**Bible 101**

**Words for the Bible**

**Bible**  
Bible comes from the Greek word βιβλιον, or biblion, meaning “the books.” The Christian Bible is a collection of between 66 (for Protestant) and 76 (for most Orthodox) books written in three languages over hundreds of years.

**Scripture**  
Scripture comes from the Latin word scriptura meaning “writing” or “things written.” Often identified as sacred or holy scripture (from scripture, scripture refers to a religious sacred writings, which is the Bible for Christians.

**Canon**  
Canon comes from the Greek κανών, 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.

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**Biblical Canons**

**Tanakh (Jewish Bible)**  
24 Books  
Tanhk is an acronym for its three subdivisions: The Law (Torah), Prophets (Neviim), and Writings (Kethuvim). The Protestant Old Testament includes all of the content of the Tanakh but orders the books differently and divides some of the books into multiple works.

**Protestant Canon**  
66 Books  

**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 Enoch, the Papyrus of Adda, 3 Maccabees, a 4th Psalm, and 4 Maccabees has an appendix. The largest canon is from the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church and includes 1 Enoch, 4 Maccabees, Sirach, and 4 other Egyptian books of Maccabees, and Juniena.

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**Timeline of the Bible**

- 8th – 7th Century BCE (Old Testament)  
  - Books of the Old Testament written
  - 460 – 450 BCE: writings that would later become the New Testament written
  - 397: Athanasius’s Canon lists the 27 books accepted as the New Testament
  - 313: Martin Luther finishes German Bible translation
  - 1545-1553: Council of Trent establishes the Vulgate as official Catholic Bible
  - 1661: The King James Version, or Authorized Version is completed and published

- 20th-21st Centuries: Proclamation of English version, and many translations into other modern languages

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**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.

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**Biblical Genres**

**Gospels**  
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

**History**  
Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, Daniel

**Prophecy**  
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah

**Letters**  
Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy

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**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 23,345 verses were written in Hebrew, with just over 250 in Aramaic. All of the New Testament’s 7,876 verses were written in Koine Greek.

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**The Bible Today**

- **602**  
  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

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**Total number of languages with some of the Bible**

3,362

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For more resources, visit www.ForwardMovement.org

Credit: Christopher Berlin © 2018 Forward Movement
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.

**MAP KEY**
- Modern country
- Ancient region/nation
- Large city
- Other city
- Geographic feature
  - Mountain

**Legend:**
- Israel
- Israelite Kingdom (11th century BCE)
- Rome
- Roman Kingdom (1st century BCE)
- Israel/Samaria Kingdom (1st century BCE and 1st century CE)
- Judah/Samaria Kingdom (1st century BCE and 1st century CE)
- Return of Roman Empire (1st century CE)
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 by 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)
  - Authorized/King James Version (KJV)

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

- **Yes**
  - New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*

- **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**

- **Old Testament**
  - Shew: 20.148 ounces
  - Shekel: 2 beka, 117.52 grams
  - Beka: 10 gerahs, 88.14 grams

- **New Testament**
  - Mina: 50 shekels, 1.33 pounds
  - Pound: .719 pound

**DRY MEASURES**

- **Kor**
  - 2 letechs, 6.524 bushels
  - 9 ephahs, 20,878 dry quarts

- **Lotech**
  - 3.262 bushels

- **Ephah**
  - 9 letechs, 20,878 dry quarts

- **Quart**
  - 598 dry quarts

**LIQUID MEASURES**

- **Bath**
  - 10 baths, 66.738 gallons

- **Gallon**
  - 4 kabs, 1.4340 gallons

**DISTANCES**

- **Foot**
  - .728 inches

- **Finger**
  - 2.915 inches

- **Cubit**
  - 1.5 feet

- **Stadia**
  - 606 feet

**LORDSHIP**

- **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.
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.

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-fourth of 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.