard Version (RSV)  
Authorized/King James Version (KJV)



## A mix of both

New International Version (NIV)  
Common English Bible (CEB)



## More natural English

New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)  
The Message\*



How modern do you want the language?



## Traditional

Authorized/King James Version (KJV)  
Revised Standard Version (RSV)



## Modern but formal

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)



## Contemporary

New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)  
New International Version (NIV)  
Common English Bible (CEB)  
The Message\*



Other considerations



## Reader's Bibles

You can buy certain translations (such as the NIV) without chapter or verse numbers to help you read the Bible like you would read other books. One option is *The Path* by Forward Movement.



## Study Bibles

A study edition with footnotes and essays is best for learning more about the context and history of the Bible. These include the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* and the *HarperCollins Study Bible*.





## Other Features

You can also find editions of the Bible that offer various other features, such as the books split up to assist with daily reading or arranged chronologically.



# WEIGHTS AND MEASURES IN THE BIBLE

-  Measures found in the Old Testament or whole Bible
-  Measures found only in the New Testament

**Name in the NRSV**  
 Equivalence to other biblical measures  
 US equivalent  
 Biblical example



## WEIGHTS

**talent** 60 minas 75.558 pounds

Jesus tells a parable about the wise use of our talents, in this case referring to the monetary unit based on the weight in Matthew 25:14-30.



**mina, pound**  
 50 shekels  
 20.148 ounces



**pound**  
 .719 pound



**shekel**  
 2 bekas  
 176.29 grains



**pim**  
 .667 shekel  
 117.52 grains



**beka**  
 10 gerahs  
 half a shekel  
 88.14 grains



**gerah**  
 8.81 grains



pound

Weights such as shekel and talent also refer to monetary units of a precious metal (usually copper or silver).

In Luke's version (Luke 19:12-27) of "The Parable of the Talents," Jesus refers to minas rather than talents.

## DRY MEASURES



**measure, kor, homer**  
 2 letechs  
 6.524 bushels 229.7 liters



**letech**  
 5 ephahs  
 3.262 bushels



**ephah, measure**  
 3 tseahs  
 20.878 dry quarts

Ruth gleaned an ephah of barley in Ruth 2:17.



**measure (H tse'ah G saton)**  
 3.33 omers  
 6.959 dry quarts



**bushel**  
 7.68 dry quarts

Jesus said that no one hides a lamp under a bushel basket in Matthew 5:15 and Mark 4:21

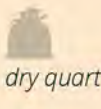


**omer**  
 1.8 kabs  
 2.087 quarts

The Israelites were to gather one omer of manna per person per day in Exodus 16:16.



**kab**  
 1.159 quarts



dry quart



**quart**  
 .98 dry quart



**measure, kor**  
 10 baths  
 60.738 gallons



**measure (G metretes)**  
 10.3 gallons



**bath**  
 6 hins  
 6.073 gallons



**hin**  
 3 kabs  
 1.012 gallons



Gallon



**kab**  
 4 logs  
 1.4349 quarts



**pot**  
 .96 dry pint or  
 1.12 fluid pints

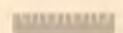


**log**  
 .674 pint

Isaiah 5:10 refers to ten acres of a vineyard yielding only a bath of wine.

## LENGTHS

foot



**finger** .728 inches



**handbreadth** 4 fingers  
 2.915 inches



**span** 3 handbreadths  
 8.745 inches



In Genesis 6:15, Noah's ark is 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high.

**cubit** 2 spans  
 1.5 feet



Acts 27:28 talks about using fathoms to measure the depth of water for sailing.

**fathom** 72.44 inches



## DISTANCES

mile (5280 feet)



**stadia** 606 feet



**mile**  
 4854 feet



Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem; Emmaus was about seven.

## LIQUID MEASURES



# THE WORLDS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible presents us with a very different political, social, cosmological, and religious world from that of today. Better yet, the Bible, written over at least 800 years in multiple parts of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean, contains multiple worlds. This information will help make sense of the cultures of the people who wrote the Bible and the people about whom the Bible is written.

Many cultures of the Bible were very concerned with increasing honor for oneself and one's community. For some, honor functioned as a kind of currency and was perhaps as important as material wealth—and at times perhaps more important.

## HONOR



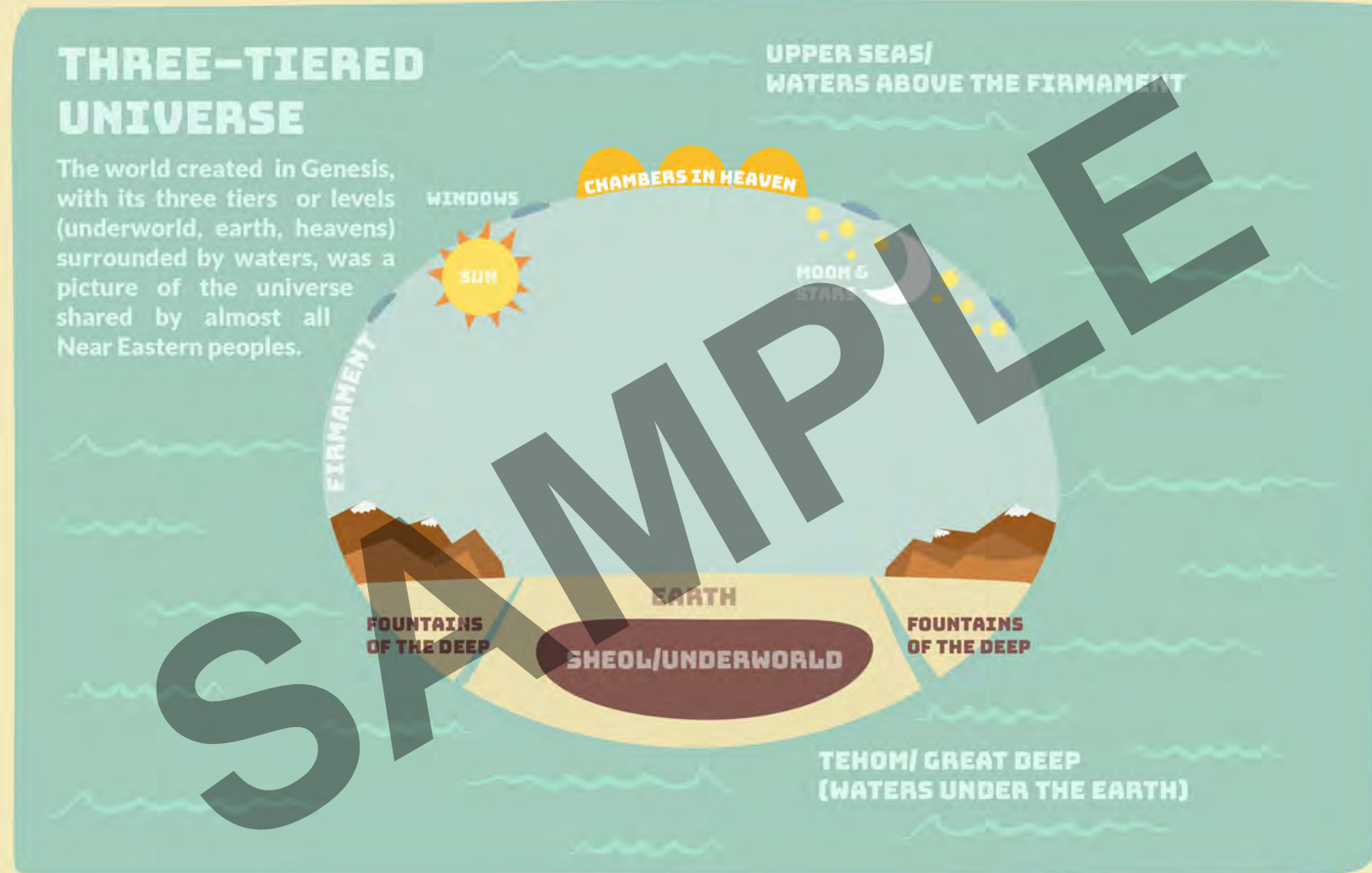
## SLAVERY

Slavery was a universal reality for the cultures of the Bible, as attested to by texts in both the Old and New Testaments. By the time of the New Testament, up to one in four people in the Roman Empire were slaves. People were enslaved because of debt or as prisoners of war. Race-based chattel slavery was unknown in the ancient world: Slaves could have relatively comfortable positions as scribes, tutors, etc., and many secured their freedom. Still, slaves were subject to their masters' wills, and some suffered severe physical and sexual abuse at their hands.



## FAMILY & COMMUNITY

Biblical cultures were much more communal than contemporary Western society. Modern beliefs about privacy were virtually non-existent. Family and larger group belonging determined identity, often more than individual features. Polygamy (multiple wives) was common during most of the time described in the Old Testament. While some elites during the Roman era still practiced polygamy, monogamy had by then become the norm.



## POLYTHEISM



Judaism and Christianity were quite unusual in their monotheism (belief in only one God). Nearly every other culture, whether Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Greek, or Roman, worshiped many gods and goddesses.

## LAW & COVENANT

Israel had a series of covenants with the one God that ensured Israel would be God's people and God would in turn protect them. In return, they were expected to keep a set of ritual and moral laws that set the Israelites apart from other peoples. Many scholars see these covenants as based on Suzerain Treaties made between kings and their vassals.



## AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

While large urban centers existed in the Ancient Near East, Israel remained largely a rural farming culture. Israel tended to have less class stratification than its neighbors (although inequality was certainly known in Israel). However, relative economic equality did not mean that people were free from poverty. Farming as an economic base meant that people were only a few bad harvests away from poverty or even starvation. While the Roman era brought more urbanization, most people continued to live as rural farmers.



## SPIRITS & SICKNESS

For the people of the Bible, the "natural" world was filled with living things like spirits, gods, and demons—even the heavenly bodies were alive. Natural phenomena weren't caused by universal laws but resulted from the willful actions for good or for ill of these various beings—and, for the Israelites, the will of the one God. There was no concept of illness caused by microbes, genetics, or chemical reactions; people got sick because of gods (God),



demons, spirits, or the activity of heavenly bodies. Belief in The Evil Eye—the idea that some beings, including humans, could harm or destroy anything in their gaze—was pervasive. The eyes were thought to literally express the intentions of the heart, so hearts full of envy created The Evil Eye. This was related to the idea that the eye produced its own light to let people see. People used amulets, often in the likeness of eyes, to protect themselves.



## POLITICS



Monarchy was nearly universal. Often rulers had absolute authority and were considered divine intermediaries, if not gods themselves. Israel was unusual in seeing its kings as normal human beings, even if they were anointed by God. Another persistent reality was empire: Kingdoms constantly sought to increase their power and land holdings by conquering other, previously independent lands.

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