Introducing The Bible

A Guide for the Curious

Andrew Ollerton



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Introducing the Bible: A Guide for the Curious
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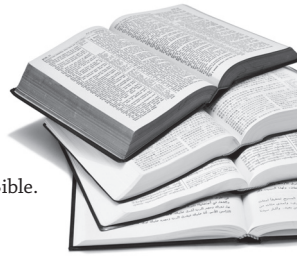
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Surprising Facts About the Bible

1 The Bestselling Book of All Time

5 BILLION +

copies distributed.



2 The Most Translated Book

3,800+ languages have at least part of the Bible.
760+ languages have the whole Bible.
1,750+ have the New Testament.

Translation work is happening somewhere in the world every day.

3 The Most Burned and Banned Book

Thousands of Bibles have been **burned**, **banned** and **stolen**.

Bible access is still restricted in dozens of countries today.

4 Not One Book but a Library

60+ books

40+ authors

Written on **3** continents

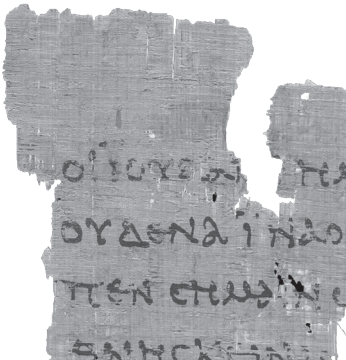
Written over **1,000** years

63,000+ cross-references

5 Extraordinary Evidence

Thousands of copies of the New Testament have survived to this day including **5,800+** Greek manuscripts and **20,000+** translated manuscripts.

No other work from the ancient world comes close.





6 The Book That Changed Books

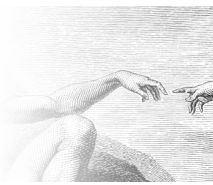
Around **1455**, the first book printed on Gutenberg's printing press was the Bible.

The printing revolution helped transform education and literacy around the world.

7 The Book That Shaped Languages

So many familiar phrases come from the Bible.

- "The writing is on the wall"
- "Salt of the earth"
- "By the skin of your teeth"
- "The blind leading the blind"
- "A wolf in sheep's clothing"



8 The Book That Shaped Cultures

- Handel's Messiah
- Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel
- Shakespeare
- Abolitionist campaigns against slavery
- The birth of hospitals and schools



9 The First Book in Space

24th December 1968

The crew of Apollo 8 read the first ten verses of Genesis live on television as they orbited the moon.

10 Still Changing Lives

Around **2.6 BILLION** people identify as Christian, and for millions across every continent, the Bible is a sacred source of...

Comfort **Wisdom** **Guidance** **Truth**

Welcome

I wonder what's sparked your interest in the Bible. Perhaps you've been given a copy, or someone you follow online shared a verse. Maybe you're intrigued by the influence the Bible has had on our history and culture.

Or perhaps your reason is more personal…

Life feels difficult right now, and you're looking for something grounding or hopeful. Maybe you're at a crossroads and need guidance or you've had a spiritual experience and want to explore things further.

Whatever your reason, you're not alone. Bible sales are rising across the UK, Europe and North America. Online content about Christianity is also trending. There's a renewed curiosity about what the world's bestseller might have to offer. And for good reason. No book has shaped our world more deeply than the Bible.

My aim in this short book is to open the front door of the Bible and help you find your way inside. I still remember trying to read the Bible for the first time and having no idea about what was going on. Now, as a Bible

scholar, I spend my time helping people to navigate these ancient writings and to understand what they mean today.

But this book will not pressurise you to believe anything. My hope is simply that, by the end, you'll feel confident to explore the Bible for yourself and reach your own conclusions.

Before we dive in, let's get prepared.

Getting Started

Over the years, I've noticed a few common challenges that prevent people from getting on well with the Bible. Here are three simple things to remember.

1. You don't need to feel overwhelmed

There are accessible ways into the Bible.

Reading the Bible can feel like being asked to eat an elephant. Where would you even begin? It contains more than 60 books amassing over 1,000 pages. For many people, the sheer size of it feels intimidating—especially if reading has never been your thing.

Fortunately, there are accessible ways in that don't require any prior knowledge. Plus, modern translations of the Bible are much easier to read and understand. The QR code later in this chapter recommends which Bible to use and provides short Bible reading plans that only take 5-10 minutes at a time. And if you

prefer listening, audio versions of the Bible are also available.

So don't feel pressured to tackle everything at once. The best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.

2. You don't need to start on page 1

It's easier to begin at the centre.

Many people instinctively turn to the first page, but the Bible is not one book in the usual sense. If you begin on page one without understanding the bigger picture, you may quickly find yourself lost among unfamiliar names, ancient laws and foreign customs.

A better starting point is at the centre. And the centre of gravity for the Christian Bible is Jesus. About three-quarters of the way through, you'll find four biographies—known as the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They introduce Jesus and explain why he is the central figure who fulfils the whole plotline. Starting with the story of Jesus and then looping back to the beginning is often a better way in.

3. Avoid using the Bible like a lucky dip

Context is crucial.

You may have heard the Bible described as "the word of God". But when you first open the Bible, it can feel surprisingly human. You might land on a poem, a personal letter, a law code, a genealogy or an account of ancient

history. The Bible contains many different styles of writing, produced across centuries.

That's why randomly opening the Bible and hoping something jumps off the page is not the best plan. The Bible is not a collection of fortune-cookie sayings; each passage makes sense when understood in context.

Scan for recommended Bibles and reading plans



That's where this short book comes in. It's divided into three parts made up of short chapters that each finish with a simple recap. In *Part 1*, we'll look at what the Bible is and how to navigate all the books and the big plotline. In *Part 2*, we'll get practical and consider the best ways you can read and understand the Bible for yourself. *Part 3* tackles common questions about how the Bible was formed and whether it's reliable. If these questions scratch an itch, why not take a quick look there first and then loop back to *Part 1*.

Ready? Let's dive in.

PART 1

What Is the Bible?



You might own a powerful motorbike. But if you fill it with fruit juice for fuel, you won't get very far. To make progress with the Bible, we first need to understand what it is—and what it isn't.

Let's begin with a simple definition:

> *The Bible is a library of ancient writings that together tell the story of God and his people. Christians believe these writings are sacred because God inspired the people who wrote them.*

Everything else in this book grows out of these three ideas. The Bible is…

- a **library** of books…
- that tells a unified **story**…
- and is **sacred**.

In this section we'll explore each in turn. By the end, you'll have a clearer picture of what the Bible is, how it fits together, and why it continues to shape the lives of millions of people today.

CHAPTER 1

The Bible Is a Library

> **Library**
> Story
> Sacred

When you open a Bible—printed or digital—you're entering a small library. The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning "books"—notice it's plural. The word "Scripture" similarly means "writings". These sound like religious words today, but originally they were ordinary terms for words written on a page. That explains why most versions have Holy Bible on the front cover. "Holy" means "set apart" or "sacred". So Holy Bible means "sacred books".

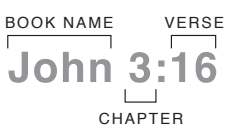
The contents page at the front of your Bible lists all of the 66 books in this remarkable library. Catholic and Orthodox editions also include several additional writings known as the Deuterocanonical books or

Apocrypha, which we'll touch on again briefly in Part 3. For simplicity, our focus will be on the 66 books that Christians of every tradition share in common.

How do I navigate the Bible?

Because the library of books is large and complex, a simple reference system helps readers to quickly locate passages. You only need three pieces of information to find a specific verse or sentence:

1. Book name
2. Chapter number
3. Verse number



If you have a Bible, try locating some famous verses by using the steps below:

1. Turn to the Bible's contents page.
2. Find the page number for the book.
3. Locate the chapter using the large numbers.
4. Find the verse using the smaller numbers.

Five famous Bible verses to look up

- Genesis 1:1
- Proverbs 3:5
- Jeremiah 29:11
- John 3:16
- Philippians 4:13

OLD TESTAMENT

HISTORY

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- 1 & 2 Samuel
- 1 & 2 Kings
- 1 & 2 Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Esther

WISDOM

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon

PROPHECY

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Lamentations
- Ezekiel
- Daniel
- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT

GOSPELS & CHURCH HISTORY

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- John
- Acts

LETTERS

- Romans
- 1 & 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1& 2 Thessalonians
- 1 & 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- James
- 1 & 2 Peter
- 1, 2 & 3 John
- Jude

REVELATION

- Revelation

What kinds of books make up the Bible?

The Bible has two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament was written mainly in Hebrew and before the time of Jesus. It includes 39 books that tell the story of ancient Israel, including Noah building a floating zoo, Moses parting the Red Sea, David killing Goliath and Queen Esther stopping a genocidal plot. Jewish people often refer to the Old Testament as the Hebrew Bible.

The New Testament was written in Greek during the first century AD, after the life of Jesus. Its 27 books focus on Jesus, the early church, and the spread of Christianity.

Together, the writings in the Old and New Testaments form the Christian Bible.

For more about Bible translations, see chapter 5.

Although the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, scholars have provided excellent modern translations that make the Bible accessible and relatable. If English is your heart language, then there are several translations available in print, as digital books and also in audio format.

What else do you need to know to navigate the library? Well, the books in the Bible are not arranged in strict chronological order. Instead, as in a modern

library, they are grouped according to different genres or styles of writing. The diagram on page 17 shows a helpful way to picture the main sections or categories of books.

When reading any book, it helps to ask, *What kind of writing is this?* Think about your phone for a moment. Different apps work in different ways. A WhatsApp message invites a quick response. A Spotify playlist creates atmosphere. An e-book draws you into a story. A social-media post might make you pause, laugh or share.

The Bible works similarly. It contains various forms of communication that invite different kinds of response. Over time, you'll learn how to understand and apply each style of writing. For now, here's a quick summary and some tips on how to handle them.



History • Around 50% of the Bible

Examples: Genesis, Exodus, Acts

These books tell the story of God's people, the ancient Israelites and the early church, through highlighting events, characters, failures, victories and journeys.

Tip: Ask not only *What happened?* but *What does this reveal about God and people?*