

# Introduction to the Bible

## - Terms -

1. The English word “Bible” came originally from the name of the papyrus or **byblos** reed used extensively in antiquity for making scrolls and books.
2. The word “Scriptures” means that which is **written** and refers to the words of God that have been recorded in writing.
3. When the terms “Scriptures” or “it is written” is referred to in New Testament writings it refers **only** to the “Old Testament”. Irenaeus first referenced the New Testament writings as “Scripture” in about 190 AD. In his day the New Testament was referred to as the Gospel and the Apostles, much as in the way that the Old Testament was referred to as the Law and the Prophets.
4. The term, “Word of God” is a title that refers to **Jesus Christ**, the Son of God.
  - a. Read John 1:1-5 (The Word)
  - b. Read John 5:37-40 (You have the Scriptures)
  - c. Read Hebrews 4:12-13 (The Word is living and active)
  - d. Read Hebrews 11. (Which of these individuals used Scripture as the basis of their faith? Most could not ... because God’s word had not been written down yet.)
5. The term “Word of God” can also mean anything that God **speaks**, whether it has been recorded in writing or not.
6. And in a **third** sense it also is used to refer to the Scriptures or the Bible.
7. The word “Canon” literally means **cane** or **measuring rod**. It came to be used as the name of the list of books, which were recognized as the genuine, originally inspired, authoritative Word of God to be used as the rule of faith.

## - History -

1. Several men wrote the Bible as God inspired them over a period of **1600** years, from about 1500 BC to 100 AD.
2. The Old Testament covers a period of history from Adam (about 4000 BC) to the prophet Malachi (about 430 BC)
3. About 250 BC the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek language, which was the common language of that day. It was called “the Septuagint” from the seventy translators who were reputed to have begun it.
4. The New Testament covers a period of history from just before the birth of Jesus (about 6 BC) to the writing of the book of Revelation by the Apostle John (about 100 AD)
5. Around 200 AD, the Scriptures were divided into the **Old** Testament and **New** Testament. The Old Testament consists of **39** books (24 books in Hebrew) and the New Testament consists of **27** books written from the time of Jesus until about 100 AD.
6. In 315 AD, the Emperor Constantine commissioned Eusebius to prepare 50 Bibles. They contained all the books that are currently in our Bible today and those books were declared the official canon of Scripture at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD.
7. From 382 to 404 AD, Saint Jerome translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin. His translation is known as the Vulgate and the western Church used it for 1000 years.

8. In 1205 AD, Cardinal Stephen Langton broke down the Bible into chapters.
9. Wyclif's Bible was the first English Bible and was translated from the Vulgate in 1382 AD.
10. The Tyndale Bible was translated from the original Greek and Hebrew in 1525 AD.
11. In 1551 AD, Robert Estienne (Stephanus) broke the Bible down by verses.
12. In 1611, King James I of England ordered a new translation for the sake of uniform services within the English-speaking churches. It was a revision of the Tyndale Bible and has been the household Bible for the English-speaking world for over 300 years.

### - Division of the Books of the Bible -

1. The books of the Bible are divided into **three** parts:
  - a. The Old Testament concerning the nation **Israel**.
  - b. The Gospels concerning the life of **Jesus**.
  - c. The New Testament concerning the **Church**.
2. The books of the Bible can be further divided into **seven** types of writing:
3. These types of writings can also represent an individual who is associated with the particular style of writing. (i.e. Moses and The Law)

### - The Old Testament -

1. The Old Testament contains **three** types of writing:
  - a. The **Law**
  - b. The **Prophets**
  - c. The **Writings**
2. The Hebrews use the acronym – **TaNaKh** - to express these types of writing:
  - a. **Ta** – Torah (teaching) – The Law
  - b. **Na** – N'vi'im – The Prophets
  - c. **Kh** – K'tuvim – The Writings
3. The individuals represented are:
  - a. The Law – **Moses**
  - b. The Prophets – **Elijah**
  - c. The Writings - **David**
4. The Law consists of the first **five** books of the Bible.
  - a. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
  - b. The Law contains **613** commands from God. Of those, **248** are positive and represent the **bones** in the human body. The remaining **365** are negative and correspond to the number of **veins** in the human body or the number of **days** in a year.
  - c. The tzitzit are a physical display of the 613 commandments.
5. The Prophets consist of **twenty-one** books.
  - a. Historical (6) Joshua, Judges, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings.
  - b. Major (3) Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.
  - c. Minor (12) Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

6. The Writings consist of **thirteen** books.
  - a. Five Scrolls (5) Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther.
  - b. Other Writings (8) Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles.

### - The Gospels -

1. The gospels consist of only **one** type of writing.
2. The individual represented by the writing is **Jesus, the Christ**.
3. The gospels consist of books:
  - a. Matthew – the most detailed.
  - b. Mark – the first written. (Around 40 AD)
  - c. Luke – in chronological order.
  - d. John – where spiritual truths are revealed.

### - The New Testament -

1. The New Testament contains **four** types of writing:
  - a. The Acts of the Apostles.
  - b. The Epistles.
  - c. The Revelation of Jesus Christ.
2. The individuals represented are:
  - a. The Acts of the Apostles – **Peter**
  - b. The Epistles – **Paul**
  - c. The Revelation of Jesus Christ – **John**
3. The Acts of the Apostles is **one** book.
4. The Epistles consist of **twenty-one** books.
  - a. Romans, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John and Jude.
5. The Revelation of Jesus Christ is **one** book.

### - Bible Interpreters –

1. Priests, Rabbis, Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees interpreted the Old Testament.
2. Pastors, Teachers, Scholars, Fundamentalists and Popes interpret the New Testament.
3. Recognize that those who interpret the Bible are inferior to the Scriptures and those who were inspired to write them.
4. But above them all is Jesus, The Word of God. If we want to know something about what is written we should consult Him first.
  - a. The Gospels tell us what **Jesus says** about a subject.
  - b. The Old Testament serves as **the foundation** for His subject.
  - c. The New Testament **builds upon** His subject.

## - Other Writings –

1. The *Apocrypha* is a collection of 14 Jewish books written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. They are excluded from the Tanakh, although the Church included them in their translations. At the Council of Trent in 1546, the Roman Catholic Church declared the Apocrypha canonical. These books are: 1st & 2<sup>nd</sup> Esdras, Tobit, Judith, the Rest of Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Song of the Three Holy Children, History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasses, and 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Maccabees.
2. The *Pseudepigrapha* is a collection of more than 60 books written between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Most of the books elaborate on Old Testament themes or are apocalyptic in character. Foremost among them are: The Books of Enoch from which there are quotations in the New Testament, The Book of Jasher is referred to in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18, Assumption of Moses, Ascension of Isaiah, Book of Jubilees, Psalms of Solomon, Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Sibylline Oracles.
3. The *Talmud* is a Jewish commentary.
  - a. Part I is the *Mishna*, a topical presentation of the Jewish Oral Torah with rabbinic discussion of it; it was compiled around 220 AD by Y’hudah HaNasi (Judah the Prince) and consists of six sections divided into 63 tractates. Hillel, Shammai, Gamli’el and Akiva are among the well-known rabbis whose contributions are included.
  - b. Part II is the Gemara, consisting of wide-ranging commentary on the Mishna tractates by rabbis who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.
  - c. The Jerusalem Talmud, with Gemara by rabbis mostly from the Land of Israel, is older, smaller and less widely known than the Babylonian Talmud, with its Gemara written largely by Diaspora rabbis living in or near Babylon.
4. The *Halakhic Midrashim* are “law related” “discussions, homilies, allegories”. These compilations from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD report much older material.
5. The *Midrash Rabbah* are primarily discussions on the Pentateuch and the Five Scrolls, which were compiled from the 6<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.
6. The *Apostolic Fathers* is a collection of ten works by early Christians dated from about 100 to 160 AD. The works are: The Epistles of Clement of Rome, The Epistles of Ignatius, The Epistle of Polycarp, The Martyrdom of Polycarp, The Didache or Teaching of the Apostles. The Epistle of Barnabas, The Shepherd of Hermas, The Epistle of Diognetus, The Fragments of Papias and The Reliques of the Elders Preserved in Irenaeus.
7. The *Apocryphal New Testament Books* are legendary and spurious Gospels, Acts of the Apostles and Epistles, which began to appear in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. They were mostly forgeries, and were so recognized from the first. The great mass of the forged writings made it very important for the Early Church to distinguish between the false and the true. It is said that Mohammed got his ideas of Christianity largely from these books. They are also the origin of some of the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church.

## - Methods of Interpreting Scripture<sup>1</sup> -

There are four basic modes of Scripture interpretation used by the rabbis. These are:

1. **P'shat** (simple) the plain, literal sense of the text, more or less what modern scholars mean by “**grammatical-historical exegesis**,” which looks to the grammar of the language and the historical setting as background for deciding what a passage means. Modern scholars often consider grammatical-historical exegesis the only valid way to deal with a text; pastors who use other approaches in their sermons usually feel defensive about it before academics. But the rabbis have three other modes of interpreting Scripture, and their validity should not be excluded in advance but related to the implied presuppositions.

2. **Remez** (hint) wherein a word, phrase or other element in the text hints at a truth not conveyed by the p'shat. The implied presupposition is that God can hint at things of which the Bible writers themselves were unaware.

3. **Drash or midrash** (search) an allegorical or homiletical application of a text. This is a species of **eisegesis** [reading one's own thoughts into the text] as opposed to **exegesis** [extracting from the text what it actually says]. The implied presupposition is that the words of Scripture can legitimately become grist for the mill of human intellect, which God can guide to truths not directly related to the text at all.

4. **Sod** (secret) a mystical or hidden meaning arrived at by operating on the numerical values of the Hebrew letters, noting unusual spellings, transposing letters, and the like. For example, two words, the numerical equivalents of whose letters add up to the same amount, are good candidates for revealing a secret through what Arthur Koestler in his book on the inventive mind called “bisociation of ideas.” The implied presupposition is that God invents meaning in the minutest details of Scripture, even the individual letters.

The presuppositions underlying **remez**, **drash**, and **sod** obviously express God's omnipotence, but they also express his love for humanity, in the sense that he chooses out of love to use extraordinary means for reaching people's hearts and minds. At the same time, it is easy to see how **remez**, **drash**, and **sod** can be abused, since they all allow, indeed require, subjective interpretation; and this explains why scholars, who deal with the objective world, hesitate to use them.

Modern readers of the Bible, by using the “**grammatical-historical exegesis**,” ignore all modes of interpretation except the **p'shat**, discounting them as **eisegesis**. This is in reaction to the tendency of the Church Fathers in the second through eighth centuries to **over-allegorize**, an error which probably resulted from their misunderstanding the limitations of, and therefore misusing, the other three rabbinic approaches to texts. But the New Testament is primarily a Jewish book, written by Jews in a Jewish context; and the first-century Jewish context included all four ways of handling texts. These four methods of working a text are remembered by the Hebrew word **PaRDeS**, an acronym formed from the initials; it means “orchard” or “garden”.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the text is taken directly from the Jewish New Testament Commentary by David H. Stern, copyrighted in 1992, pages 10-13.

In Christian schools of Theology the four methods of interpreting Scripture are known as:

1. **Literal** – the actual and obvious sense of the Scripture.
2. **Moral** – the moral significance or practical lesson that the Scripture teaches.
3. **Allegoric** – having a hidden spiritual meaning that transcends the literal sense.  
**Allegory** – an expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions and truths or generalizations about human existence.
4. **Anagogic** – the mystical sense. Many times it is expressed through a ritual.

### - Choosing a Bible Translation -

| <b>Literal</b> |                              | <b>Dynamic Equivalent</b> |                           | <b>Free</b> |    |
|----------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|----|
| KJV            | NRSV                         | NIV                       | GNB                       | JBP         | LB |
| NKJV           | RSV                          | NAB                       | NJB                       |             |    |
| NASB           |                              |                           | NEB                       |             |    |
|                |                              |                           |                           |             |    |
| KJV            | King James Version           | NAB                       | New American Bible        |             |    |
| NKJV           | New King James Version       | GNB                       | Good News Bible           |             |    |
| NASB           | New American Standard Bible  | NJB                       | New Jerusalem Bible       |             |    |
| NRSV           | New Revised Standard Version | NEB                       | New English Bible         |             |    |
| RSV            | Revised Standard Version     | JBP                       | J.B. Phillips Translation |             |    |
| NIV            | New International Version    | LB                        | Living Bible              |             |    |

#### **Literal**

A literal translation is the attempt to translate by keeping as close as possible to the exact words and phrasing in the original language. A literal translation will keep the historical distance intact at all points.

#### **Dynamic Equivalent**

A dynamic equivalent translation is the attempt to translate words, idioms and grammatical constructions of the original language into precise equivalents in the receptor language. Such a translation keeps historical distance on all historical and most factual matters, but updates matters of language, grammar and style.

#### **Free**

A free translation is the attempt to translate the ideas from one language to another, with less concern about using the exact words of the original. A free translation, also called a **paraphrase**, tries to eliminate as much of the historical distance as possible by using modern phraseology.