

# GETTING TO KNOW THE BIBLE BETTER



Getting to know the Bible better, 2006  
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# PREFACE

The Bible is the book that has influenced the whole course of history. It continues to influence millions of people today. It is the book in which God speaks to you.

However, it is a book that many people find hard to read. It can be frustrating, confusing, boring or simply overwhelming. In this course, you will learn how to start reading the Bible for yourself, so that its ancient message is exciting and relevant to you today.

Our goal is to teach you to read the Bible for yourself. You are certainly capable of reading and understanding this great book, but if you are like most people you are occasionally frustrated, confused, bored, overwhelmed by the task.

We assume that, since you are attending this course, you want help in furthering your understanding of the Bible while avoiding the many roadblocks that hinder progress. We think we can provide you with keys and tips in doing so.

The aims of the course are to help you:

1. become more familiar with the Bible;
2. be able to read and understand the Bible independently;
3. evaluate the claims for the Bible's inspiration.

In addition to these course notes, you will also need *The Bible Readers' Handbook* which contains many useful charts, maps and other tools to help in your Bible reading.

We are committed to helping you to discover the Bible message for yourself, and to be able to evaluate it for yourself. No knowledge of the Bible is assumed—we will start from the very beginning.

We hope this course will meet your needs. It is suitable for people of all religions—you don't have to be a Christian. The only requirement is a desire to learn more about the Bible for yourself.

Rob Hyndman  
October 2005



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SESSION 1

# INTRODUCING THE BIBLE

In this first session of the course, we will look at some background information about this fascinating book. It is a book of amazing diversity: read the Bible and you will find a mixture of enchanting history, beautiful poetry, remarkable prophecy, great wisdom, simple proverbs and difficult teaching.

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## A UNIQUE BOOK

No-one can understand modern society without understanding the history and message of the Bible. It is a holy book for Christians, Jews and Muslims and it has played a major part in the development of world civilization and social values. Whether you believe it or not, you cannot ignore it.

Furthermore, it makes extraordinary claims of itself. For example:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)



*What do you think “God-breathed” means?*

It is only sensible to test these claims for ourselves. If its claims are true, we must read the Bible carefully and thoroughly. This course is designed to help you test the Bible’s claims and read it effectively.

## RECORD BREAKER

The Bible is the world’s best seller. It has been estimated that between 1815 and 1975, about 2,500 million copies of the Bible were printed. Each year approximately 100 million Bibles or parts of Bibles are distributed. These are staggering numbers when compared with the very few books which ever sell just one million copies. The best-selling novel ever has only sold about 30 million copies over a period of more than 20 years. What is it that makes the Bible consistently out-sell every other book ever produced? It does it every year, and has done so for hundreds of years.



*Why do you think the Bible sells in such large numbers?*

Data from the United Bible Societies  
([www.biblesociety.org](http://www.biblesociety.org)).

The Bible also holds the record for being translated into more languages than any other book. Currently at least a portion of the translated scriptures exist in more than 2300 languages, giving 94% of the world’s population some access to

God’s word in their native language. This means that almost any person on earth can have access to the Bible and read or hear the words which have changed the course of history so often. The main groups involved in this work of translation, printing and sale have been the Bible Societies.

No other book is so widely quoted or so widely studied. More books are written about the Bible than any other book.

## **SURVIVAL**

The Bible has endured thousands of years of copying by hand, yet it appears to have remained almost unchanged.

It has been burned, banned and outlawed many times. For example, in 1408 England passed the following law:

that no one henceforth on his own authority translate any text of Holy Scripture into English or other language . . . and that no book of this kind be read.

Those who did translate it into English (such as William Tyndale) were killed. Others were burnt at the stake for saying the Lord’s Prayer in English. Only a few years ago, it was a criminal offence in many communist countries to have a Bible in your possession.

***Why would owning or translating a Bible be made a criminal offence?***



## **A LIBRARY OF BOOKS**

The word “bible” comes from a Greek word *biblos* meaning simply “writings”. The Bible is not just one book—it is one volume, but it contains 66 separate books written by many different authors. At the front of your Bible you will find a list of these 66 books. You may already know some of the book names and some of the Bible stories.

But how do all these books and stories fit together? One of the aims of this course is to help you to gain an overview of the Bible and what it is all about. You can build on your knowledge quickly if you read your Bible regularly.

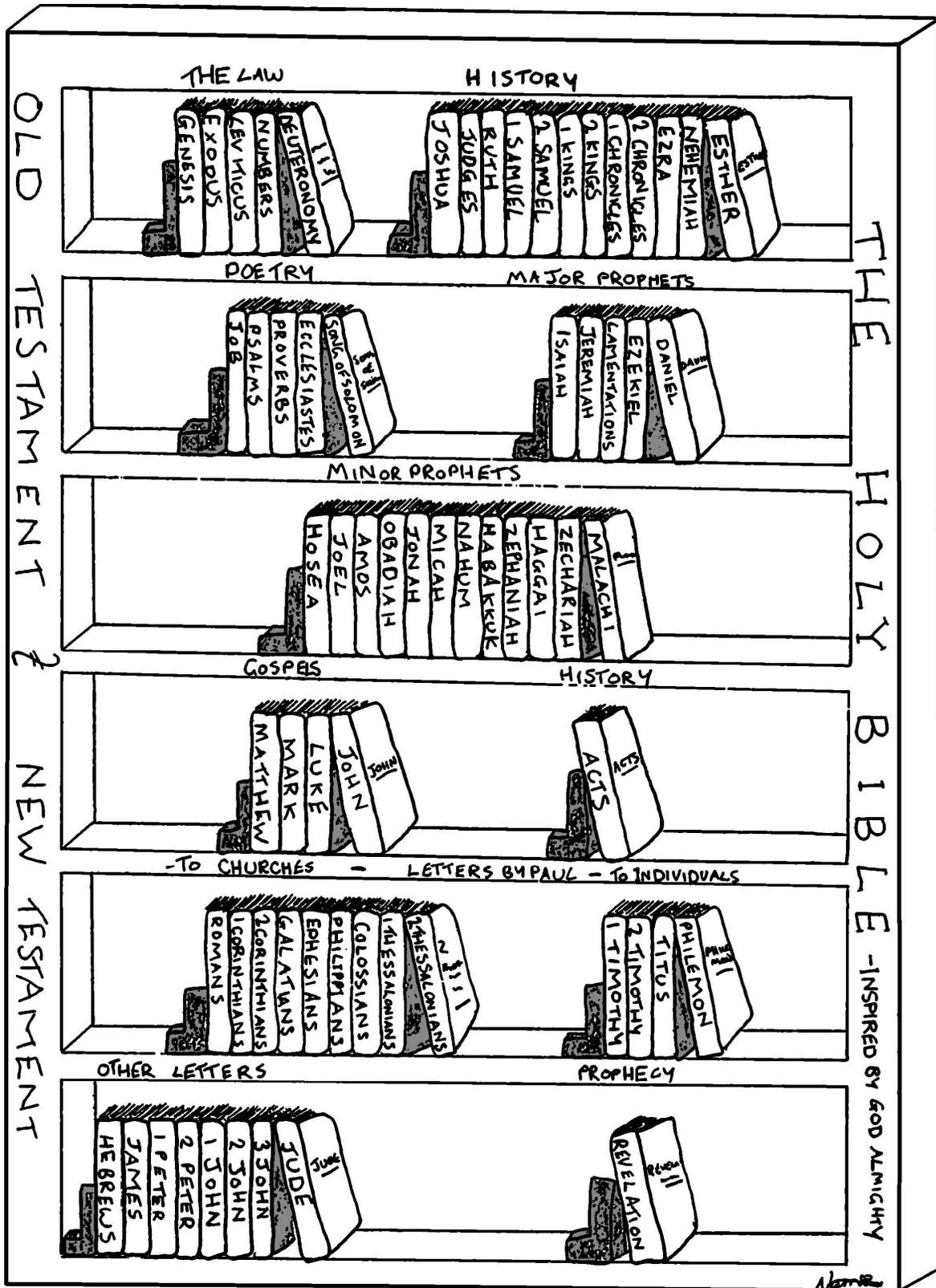


FIGURE 1: THE BIBLE IS A LIBRARY OF BOOKS

## BACKGROUND

The Bible brings together an amazing list of authors.

- The 66 books were written by about 40 different authors of many different occupations: kings, shepherds, prophets, herdsmen, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and so on.
- These authors lived in 10 different countries and wrote over a period of 1,600 years.
- The Bible was originally written in three languages. These were:
  1. Hebrew
  2. Aramaic
  3. Greek

Remarkably, despite this diverse background, the Bible message is consistent.

## TESTAMENTS

The bookcase on page 4 shows the 66 books of the Bible divided into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. A testament was a covenant or an agreement. So the two parts of the Bible simply record two covenants, each between God and men.

The *Old Testament* tells of events from the creation of man to about 400 years before Jesus Christ was born. It gives God’s word as it related particularly to the people of Israel. In contrast, the *New Testament* records God working with people through his son, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament it becomes clear to all that God’s promises are to all people, not just to Jews.

Many Christians read only the New Testament. After all, does not the very name *Christians* indicate that only records about Jesus Christ are of use to them? This is a tragic error. It is not possible to fully understand the New Testament without also reading the Old Testament. Jesus said:

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me. (John 5:39)

***When Jesus referred to “the Scriptures” was he talking about the Old or New Testament?***



## FINDING THE PASSAGE

In these notes (and in most books about the Bible) we use a shorthand way of describing Bible passages. The Bible is a big book and locating a particular passage can be difficult. Each book of the Bible has been divided into chapters and each chapter has been further divided into verses.

When we give a Bible reference we give the book, chapter and verse. For example, Jeremiah 30:3 refers to verse three of chapter thirty of the book of Jeremiah. Some very short books have only one chapter and so they are referred to just by verse numbers. For example, Jude 24–25 refers to verses 24 and 25 of the book of Jude.

To find a passage in the Bible, use the index in the front section of your Bible to find the page number of the book you require (e.g., Jeremiah). Turn up the book, then look for the required chapter and verse. To become proficient at moving from one passage to another, memorise the order of the 66 books of the Bible.



**Write the Bible book name after its abbreviation.**

**Jer.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Matt.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gen.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Isa.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Rev.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Jud.** \_\_\_\_\_

## VARIETY

The Bible contains a great variety of different types of literature. The bookcase shown on page 4 divides the books in each testament into categories: law, history, poetry, prophecy, letters, etc. These summarise the type of literature found in each book.

<b>Law</b>	The five law books are at the front of your Bible. They contain the early history of God’s people as well as the laws he gave to Moses for Israel.	e.g., Leviticus 19:13–14
<b>History</b>	The Old Testament contains much of the history of Israel. In the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles gives the history of the early Christians.	e.g., 2 Kings 24:8–12
<b>Poetry</b>	Five of the Old Testament books are largely poetic. For example, you may know some of Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd”. Bible poetry does not rhyme (even in the original languages). It is classified as poetry because of its structure.	e.g., Psalm 23:1–3
<b>Prophecy</b>	Human beings cannot foretell the future. If they could, we would not have insurance companies and bookmakers. Yet the Bible is full of forecasts or prophecies. Some books contain mostly prophecy; these are in the sections labeled “Major Prophets” and “Minor Prophets” in the bookshelf. (The minor prophets are smaller books, not less important!) In these books, God foretold much of the history of Israel and nearby nations. Revelation, the last book of the Bible, is also a book of prophecy.	e.g., Jeremiah 30:1–3
<b>Gospels</b>	The four gospels are records of the life of Jesus. They contain parallel accounts of many things Jesus did and said, although each of them contains information that the others omit. The word “gospel” means “good news”.	e.g., Mark 12:41–44
<b>Letters</b>	Much of the New Testament consists of letters. Most of them were written by the apostle Paul to churches and individuals.	e.g., Galatians 1:1–11

A summary of each of the books of the Bible is found in *The Bible Readers’ Handbook*.

## THE BIBLE TIMELINE

The Bible contains quite a lot of information about when events happened. When archaeological information is also taken into account, a fairly detailed chronology of the Bible can be obtained from about the time of Abraham. Before Abraham, there is insufficient information to accurately date any event.

The historical events described in the Old Testament take place over a period of several thousand years. A much shorter time is covered by the New Testament—only about 100 years. Bible history is highly selective. There are long periods about which the Bible says relatively little (such as the time between Adam and Noah), and short periods about which the Bible says a lot (such as the last week of Jesus' life).

The charts in *The Bible Readers' Handbook* show more detailed timelines for the Old Testament, New Testament and the ministry of Jesus.

## BIBLE GEOGRAPHY

When the Bible describes the geography of the events it records, it is helpful to look at a map to see where the places were. Almost all of the Bible concerns Israel or neighbouring countries in the Middle East. Of course, modern atlases of the same area aren't particularly helpful because many of the towns and cities have different names or may have ceased to exist altogether. Many Bibles contain maps as an appendix, and some simple maps are found in *The Bible Readers' Handbook*.



***Find the following places on the maps in *The Bible Readers' Handbook*.***

- ***Israel***
- ***Mediterranean Sea***
- ***Dead Sea***
- ***Galilee***
- ***Jerusalem***
- ***Egypt***

## WHY READ THE BIBLE?

Although the Bible has 66 different books, and many thousands of verses, it has a consistent theme. This theme is the relationship between God and human beings—a theme of love and salvation. Through the lives of individuals and nations this theme develops.

Most people who set out to read the Bible seriously soon find it a disturbing book. The Bible claims to be the actual word of God, who created and sustains the universe. As a result, the Bible lays down rules for living and outlines the consequences of obedience and disobedience. No wonder the Bible has a real impact on any serious reader.

The Bible...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• makes us wise for salvation (2 Timothy 3:14–17)</li><li>• gives us hope (Romans 15:4)</li><li>• is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16–17)</li><li>• must be read if we want our prayers heard (Proverbs 28:9)</li><li>• provides direction for daily living (Psalm 119:105; Joshua 1:8).</li></ul>

Make no mistake—the Bible *can change your life*. Not the Bible itself, of course, but its message. In the Bible, God has revealed himself as righteous and holy. By contrast we are all unholy sinners. And in the Bible, God offers us the way of escape from our sin, the saving blessing of Jesus Christ. Jesus has called people to him for 2,000 years and offered them life in a hopeless world.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”  
(Matthew 11:28–30)

This invitation gives meaningful direction to people’s lives. People who turn to God in faith and respond to the call of Jesus Christ are changed. They are not immediately made perfect, but they are made free of fear and guilt. Take the opportunity over the years ahead to read the Bible, learn more of God and his son, and follow him.

A sinner is someone who disobeys God’s commandments.



## YOUR TURN

- 1) Find the book of Mark
  - a) In what testament of the Bible is Mark found?
  
  - b) What sort of book is Mark?
  
- 2) Read Mark 1:1–8
  - a) What was John the Baptist’s main message?
  
  - b) How did the people respond to John’s message?
  
  - c) What was unusual about John?
  
- 3) Which books of the Old Testament does Mark quote from? Look up and read the passages.
  
- 4) Read John 1:19-28
  - a) Using the Bible Readers’ Handbook, find out what the word “Christ” means (v. 20)?
  
  - b) In verse 21 John is asked if he is Elijah. Locate Elijah in the timeline of Bible prophets. Does Malachi 4:5-6 provide any answers as to why they asked this question?
  
  - c) Find the reference in the Old Testament that is being quoted in v. 23
  
- 5) Find the Jordan River on a map. Which gospel tells us exactly where John baptized on the Jordan River?

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SESSION 2

# STARTING TO READ THE BIBLE

In this chapter, we introduce a Bible reading plan to help you read systematically through the Bible, and we provide some tips to successful Bible reading. We also look at two common problems new Bible readers have: strange words and strange customs. Finally we consider the use of cross references and footnotes to help you understand the Bible better.

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## A BIBLE READING PLAN

We recommend regular intake of God’s Word. Just as we have regular meals of physical food, we need regular meals of spiritual food to be in good health. If you are serious about Bible reading, aim to have a steady, consistent diet of the Word of God. For example, God said that the king of Israel was to have God’s word

. . . with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.

(Deuteronomy 17:19)

Because your Bible is a big book, and because it is so important, it pays to be systematic in reading it. After all, it is a textbook, your textbook for life, and if it is worth reading at all, it is worth reading well. In other words, don’t just open your Bible at random each day and read a little; you wouldn’t do that to a textbook on an unfamiliar topic.

However, you are not advised to open the Bible to page one, start, and keep reading day by day until it’s finished. Some people have successfully read the Bible that way. But some of the difficulties experienced by people when they first read the Bible lead us to recommend a step by step approach which gives important and useful ideas quite early in your reading, and then progressively builds on them.

There are several ways of achieving this, but we have chosen a reading course that has been widely used and well tested. The reading planner we are using (see page 3) gives daily readings for one year, each day’s reading consisting of one chapter. Through the year, you will read from many different parts of the Bible. We will also provide an accompanying booklet which will help fill you in on some of that Bible background you may need as you read each chapter. If you keep up your Bible readings for a year, you will cover many different parts of the Bible and develop a good grasp of the overall plan of God.

Session 2 – Starting to Read the Bible

Week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	Psalms 19	Genesis 1	Luke 2	1 Corinth 13	Mark 4	Eccles 3	2 Timothy 3
2	Genesis 2	Genesis 3	Genesis 4	Genesis 5	Genesis 6	Genesis 7	Genesis 8
3	Matthew 1	Matthew 2	Matthew 3	Matthew 4	Matthew 5	Matthew 6	Matthew 7
4	Genesis 11	Genesis 12	Genesis 13	Genesis 14	Genesis 15	Genesis 17	Genesis 19
5	Matthew 8	Matthew 9	Matthew 10	Matthew 11	Matthew 12	Matthew 13	Matthew 14
6	Genesis 22	Genesis 26	Genesis 27	Genesis 28	Genesis 29	Genesis 30	Genesis 31
7	Matthew 15	Matthew 16	Matthew 17	Matthew 18	Matthew 19	Matthew 20	Matthew 21
8	Genesis 32	Genesis 33	Genesis 37	Genesis 39	Genesis 40	Genesis 41	Genesis 42
9	Matthew 22	Matthew 23	Matthew 24	Matthew 25	Matthew 26	Matthew 27	Matthew 28
10	Genesis 43	Genesis 44	Genesis 45	Genesis 46	Genesis 47	Genesis 49	Genesis 50
11	Mark 1	Mark 2	Mark 3	Mark 6	Mark 7	Mark 8	Mark 9
12	Exodus 1	Exodus 2	Exodus 3	Exodus 4	Exodus 5	Exodus 6	Exodus 7
13	Mark 10	Mark 11	Mark 12	Mark 13	Mark 14	Mark 15	Mark 16
14	Exodus 8	Exodus 9	Exodus 10	Exodus 11	Exodus 12	Exodus 13	Exodus 14
15	Luke 1	Luke 2	Luke 4	Luke 5	Luke 7	Luke 9	Luke 10
16	Exodus 16	Exodus 17	Exodus 19	Exodus 20	Exodus 24	Exodus 25	Exodus 32
17	Luke 11	Luke 12	Luke 13	Luke 14	Luke 15	Luke 16	Luke 17
18	Lev 8	Lev 10	Lev 16	Lev 17	Lev 23	Lev 25	Lev 26
19	Luke 18	Luke 19	Luke 20	Luke 21	Luke 22	Luke 23	Luke 24
20	Num 14	Num 17	Num 20	Num 21	Num 22	Num 23	Num 24
21	John 1	John 3	John 4	John 10	John 11	John 15	John 17
22	Deut 1	Deut 2	Deut 3	Deut 6	Deut 8	Deut 18	Deut 28
23	Acts 1	Acts 2	Acts 3	Acts 4	Acts 5	Acts 6	Acts 7
24	Joshua 1	Joshua 2	Joshua 3	Joshua 4	Joshua 6	Joshua 20	Joshua 24
25	Acts 8	Acts 9	Acts 10	Acts 11	Acts 12	Acts 13	Acts 14
26	Judges 4	Judges 7	Judges 14	Ruth 1	Ruth 2	Ruth 3	Ruth 4
27	Acts 15	Acts 16	Acts 17	Acts 18	Acts 19	Acts 20	Acts 21
28	1 Samuel 1	1 Samuel 2	1 Samuel 3	1 Samuel 8	1 Samuel 9	1 Samuel 10	1 Samuel 15
29	Acts 22	Acts 23	Acts 24	Acts 25	Acts 26	Acts 27	Acts 28
30	1 Samuel 16	1 Samuel 17	2 Samuel 1	2 Samuel 2	2 Samuel 5	2 Samuel 7	2 Samuel 24
31	Romans 5	Romans 6	Romans 8	Romans 9	Romans 10	Romans 12	Romans 13
32	1 Kings 3	1 Kings 5	1 Kings 12	1 Kings 17	1 Kings 18	2 Kings 5	2 Chron 36
33	1 Corinth 1	1 Corinth 2	1 Corinth 3	1 Corinth 10	1 Corinth 11	1 Corinth 13	1 Corinth 15
34	Psalms 1	Psalms 2	Psalms 6	Psalms 16	Psalms 19	Psalms 22	Psalms 23
35	2 Corinth 11	Galatians 1	Galatians 2	Galatians 3	Galatians 4	Galatians 5	Galatians 6
36	Psalms 32	Psalms 37	Psalms 45	Psalms 46	Psalms 48	Psalms 49	Psalms 51
37	Ephesians 4	Ephesians 5	Ephesians 6	Philip 1	Philip 2	Philip 3	Philip 4
38	Psalms 67	Psalms 72	Psalms 88	Psalms 90	Psalms 91	Psalms 95	Psalms 96
39	1 Thess 1	1 Thess 2	1 Thess 3	1 Thess 4	1 Thess 5	2 Thess 1	2 Thess 2
40	Psalms 103	Psalms 104	Psalms 110	Psalms 122	Psalms 146	Psalms 149	Psalms 150
41	1 Timothy 1	1 Timothy 2	1 Timothy 6	2 Timothy 1	2 Timothy 2	2 Timothy 3	2 Timothy 4
42	Isaiah 1	Isaiah 2	Isaiah 9	Isaiah 11	Isaiah 25	Isaiah 26	Isaiah 32
43	Hebrews 1	Hebrews 2	Hebrews 3	Hebrews 4	Hebrews 5	Hebrews 10	Hebrews 11
44	Isaiah 40	Isaiah 42	Isaiah 52	Isaiah 53	Isaiah 55	Isaiah 60	Isaiah 61
45	Hebrews 12	Hebrews 13	James 1	James 2	James 3	James 4	James 5
46	Jeremiah 1	Jeremiah 17	Jeremiah 30	Jeremiah 31	Jeremiah 33	Jeremiah 36	Jeremiah 38
47	1 Peter 1	1 Peter 2	1 Peter 3	1 Peter 5	2 Peter 1	2 Peter 2	2 Peter 3
48	Ezekiel 2	Ezekiel 3	Ezekiel 18	Ezekiel 36	Ezekiel 37	Ezekiel 38	Ezekiel 39
49	1 John 1	1 John 2	1 John 3	1 John 4	2 John	3 John	Jude
50	Daniel 2	Daniel 3	Daniel 5	Daniel 6	Daniel 7	Daniel 9	Daniel 12
51	Hosea 13	Joel 3	Micah 5	Zec 8	Zec 12	Malachi 3	Malachi 4
52	Rev 1	Rev 2	Rev 3	Rev 5	Rev 19	Rev 21	Rev 22

## PREPARING TO READ THE BIBLE

There are a number of things that need to be considered when reading the Bible.

### 1. Pray

It is important to ask God's blessing on your reading. It is his book and he can help us understand it.

### 2. Be comfortable

To properly concentrate on the Bible, you will need to find a comfortable, quiet place in which to read. Try to avoid places where there is a lot of background noise from the television or other people talking. In the Bible, God speaks to us. It is worth listening carefully.

### 3. Allow time

Bible reading is most effective if you are not rushed. Set aside 20–30 minutes each day to read the passage and think about what it means. It also takes time to become familiar with the Bible message and the background in which it is set. Be patient, and over time it will all start to fit together like a beautiful jigsaw.

### 4. Be open to new ideas

If we are to gain as much as we can from Bible reading, we need to approach the Bible with the right attitude. The people from Berea (in Greece) are described as being

of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

We need an openness to new ideas. If we approach all ideas thinking that our main job is to defend our existing beliefs, then we have very little room for growth.

The Bible is a book of strength that has withstood all kinds of attacks during its history. As in all other areas of study, scholars build upon and re-evaluate the work of earlier scholars. We need not fear examining new ideas and evaluating them carefully in the light of all the teachings of the Bible.

## 5. Think about it

God told Joshua

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:8)

To successfully understand the message of the Bible, we must spend time thinking about it carefully. So important is this that God said to the nation of Israel:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. (Deuteronomy 11:18–21)

## 6. Ask questions

You will inevitably have questions about what you read. Write them down. You might discover the answers through further reading. Or you can take your questions to a more experienced Bible reader to see if he or she can help. Bring your questions along to this course and see if anyone can answer them.

## 7. Share your ideas

We need an attitude of willingness to meditate on what we are learning and to think through for ourselves how our learning should be applied in our own lives. To do this, it is usually helpful to share our ideas and interpretations with other Bible students for discussion and evaluation. We can learn from each other.

Bible study can be difficult work. It is also exciting and life-changing. Study of the Bible can enrich us as no other study can. You will experience a new energy as you learn to make your own judgements based on firm principles, and the Bible will become more alive and powerful in your life. Remember, you are intended to understand this remarkable book and to meet God in its pages.



***Let's start using the Bible Reading Planner by reading Psalm 19.***

***1. According to this Psalm, what two things speak to us about God?***

***2. What different words are used to describe God's instructions?***

***3. Are there any words, or verses, that you don't understand?***

***4. What questions do you have after reading this Psalm?***

***5. What verse do you find particularly helpful to you? Why?***

## STRANGE LANGUAGE

The King James Version (or KJV, also called the Authorised Version) is the most quoted version of the Bible. It was produced in 1611 and is famous for its majestic language. However, these days it is becoming increasingly difficult to understand because of changes in the English language.

Consider the following passage (Psalm 23:1–3).

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Compare the New International Version (NIV):

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Note the archaic form of verbs used in the KJV. Notice, also, that punctuation has changed—the colon (:) is used differently today. However, in this passage, none of the words in the KJV is particularly difficult to understand and the meaning of the passage is clear.

This is not true everywhere. The KJV can sometimes be difficult to understand because of the archaic language. Consider the following example.

Psalm 119:147-148	
<p>KJV</p> <p><sup>147</sup> I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.</p> <p><sup>148</sup> Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.</p>	<p>NIV</p> <p><sup>147</sup> I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word.</p> <p><sup>148</sup> My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.</p>

*What does the word “prevent” mean in the KJV?*





**Read Philippians 1:27 in the KJV. Turn to a more recent version for comparison. What does the word “conversation” mean in the KJV?**

As these two examples show, some words have a different meaning now from the meaning they had in 1611 when the KJV first appeared. In fact, it contains over 500 words which have changed their meaning or become obsolete. Some are shown in the table below.

Language is dynamic—it is always changing. New words are created, old words die out, and some words change their meaning. Therefore, if you wish to read an older version such as the KJV, you need to learn the old words.

Even with a modern version, you will come across words that are not in common use. There are things mentioned in the Bible which are not part of everyday conversation, and so the words used may not be familiar. When you come across these words, check the definitions listed in *The Bible Readers’ Handbook*.



**Listed below are some archaic words from the King James Version. Fill in the blanks with the modern equivalent.**

Old word	Modern equivalent	Example
prevent		1 Thessalonians 4:15
bowels		Genesis 43:30
bewitch		Acts 8:9
allow		Luke 11:48
conversation		Philippians 1:27
bruit		Jeremiah 10:22
maketh collops		Job 15:27
trow		Luke 17:9

## STRANGE CUSTOMS

The people in the Bible lived thousands of years ago in a different culture and a different land. When reading the Bible, you will soon learn some of their ancient customs. For example:

When David arrived at the summit, where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him, his robe torn and dust on his head. (2 Samuel 15:32)

Tearing your clothes and covering your head with dust seems strange behaviour to us, but in the context it is clear that this was a sign of mourning. The same custom is found many times throughout the Old Testament. It doesn't take long to recognize most of these ancient customs and learn what they meant.

***What was the purpose of these ancient customs?***

- ***tearing your clothes***
- ***putting dust on your head***
- ***wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes***
- ***professional wailing women***
- ***walls around cities***
- ***sitting in the gate of a city***
- ***giving someone your sandal***

***Do you know any other ancient customs mentioned in the Bible?***



## FOOTNOTES

Footnotes are provided by the translators to explain some words, give alternative translations, or explain some aspect of the text. They are often helpful in understanding a passage. Consider the following passage from Matthew 5:21–22 which is part of Jesus’ famous “Sermon on the mount”. This excerpt is from the RSV.

21 “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’<sup>22</sup> But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother<sup>i</sup> shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults<sup>j</sup> his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell<sup>k</sup> of fire.

<sup>i</sup> Other ancient authorities insert *without cause* <sup>j</sup> Greek says *Raca to* (an obscure term of abuse)  
<sup>k</sup> Greek *Gehenna*

The basic message of Jesus is quite clear: “in the past you were told not to kill—I am telling you not even to be angry or abusive.” He was taking the Old Testament commandment to a new level. However, we can understand the passage better using the footnotes.

- The small letters i, j and k after the words “brother”, “insults” and “hell” indicate there is a footnote with more explanation.
- The first one shows that some of the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament give a slightly different form of words, which alters the meaning. Obviously the translators felt the form of words they used in the main text was the most likely but there was sufficient doubt to include the alternative as a footnote.
- The second footnote explains that the original Greek actually refers to a particular abusive expression. Because this has little meaning for us, they have translated it.
- The third footnote shows that the word “hell” has been used for the Greek word Gehenna. Gehenna was a valley south of Jerusalem; it is also known as the valley of Hinnom. It was used as a rubbish dump and always had a fire burning to destroy the rubbish. Previously it had been the site of child sacrifice to an Ammonite god called Molech (Jeremiah 32:35). Jesus uses it as a symbol of complete destruction.

Most footnotes are for the following purposes:

- source of quotations
- explanation of textual variations
- meaning of non-English words
- gives Hebrew or Greek word
- alternative translations

## CROSS-REFERENCES

There is no better commentary on the Bible than the Bible itself. No source is more appropriate for interpreting God’s Word than God himself. It is in this area that the use of cross-references can be so valuable. They are verse ‘references’ supplied by the publishers which direct the reader to other locations in the Bible where the same phrase or event may be found, or one very similar.

The following example from the NIV Study Bible shows the use of both footnotes and cross-references. The bold superscripts are footnotes. The italic superscripts are for cross-references (given to the side of the text).

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder,<sup>t e</sup> and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I tell you that anyone who is angry<sup>f</sup> with his brother<sup>u</sup> will be subject to judgment.<sup>g</sup> Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,<sup>v</sup>’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin.<sup>h</sup> But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.<sup>i</sup>

**5:21** <sup>e</sup>Ex 20:13; 21:12; Dt 5:17  
**5:22** <sup>f</sup>Ecc 7:9; 1Co 13:5; Eph 4:26; Jas 1:19,20  
<sup>g</sup>Jn 3:15  
<sup>h</sup>Mt 26:59; Jn 11:47; Ac 5:21,27,34,41; 6:12 <sup>i</sup>Mt 18:9; Mk 9:43,48; Lk 16:24; Jas 3:6

<sup>t</sup>21 Exodus 20:13      <sup>u</sup>22 Some manuscripts *brother without cause*      <sup>v</sup>22 An Aramaic term of contempt

**Look up the following cross-references: Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17; 1 John 3:15; Ephesians 4:26; James 1:19–20. Do they help us better understand what Jesus said?**



Not all Bibles have cross-references. Bibles which do have cross-references will usually place them in a centre column, after the foot-notes, or at the end of each verse.

Most cross-references take one of the following forms:

1. Quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament, or vice versa;
2. Parallel passage of the same or similar events;
3. More detail about a person, place or subject.

## YOUR TURN



The second reading in the Bible Reading Planner is Genesis 1. Read the chapter and discuss the following questions.

- 1) Fill in the boxes with what was created on each day.

Day 1	Day 4
Day 2	Day 5
Day 3	Day 6

- 2) Are there any parallels or patterns that you see in the days of creation?
- 3) Over what part of creation did man have dominion? How does this affect our care for the environment?
- 4) Human beings are described as being created “in God’s image”. Look at the following cross-references: Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; James 3:9. How do these help us understand what Genesis means?
- 5) Are there any words, or verses, that you don’t understand? What questions do you have after reading this chapter?
- 6) What verse do you find particularly helpful to you? Why?



## HOMEWORK

- 1) Follow the Bible Reading Planner every day this week.
- 2) Start a notebook with questions that arise when you read your Bible.
- 3) Read tonight's reading (Luke 2). Several words are used that you may not have come across before. Find out what they mean. (Hint: some of the words are listed in The Bible Readers' Handbook.)
  - Saviour
  - Christ
  - manger
  - circumcise
  - Law of Moses
  - Holy Spirit
  - Gentiles
  - Passover
- 4) Here are some examples of cross references. Use them to answer the questions.
  - a) Read Luke 9:7–9.  
Why was John the Baptist beheaded?  
Cross reference to Matthew 14:1–11; Mark 6:14–18.
  
  - b) Read Matthew 12:38–42.  
Who was the "Queen of the South"?  
Cross reference to 1 Kings 10:1.

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SESSION 3

# THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE BIBLE

How do we know that the 66 books in our Bibles were all inspired? What about other books? In this session we answer these questions. We also look at the manuscript evidence that our Bibles are reliable copies of what God originally caused to be written down. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide some fascinating and relatively recent evidence of the reliability of the Bible. Finally, we trace the history of the English Bible through to the most recent versions and discuss the problem of choosing a Bible to suit you.



## INSPIRATION

As we found in Session 1, the word inspiration literally means God-breathed. The Bible is “inspired” because the words have been breathed by God himself. The Apostle Paul described the Scriptures like this:



All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

Peter described the inspired prophets as

men [who] spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21)

Sometimes God seems to have inspired what they said word for word to the point that they did not always understand what they wrote (see 1 Peter 1:10–12). At other times, the writer seems to have had more freedom of expression, although the thoughts expressed were inspired by God. For example, the writings of Paul are distinctive in their style and language used, but were still inspired by God.

## THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

The “canon of Scripture” means those writings which are inspired. How do we know what books are part of inspired Scripture and what books are not? Some Bible writers stated explicitly: “This is the word of the LORD” or “This is what the LORD says . . .” (e.g., Jeremiah 2:1; Joel 1:1). Other books do not claim to be inspired, but they quickly became recognized as inspired because the person who wrote them was accepted as a prophet of God (e.g., Genesis, Song of Solomon).

The Bible provides two tests for deciding whether a prophet is inspired:

1. he should predict the future accurately (Deuteronomy 18:21–22); and
2. he should not teach people to turn away from God (Deuteronomy 13:1–5).

***Hananiah was a false prophet. He claimed to be from God, yet his prophecies did not come true. See Jeremiah 28:1–4, 15–17.***



***What did he prophecy?***

***What actually happened?***

***Who was God’s true prophet at this time?***

***Why can we be confident that we have all the inspired books God wants us to have?***



The Old Testament was well-established by the time of Jesus. The books had been accepted for centuries because they were recorded by prophets of God such as Moses, Isaiah and Ezra. These men had visions from God and made prophecies that came true. Therefore what they said and what they wrote were accepted as the work of God.

It did not take long for the New Testament writings to be considered “Scripture” also. For example, the gospel of Luke was considered Scripture by the time Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy. Similarly, the writings of Paul were considered Scripture by the time Peter wrote his second letter (see 2 Peter 3:15–16).

See 1 Timothy 5:18 which quotes Luke 10:7 as “Scripture”.

## THE APOCRYPHA

Most Bibles contain only the 66 books mentioned in Chapter 1, but some Bibles, particularly Roman Catholic Bibles, contain several additional Old Testament books. Most Catholic Bibles will contain an additional seven books in the Old Testament and several additions to other books. Some Bibles add up to seventeen extra books or parts of books.

Apocrypha means “hidden books”.

These additional books are known as the “Apocrypha”. Protestants reject these books as uninspired—not part of the revealed word of God. They were written between about 200 BC and AD 100, well after the Old Testament was completed.

Some of the books of the Apocrypha are mainly historical: for example, 1&2 Maccabees describe the history of the Jews about 100–150 years before Jesus. Other books are pure fiction: Tobit tells the story of a man named Tobit who travels with his guardian angel, Raphael, and fights off the demon Asmodeus with the organs of a fish! Another fictional story, Judith, contains major historical blunders: it says Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Assyria in Nineveh instead of the king of Babylon. Many of the books falsely claim to be written by people mentioned in the Bible. For example, Baruch claims to be written by Jeremiah’s friend but was certainly written much later. Similarly Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon were written hundreds of years after Solomon, not by Solomon himself.

None of the books of the Apocrypha came from prophets and so they were never accepted by the Jews as inspired. The Jews sometimes quoted from the Apocrypha, but in the same way that we would quote Shakespeare—interesting literature but definitely not the word of God.

There is also a New Testament Apocrypha which is not so well known. No-one suggests these books are inspired and they are not included in any Bibles.

**TABLE 1- OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Approximate date of writing</b>
Psalm 151	200 BC?
Ecclesiasticus	180 BC
Tobit	180 BC
The Prayer of Manasseh	150 BC
Judith	150 BC
1 Esdras	150 BC
Additions to Esther	100 BC
Song of the Three Young Men	100 BC
Susanna	50–100 BC
Bel and the Dragon	50–100 BC
1,2&3 Maccabees	50–100 BC
4 Maccabees	AD 40
The Wisdom of Solomon	AD 40
2 Esdras	AD 100
Baruch	AD 100

## OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

The Old Testament was written mainly in Hebrew between about 1450 BC and 400 BC. It has been copied by scribes, many times (there were no printing presses), then later translated into English. It was the job of scribes to copy out the Old Testament onto scrolls of parchment or animal hides, and later into books. The process of copying was carried out with extraordinary care.



For example, several copies of the Old Testament have been found dating from about AD 900. These were produced by a group of Jews known as Masoretes who followed a number of precise rules when copying (see below). As long as such rules were followed, it was highly unlikely that errors would creep in.

### Masoretic rules for copying the Old Testament

1. the whole scroll must be carefully ruled before a word is written
2. the ink must be black, made from soot, charcoal and honey
3. each line is to contain 30 letters exactly
4. each column is to contain an even number of lines, the same number throughout the scroll
5. no letter or word is to be written from memory
6. each word must be studied in the original manuscript and spoken aloud before being copied
7. the document is to be carefully checked using word and letter counts
8. the entire scroll is to be checked by a supervisor

## DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a large collection of scrolls discovered in the Dead Sea area. The first scrolls were discovered in early 1947 by three Bedouin shepherds. Eventually, some of the scrolls made their way into the hands of archaeologists and Hebrew scholars. They were amazed to find an entire copy of Isaiah which they dated to the first century BC. At that time, this was about 1000 years older than the next oldest manuscript of any part of the Bible. About 800 different manuscripts have since been found in this area. There are manuscripts or fragments of every book in the Old Testament except Esther. Several copies of some books were found including Isaiah, Psalms, Deuteronomy and Genesis.

Dead Sea Scrolls



Dead Sea Cave in which scrolls were found.



Jar containing scrolls.



Part of one of the scrolls found in the Dead Sea area.

All the manuscripts are dated between 150 BC and AD 250. Until this discovery, all translation was based on the Masoretic text which is a little over 1000 years old. The Dead Sea Scrolls are about 2000 years old! Yet when compared with the Masoretic text, there was hardly any difference. Because of their great age, they provide amazing evidence that the Bible has been faithfully copied by scribes for centuries. So accurate has this copying been, that it provides compelling evidence that God has preserved his word for future generations.

The scrolls are also interesting because they help to date prophecies. Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, some critics said that prophecies about Jesus, such as those in the Psalms and Isaiah, were written after the event. The Dead Sea Scrolls proved that they were true prophecies which predated Jesus, and we know they were fulfilled. Again, this gives further evidence that God inspired the Bible, and preserved it for us to read.

#### The Isaiah Scroll

When a copy of Isaiah was discovered in the Dead Sea caves, the translators of the RSV had already completed their translation of Isaiah. They compared what they had done with the Isaiah scroll and made a total of 13 changes. That is, in only 13 places did they think the Dead Sea Scrolls were more accurate than the later Masoretic text. All changes were minor.

## NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

The New Testament was written in Greek. Its accuracy is also well supported by the manuscript evidence. In fact, there are thousands of surviving New Testament manuscripts from the first few centuries after Jesus. When compared with other ancient writings from the time of Jesus and before, the evidence for the New Testament is overwhelming.

Professor F.F. Bruce has written:

The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no-one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.

*The New Testament Documents*, 1960, p.15.

Other support for the reliability of the New Testament comes from early believers who quoted it. For example, Ignatius quoted from Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, James, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy and 1 Peter. Others such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen and Tertullian quoted from the New Testament thousands of times. These quotations can also be used to check the accuracy of the surviving manuscripts.

FF Bruce (1910–1990) was Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester in England. He was a famous Bible commentator.

Ignatius was Bishop of Antioch, AD 70–110.

These men were leaders in the church about 100–200 years after Jesus died.

Bruce Metzger (1914-2007) was Professor Emeritus of New Testament Language and Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary, USA.

Professor Bruce Metzger has written:

Indeed so extensive are these citations that if all other sources of our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.

*The Text of the New Testament*, 1968, p.86.

## THE FIRST ENGLISH BIBLES

There are several translations of parts of the Bible into English dating back to the 7th century. However, English has changed so much that we would not be able to understand any of these!



JOHN WYCLIFFE

### JOHN WYCLIFFE

The first translation of the entire Bible into English was by John Wycliffe in 1382. Wycliffe did not translate from the Hebrew and Greek but from a Latin edition of the Bible known as the Vulgate. For the first time, the common people could hear the Bible in their own language. They quickly realised that the church leaders were astray from the Bible in both what they taught and how they lived. Wycliffe and his followers met with great opposition from the church for their work, and many were killed. Forty years after Wycliffe died, his bones were dug up and burned, and the ashes thrown into a nearby river. This was meant to be a lesson for others who might attempt unauthorised translations.

Wycliffe's Bible was handwritten in manuscript form. It took about ten months for each copy to be produced, and cost an educated man a year's salary. Of course, most people could not afford a copy themselves but were thrilled to be able to hear it read by one of Wycliffe's followers. Wycliffe's Bible was one of the first to include chapters (but not verses).

In the 1450s, the first printing press was developed by Gutenberg. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of printing for Bible believers. Suddenly, the Bible was widely available to be read by almost anyone who wanted to do so.

## WILLIAM TYNDALE

Towards the end of the 15th century there was a resurgence of the study of Greek. When William Tyndale graduated from Oxford in 1515, he had studied the Scriptures in both Greek and Hebrew. He developed a strong desire to translate the Bible into English, from the original languages.

Due to Church opposition he was forced to relocate to Hamburg in Germany, where he completed his translation of the New Testament into English in 1525. English New Testaments arrived in England in 1526, where they were gladly received by the common people, and burned by the Church!

After finishing the New Testament, Tyndale began work on the Old Testament, until his arrest and imprisonment in 1535. After over a year in prison, he was first strangled, and then burned at the stake, in 1536.

The Old Testament was finished off by Tyndale’s assistant, Miles Coverdale, in 1537. By the time this translation was issued, King Henry VIII was ready to tolerate an English translation. He endorsed Coverdale’s Bible without knowing that it was essentially the work of Tyndale, which he had previously condemned!



WILLIAM TYNDALE

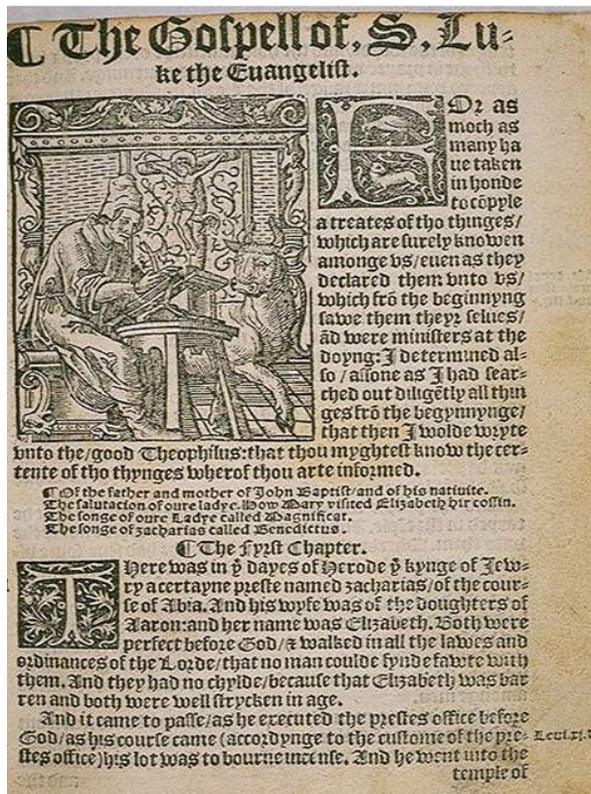


FIGURE 2 - A PAGE FROM TYNDALE'S NEW TESTAMENT

The Geneva Bible is also known as the “Breeches Bible” because in Genesis 3:7 it states that Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together and made themselves “breeches”.

## GENEVA BIBLE

When King Henry VIII died, his daughter Queen Mary succeeded him. She instituted a bitter persecution of Bible translators and readers. Coverdale escaped to Geneva in Switzerland, where he began work on a fresh translation which was to contain explanatory notes, some additional charts, maps and illustrations, and the first use of verse divisions. It is also the first Bible to have cross-references. The Geneva Bible was published in 1560 and is the one Shakespeare quotes in his plays.

## KING JAMES VERSION

The Geneva Bible was immediately popular and acknowledged as the best translation up to that time. However, the marginal notes in the Geneva Bible reflected some beliefs that were not acceptable to the Church of England.

In 1604 King James I convened a church conference which resolved that a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek; and this to be set out and printed without any marginal notes, and only to be used in all Churches of England in time of divine service.

In 1611 his resolution bore fruit in the most loved English Bible ever, the King James Version or Authorised Version (KJV or AV). It became the universally accepted version for the English speaking world, and remained so for 350 years.

### Some famous mistakes

- Some of the most famous early English editions are known for printers’ errors or unusual translations. For example, in the very first edition of the KJV in 1611, Exodus 14:10 is repeated, word for word.
- Then there was the unfortunate “Adultery Bible” of 1641 where the printer left out the word not from Exodus 20:14! He was fined 300 pounds.
- In 1702 a Bible was printed where Psalm 119:161 read “Printers have persecuted me without cause.” (It should have read “princes”.)

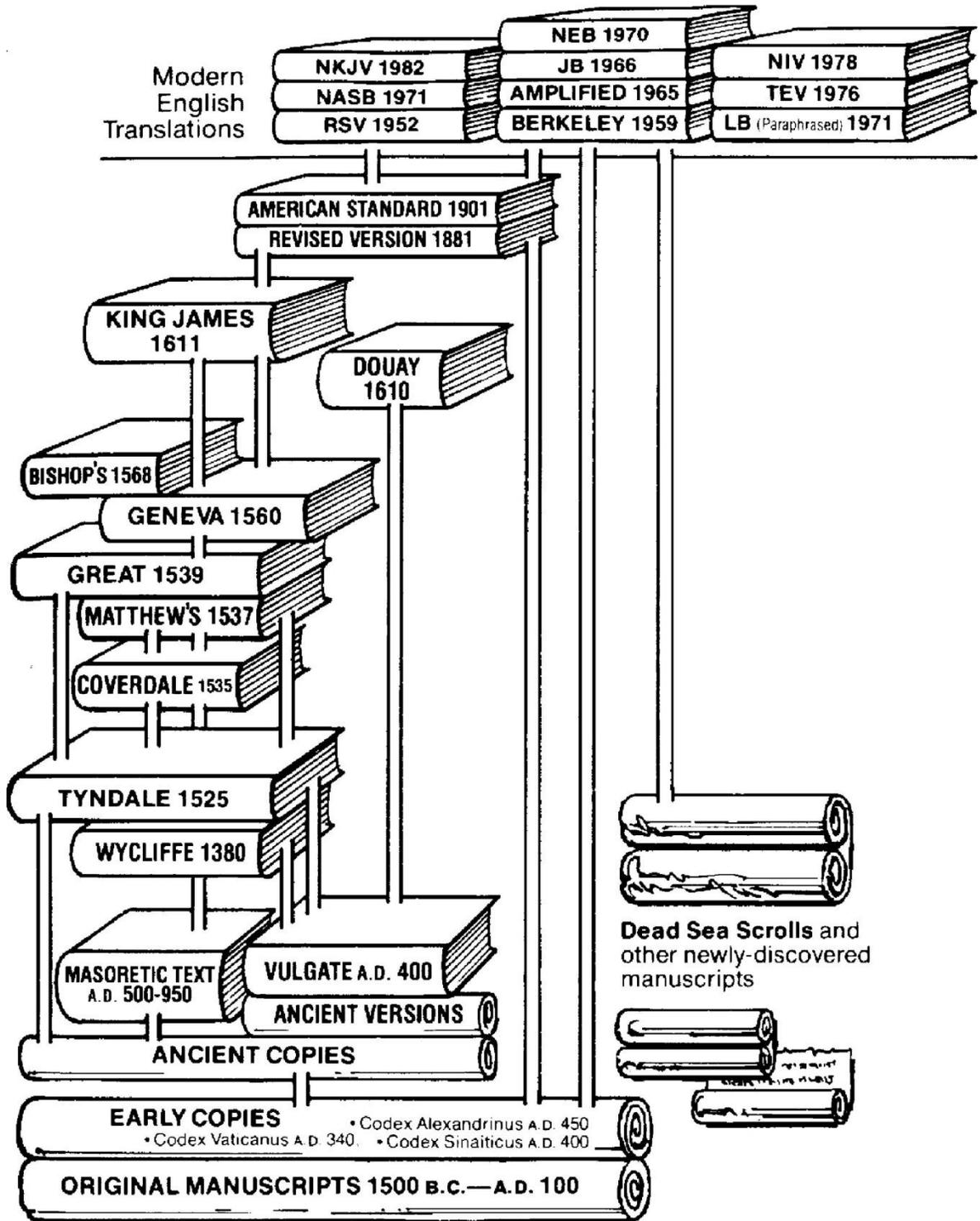


FIGURE 3 - THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE (REPRODUCED FROM *THE THOMPSON CHAIN REFERENCE BIBLE*, KIRKBRIDE BIBLE COMPANY)

## MODERN TRANSLATIONS

Towards the end of the 19th century it was considered crucial to produce a new translation as so much of the KJV needed explanation. Changes were needed for two reasons: additional ancient manuscripts had come to light since 1611, and many English words had changed meaning so significantly as to cause confusion for the ordinary reader. As a result, in 1885 the Revised Version (RV) was published in the UK, and in 1901 the American Standard Version based on the same texts.

The twentieth century has seen many new translations of the Bible. More than 80 new versions have been produced since 1948. These newer versions have the advantage of being based on more extensive manuscript evidence. They also contain more modern language which makes them easier to understand by current readers. The most widely used of these newer versions is the New International Version (NIV), first released in 1978.

## CHOOSING A BIBLE

Once there was no choice. The only English Bible was the King James Version (KJV) and the only colour was black. These days there is a bewildering array of English translations. Some of them are shown in the table below.

Name	Abbr.	Year
King James Version ( <i>also called Authorised Version</i> )	KJV (AV)	1611
Revised Standard Version	RSV	1952
New English Bible	NEB	1970
New American Standard Bible	NASB	1971
Living Bible	LB	1971
Good News Bible ( <i>also called Today's English Version</i> )	GNB (TEV)	1976
New International Version	NIV	1978
New King James Version	NKJV	1982
New Revised Standard Version	NRSV	1990
New Living Translation	NLT	1996
NET Bible	NET	1998
English Standard Version	ESV	2001

Each version has its good and bad points. Some have been designed for easy reading in modern English, others stick very closely to the original text but are more difficult to understand, some have more study helps available, and so on.

There are also versions that are published by specific denominations. These tend to emphasise certain doctrines that are held by that denomination, often at the expense of accuracy. Many of the popular, readily available translations will be suitable for reliable everyday use.

When selecting a Bible to use, remember:

- what is best for one person, is not necessarily the best for another;
- a study Bible is not necessarily a good reading Bible, and vice versa;
- reading with children may be different from reading with adults or reading on your own;
- using several versions is helpful.

Whichever Bible version you read from regularly, you will often come across words, verses, or ideas that are not entirely clear. It is an enormous help to have several Bible versions so that you can compare them.

## APPROACHES TO TRANSLATION

One difference between versions is the approach they take to translation. The three main approaches are:

- **Formal equivalence:** literal (word for word). (e.g., KJV, ESV)
- **Dynamic equivalence:** thought for thought. (e.g., NIV)
- **Paraphrase:** some interpretation involved. (e.g., LB)

A formally equivalent translation attempts to translate each word into an equivalent word in English. A dynamically equivalent translation attempts to translate each thought or phrase into an equivalent thought in English. A paraphrase contains the same ideas as the original but doesn't follow the original text so closely.

For example, consider the first three verses of Psalm 23. The NIV reads

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

The LB reads

Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need!  
He lets me rest in the meadow grass and leads me beside the quiet streams. He restores my failing health. He helps me do what honours him the most.

Paraphrases are popular for reading because they are designed to be easy to read and they can provide fresh insight into familiar passages. However, there is always a danger that the interpretations of the translator are wrong, and you have no way of finding this out for yourself. Paraphrases are not good for study purposes either.



***Read Matthew 5:3–12. These verses are commonly known as “The Beatitudes”.***

***1. In groups of two or three, write a paraphrase of verse 3. [Ask for help if you don’t understand some words or phrases.]***

***2. How does your paraphrase help people understand the passage?***

***3. What things did you omit in your paraphrase? Did you insert any new ideas? Will your paraphrase mislead people?***

***4. Read the same passage from a paraphrase version such as the Living Bible. How does it compare with yours?***

At first it might seem that the best approach is literal translation since that is “closest” to the original text. But that is not necessarily the case. Consider these two examples.

- In Luke 18:13, a man “beat his breast” in remorse. In Chokwe (a Zambian language) this means to congratulate yourself— the opposite of what Jesus meant! Therefore, in the Chokwe Bible, the phrase “beat his breast” has been translated “beat his brow”, which carries the idea of remorse. This is not a literal translation, but a “thought for thought” translation.
- In the Philippines, repeating a word shows you are not sure. So when Jesus said “Truly, truly . . .” this would mean “I’m not sure of what I am about to say” instead of “I really mean this and want you to listen”. Again, a literal translation is not the best.

## OTHER DIFFERENCES

Versions also vary in size of vocabulary, traditional or modern tone, use of archaic language, theological orientation and textual layout.

Textual layout means how the text is arranged on the page. A Bible with good textual layout:

- prints the text in the natural paragraphs (instead of printing each verse as a separate paragraph);
- includes subheadings to help the reader see the natural breaks in the text and know what is to follow;
- prints the poetic parts of the Bible in the natural stanzas rather than as prose or in the artificial verse divisions;
- gives lists of names or places in columns instead of as prose.

The NIV makes most use of textual layout to assist the reader. The KJV makes the least use of textual layout. Most other versions are somewhere in between.

Apart from the version, you will also need to consider the format of your Bible. It is worth buying one with wide margins around the text. This provides room for notes you may wish to make. Bibles with cross-references are very useful for finding related passages. Some Bibles also have charts and maps in the text which can be helpful.



## YOUR TURN

- 1) Read the translations of Acts 1:10–11 below from the KJV and NET Bible. Find and read one other version of the same passage.

KJV: <sup>10</sup> And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

<sup>11</sup> Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

NET: <sup>10</sup> As they were still staring into the sky while he was going, suddenly two men in white clothing stood near them <sup>11</sup> and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven.”

- a) Which do you prefer?
  - b) Why?
- 
- 2) In your readings this week, use a few different versions if you have access to them. List what you feel are their strengths and weaknesses.

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## SESSION 4

# BIBLE PROPHECY

More remarkable evidence for the inspiration of the Bible comes from prophecy. The Bible contains many prophecies about Israel and the surrounding nations. Some were fulfilled almost immediately, some were fulfilled hundreds of years later, some are still being fulfilled today, and some are yet to be fulfilled. Fulfilled prophecy shows that the Bible must come from a powerful God who knows the future.

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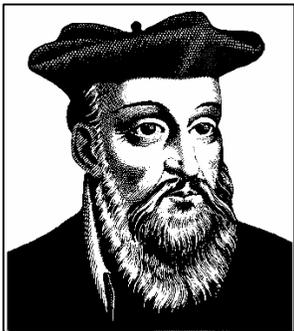
## PREDICTING THE FUTURE

People have always wanted to predict the future to reduce their fear and anxiety about the uncertain and unknown. This desire has been satisfied by priests, astrologers, prophets and fortune tellers since the dawn of civilization. In Bible times a range of methods were used.

- Augury: using animal entrails
- Hepatoscopy: using animal livers
- Auspices: using the flight of birds
- Astrology: using stars and planets
- Oracles: often ambiguous answers by priests or priestesses to specific questions

Today we have

- horoscopists
- tarot card readers
- palmists
- tea leaf readers
- clairvoyants



NOSTRADAMUS

Nostradamus, who was born in 1503, is one who claimed to be a prophet. He wrote a large number of quatrains (four line paragraphs) which together formed his book of prophecy. The quatrains are very vague and mystical. Despite this many people have endeavoured to interpret them as prophecies of significant events such as World War 2 or the deaths of famous people. However, such interpretations are highly subjective. For example, Nostradamus (X.72) wrote

The year 1999 seven months  
From the sky will come the great King of Terror.  
To resuscitate the great king of the Mongols.  
Before and after Mars reigns by good luck.

After the event, some people claimed this referred to the plane crash that killed John F Kennedy in July 1999, others have claimed it refers to a solar eclipse in August 1999. The “prophecy” is so vague that it could be interpreted in many different ways.

What other possible interpretations of this “prophecy” can you think of?

Bible prophecy is different. It is usually clear, specific and straight-forward to interpret. The Bible claims that the prophets were inspired by God in what they wrote:

Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21)

## BIBLE PROPHETS

A Bible prophet did not just foretell the future, but was God’s messenger in commanding, encouraging and warning his people. Sometimes this involved relaying God’s plans and intentions for the future, but sometimes a prophet’s message did not involve any prediction. However, in this session, we will look only at prophecies which predicted events in the future.

It is important to see prophecy from God’s perspective. The Bible portrays him as the controller of future events. He knows the future because he will make it happen. In this way, Bible prophecy is history in advance.

There are different types of prophecy. Some are “short-term” and fulfilled in the lifetime of the prophet. Many are “long-term” and extend beyond the prophet’s lifetime. A prophet often used a combination of both, the short-term fulfilment providing evidence of the truth of the long-term prophecy. Many prophecies have a dual fulfilment, a partial short-term fulfilment and a more complete long-term fulfilment.

Two tests were applied to see if a prophet was genuinely from God. The first test concerned the teaching of the prophet:

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, “Let us follow other gods” (gods you have not known) “and let us worship them”, you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1–3)

Isaiah also stated

When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists . . . To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this [God's] word, they have no light. (Isaiah 8:19–20)

The second test was whether the prophet had shown the ability to predict the future before.

You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?” If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:21–22)

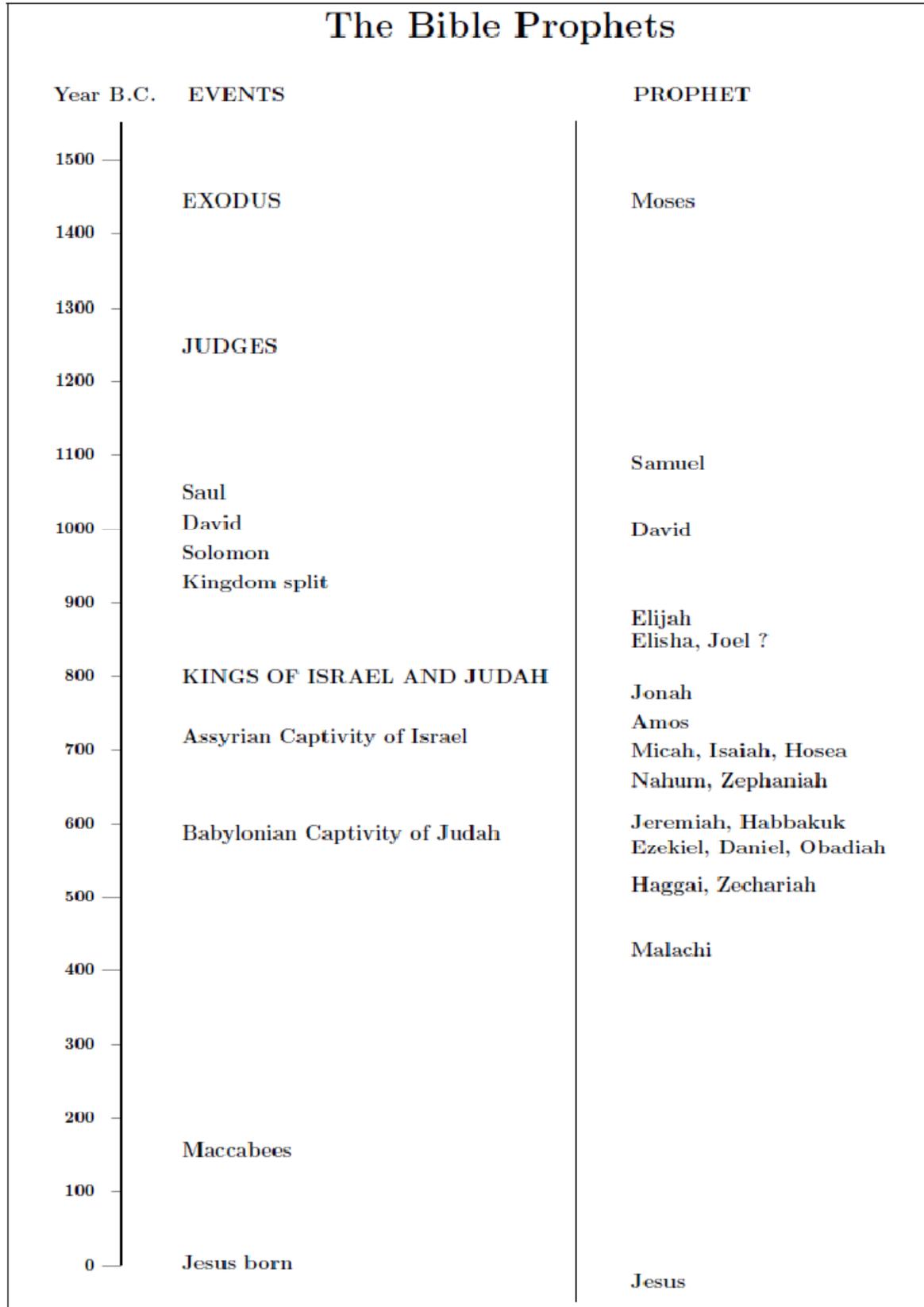
The prophet . . . will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true. (Jeremiah 28:9)

So a true prophet was one who taught things consistent with the rest of God's revelation and who gave a short-term prophecy which came true.



***How do you apply these tests to modern prophets?***

The accurate fulfilment of Bible prophecies gives great credibility to the Bible's claim of inspiration. It also gives us confidence in prophecies not yet fulfilled.



## EZEKIEL’S VISION OF THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

*Reference: Ezekiel 37:1–14*

Ezekiel prophesied in about 590 BC when the nation of Israel was in captivity in Babylon. He gave many fascinating prophecies, including this vision of a valley of dry bones. The well-known Negro spiritual song “Dem dry bones” refers to this prophecy. It is a very clear prophecy with each element of the prophecy being clearly explained.

Ezekiel’s vision was of a collection of dry bones lying at the bottom of a valley. The bones come together and were covered with tendons, flesh and skin, but the bodies which were formed remained dead. Then breath entered the bodies and they became a vast living army.

In verses 11–14, the prophecy is explained. It depicts Israel’s revival in two stages.



Vision	Meaning
bones	
dried bones	
bones come together	
breath in bones	

The prophecy is unambiguous and clearly explained. The Jews were to be gathered out of many nations around the world. They were to become one nation in the land of their ancestors, the land of Israel. This is precisely what has happened over the past century.

No other nation has maintained a national identity after more than 1800 years of exile. But no other nation has had these prophecies made concerning their history. Other nations which have been dispossessed of their land have lost their identity within a few years. What has happened to Israel is extraordinary. The Jews are a standing miracle, a wonderful example of fulfilled prophecy. The fact that their history was predicted so accurately shows the Bible is God’s book.

We have only seen the first stage of Ezekiel’s prophecy fulfilled. Israel has returned to their land as predicted, but they remain a secular nation uncommitted to God. God’s spirit does not yet dwell in them. A recent survey revealed that most Israelis do not consider that God is responsible for their current position and survival in the land. These prophecies indicate they are yet to become a religious nation relying on God and obeying him.

The last stage in the prophecy is described in verses 24–28. After the Jews turn back to God, they will have a new king “David” who will rule over them forever in peace. Luke 1:30–33 makes it clear that this king will be Jesus, who was a descendant of the earlier King David of Israel. He is to sit on David’s throne in Jerusalem.

We can be confident that the Jews will turn back to God and that Jesus will return to be king, because the first part of this vision has been fulfilled. The Jews are back in the promised land as predicted in the Bible.

***How many common ideas can you find between Ezekiel 37:24–28 and Luke 1:30–33?***



## PROPHECIES ABOUT ISRAEL

Israel is the subject of more prophecies than any other nation, simply because the Jews are God’s special people. Their entire history has been foretold, including events which have taken place in the 20th century. The existence of the people of Israel, the Jews, and the existence of the nation in its biblical land is clear evidence for the reliability of the Bible.

In 1897 at the first Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, a Jew named Theodore Herzl proposed a Jewish homeland in the land known at that time as Palestine. It was under the control of Turkey and formed part of the Ottoman Empire. At that time, there was only a handful of Jews living in Palestine.

Just 20 years later, at the end of World War 1, the British evicted the Turks from Palestine and liberated Jerusalem. For the next 20 years, Britain ruled Palestine with the approval of the League of Nations (the forerunner to the United Nations). Slowly, Jews began to move back to the land of their ancestors. The pace of immigration increased rapidly after World War 2 and the atrocities of Nazi Germany, and many surviving Jews returned to Palestine. The enormity of Jewish suffering in what was to become known as “the Holocaust”, and the concern and guilt of many nations, led to the establishment of the State of Israel, proclaimed on 15 May 1948. This new State of Israel was established nearly 1900 years after the Jews had been exiled by the Romans.



FIGURE 4 - MODERN ISRAEL

<b>Some prophecies about Israel</b>	
1. Israel's national birth was predicted by God to Abraham. Genesis 15 ..... 2000 BC Fulfilled through Abraham's descendants.	
2. Israel's disobedience, scattering, preservation and revival was predicted by Moses. Deuteronomy 28 ..... 1500 BC Fulfilled: taken captive to Babylon in 600 BC, returned to land in 538 BC Fulfilled: scattered in AD 70, returned to land in 20th century, nation reborn 1948.	
3. Israel is a continuing witness to God's existence Isaiah 43:1–2, 10–12 ..... 700 BC	
4. Though scattered throughout the world, Israel would be preserved. Jeremiah 30:10–11; 31:10 ..... 600 BC Fulfilled: The Jews have survived the Spanish inquisition, the Russian pogroms, the Nazi holocaust, and many other attempts to destroy them. Throughout their history, God has preserved a remnant of his people.	
5. When Israel is reborn and Jerusalem recaptured, the kingdom of God will soon come. Luke 21:24–31 ..... AD 30 Fulfilled: nation reborn 1948, Jerusalem recaptured 1967, kingdom of God yet to begin.	

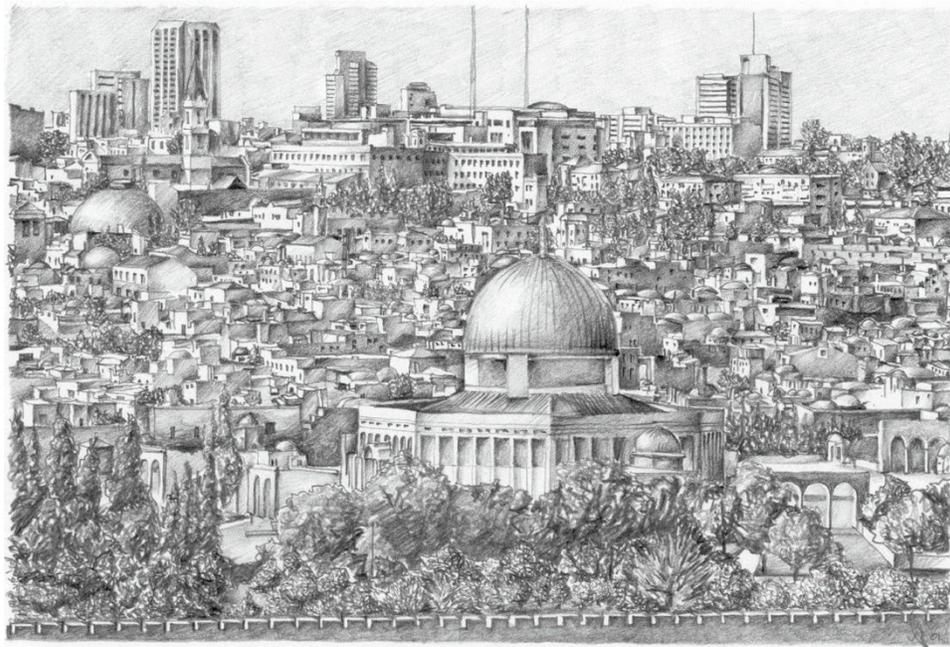
<b>History of Israel</b>	
2000 BC	Abraham, the father of the Jews.
1400 BC	Israel invades and conquers Canaan and is established as a nation.
1000 BC	King David.
605 BC	Jews taken captive to Babylon.
538 BC	Jews return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city.
AD 70	Romans capture Jerusalem. Jews scattered throughout the world.
AD 1882	First wave of Jewish immigration as a result of Russian pogroms
AD 1897	First Zionist congress in Basle, Switzerland.
AD 1900	A handful of Jews living in Palestine; Turks in charge.
AD 1904	Second wave of Jewish immigration.
AD 1917	British capture Palestine; increased Jewish migration.
AD 1945–1948	Many Jews who survived WW2 migrated to Palestine.
AD 1948	State of Israel proclaimed.
AD 1948–	Many wars with Arabs; Israel maintains independence; Jews migrate in large numbers.
AD 1993–	Limited Palestinian self-rule of the Gaza Strip and areas of the West Bank.
AD 1996–	Palestinian terrorist activity within Israel.

The nation has survived against incredible odds, with its hostile neighbours seeking to destroy it on numerous occasions. The most notable of these wars occurred in 1967 when an extraordinary event took place. The city of Jerusalem, divided since the partition of Palestine in 1948, and out of Jewish control for nearly 1900 years, was once again united and brought under Jewish control.

Why has Israel survived? Because God said it would. The prophets taught that, despite the wickedness of the people, God would ultimately remember the promises he had made to their faithful ancestors. Part of these promises involved bringing the Israelites into their own land again.

The attempts to bring lasting peace to the Middle East will certainly fail. One of the consistent stumbling blocks to peace in the region is the status of the city of Jerusalem. God, through the prophet Zechariah, says of Jerusalem:

I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling . . . I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. (Zechariah 12:2–3)



**FIGURE 5 - MODERN DAY JERUSALEM**

### Psalm 83



This psalm contains a prophecy about nations that want to destroy Israel. They are:

- Edom
- the Ishmaelites
- Moab
- the Hagrites
- Gebal
- Ammon
- Amalek
- Philistia
- Tyre
- Assyria
- the descendants of Lot

Use a map and Bible dictionary to find the modern day names for these places (where possible!). Mark them on the map in The Bible Readers Handbook. It is likely that these are the nations that will attack Jerusalem before Jesus returns.

## VISION OF WORLD EMPIRES

One night in about 600 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, had a dream. The dream seemed unusually vivid and it concerned him. He called for his advisers to explain it. One of his advisers was Daniel, a captive from Jerusalem. Daniel told the King what the dream was (see Daniel 2:31–35). Nebuchadnezzar had seen a large statue composed of different metals. As he watched, he saw a stone which had been cut (but not by human hands) strike the image on the feet and destroy it. The metals broke in pieces while the stone grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

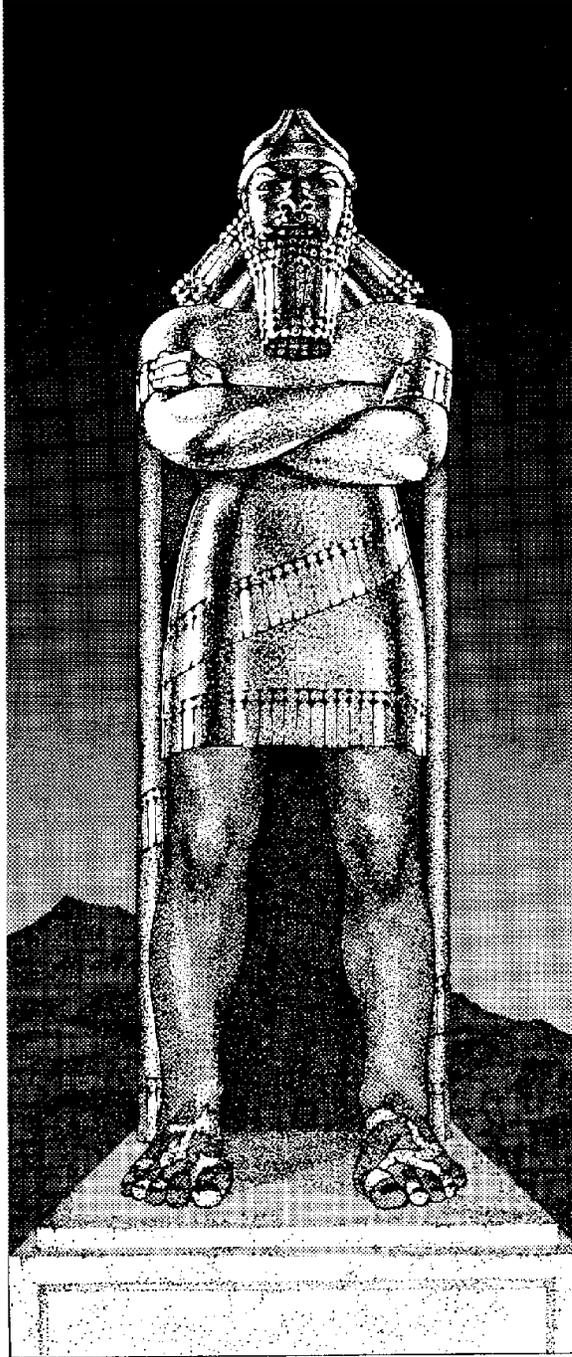
Then Daniel told him what it meant (see Daniel 2:36–45). The four metals of the image represented four empires that would arise. The statue's head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar himself and his kingdom of Babylon. The other empires were Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

A stone came and destroyed the image and grew into a great mountain. This is the kingdom of God which replaces the kingdoms of men.

The history of Israel has followed the pattern of this prophecy. From the time of Daniel, there were four empires which ruled Israel: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. After the Roman Empire, the Jews were scattered around the world. Now that Israel is back in their land, there is no dominant empire, but a mixture of strong and weak nations represented by the statue's feet of iron and clay.

The one phase of the prophecy yet to be fulfilled is the shattering of the statue by the rock cut out of a mountain without human hands and the mountain which fills the earth. Daniel says this represents the kingdom of God which replaces the kingdoms of men. Because the rest of the prophecy has been fulfilled, we can be confident that this last phase will be fulfilled too.

So the prophecy ends with a similar scene to Ezekiel's valley of dry bones: a time when God's kingdom will be in the earth. Putting the two prophecies together we can see that this will occur when Jesus returns to be king on David's throne in Jerusalem, ruling in righteousness and peace.



gold head  
**BABYLON**

silver  
breast & arms  
**MEDO-  
PERSIA**

bronze  
belly & thighs  
**GREECE**

iron legs  
**ROME**

iron & clay feet  
**DIVIDED  
NATIONS**

Find these places on the maps in *The Bible Readers' Handbook*.

<b>Nebuchadnezzar's image</b>		
Head of gold	Babylon	626-539 BC
Chest and arms of silver	Medo-Persia	539-330 BC
Belly and thighs of bronze	Greece	330-63 BC
Legs of iron	Rome	from 63 BC
Feet of iron and clay	Nations today	



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SESSION 5

# BIBLE READING TIPS

Despite being written by many different authors over a period of 1600 years, the Bible contains a consistent message throughout. In this session we consider the exciting discovery of “Bible echoes”. Finally, we look at how to decide when Bible language is literal or figurative, and we discover that the Bible often explains itself.



## BIBLE ECHOES

One of the exciting things in Bible reading is finding in one part of the Bible an “echo” of an idea from another part of the Bible. These often help us understand more about what God is telling us. Finding Bible echoes usually only comes about after you become very familiar with the Bible.

One example is the “failure of the firstborn”. To the Jews, the first-born son of the family was very important—he was entitled to a double portion of the family inheritance. Yet not one of the successful men of the Old Testament is said to be a firstborn. Every firstborn male of the Old Testament, who might have had a position of honour, was in some way a failure. Only after reading the Bible through many times do you notice this sort of thing. The reason for this remarkably consistent theme is that God is teaching us something: important people in human affairs are not necessarily important to God. The world had to wait for God’s own firstborn son to be born before it could see a successful firstborn.

This also provides additional evidence for the inspiration of the Bible. If the Bible writers were not inspired, what made them all combine to produce this instructive and consistent theme? They certainly didn’t do it deliberately, because none of them draws attention to it.

Finding Bible echoes also adds interest to Bible reading, even after you have been reading the Scriptures for years. Stay alert and you might find another Bible echo, a concealed theme, buried deep in the pages of Scripture, waiting to be unearthed.



*List as many people as you can who were leaders of God’s people and spent a period of time in the wilderness.*

*Why do you think this happened?*

## LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

How do you decide if a given part of the Bible is literal or figurative? The Bible does contain some figurative language, but most of it can be understood literally. It can be adopted as a general rule for the Bible, as for any book, that it should be taken literally unless there is a direct statement or very strong indirect evidence that it is figurative.

For example, whenever Jesus described a story he told as a “parable” or said “The . . . is like . . .” it is clearly not literal.

In other places the use of symbols is clear. For example, Isaiah 11:1 says “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse”. Now Jesse was the father of King David. Describing Jesse as a stump is an obvious metaphor. The verse is a reference to a descendant of Jesse. The rest of the chapter makes it clear that it is referring to Jesus Christ, who was descended from King David.

The general principle is that the Bible should be understood literally unless there is a good reason not to.

***Are the following passages figurative or literal? How can you tell?***

***Exodus 14:21–22***

***Zechariah 13:1***

***Zechariah 14:2***

***Matthew 5:13***

***Revelation 20:14***



## THE BIBLE EXPLAINS ITSELF

The key to easier understanding of the Bible is found within its own pages. Our tendency is to not look far enough for answers within the book when we encounter something we do not understand. A basic principle in reading the Bible more effectively lies in this simple fact:

**Your questions about what the Bible teaches are answered in the Bible.**

Answers are found near and far. Look in the same chapter or surrounding chapters:

- Jesus' explanation of the parable of the Sower  
Matthew 13:3–8 compare Matthew 13:18–23  
(note they are not adjacent)
- Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the image  
Daniel 2:31–45

Sometimes it is helpful to look in other books of the Bible too (especially New vs. Old Testament).

- How long was Moses in Midian?  
Exodus 2:15; 3:1–4 compare Acts 7:30–31

Finding answers
<p><b>DO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Look first to the Bible for answers to questions</li><li>• Read all of the Bible to find answers to your questions</li><li>• Write down your question (it may be a while before you get an answer)</li></ul> <p><b>DON'T</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expect quick answers</li><li>• Look at isolated passages and draw conclusions</li></ul>

