

What Is the Bible?

The Bible is not a single book but a library of 66 books. It was written over a period of approximately 1600 years by about 40 different human authors.

What is the Bible about? The Bible is about God. It is intended to help us know Him and thus better understand ourselves. It is the account of God's dealings with the human race, how He is saving us and drawing us to Himself. That's why the Bible is sometimes said to tell "the history of salvation".

The Bible is not only highly varied in its time period and in its authorship, but in its content. It contains a wide range of types of literature: history (with many fascinating stories), law, poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy, parables, letters, and sermons.

The Bible was originally written in three different languages. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, with a few passages in Aramaic, a language closely related to Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek, specifically koine Greek, the common language of the day.

The Bible is organized into two sections. The Old Testament contains 39 books and covers the period from the creation till just before the birth of Jesus Christ. The New Testament, made up of 27 books, covers the period from Christ's birth through approximately 100 A.D.

Within these two testaments, or covenants, the books are organized by literary type and time period. The first five books of the Old Testament, called the books of law, Genesis through Deuteronomy, cover the period from creation through the Exodus of the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Then come the books of history, Joshua through Esther, telling the history of Israel from their arrival in Canaan through their return from the Babylonian exile. Following them are the books of poetry and wisdom, Job through Psalms, then the prophetic books. Isaiah through Daniel are called the major prophets, simply because they wrote more, not because they are more important. The minor prophets finish up the Old Testament, Hosea through Malachi.

The New Testament opens with the gospels, which record the life and teachings of Jesus. They are told by four different authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, for four different purposes. They beautifully complement each other. Then comes the history of the early Church, the Acts of the Apostles, usually simply called Acts. It covers approximately the first 30 years after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. The rest of the New Testament consists of 22 letters, or epistles, written by Christian leaders to various churches or individuals during the first century A.D.

What a rich and marvelously varied library!