

# myBible

## The Structure and Organization of the Bible

### What is the Bible?

The Bible is widely recognized as the best selling book in human history. It is estimated that over 6 billion copies of the Bible have been printed, with over 100 million being printed and distributed each year. To provide a sense of magnitude, if you assumed that each Bible averaged a thickness of 1 inch, the 100 million Bibles printed each year would make a stack that is 1,578 miles high, approximately the distance from Anchorage to Portland, Oregon. If you stacked the estimated six million Bibles that have been printed throughout history, you would get a stack that is 94,680 miles high, enough to go around the world almost four times (3.8 to be exact)!



Not only is the Bible the most printed book in the world, it is also the most widely translated book in the world. The following quote was taken from Wikipedia:

In November 2012, Wycliffe presented statistics that said that scripture existed in 2,798 languages out of the 6,877 languages currently known to be in use in the world. There are currently 518 languages with a full Bible translation. At least 4.9 billion people (70% of the world's population) have access to a full Bible translation in their first language. A further 595 million (8.5% of the world's population), representing 1,275 languages, have at least the New Testament in their first language. Also, 1,005 languages (almost 20% of the world's population) have at least one portion of scripture (one or more books) available in their first language. By September 2012, personnel from participating bible translation organizations were involved in 2075 active language programs.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible itself is a collection of 66 books divided into two sections, referred to as the Old and New Testaments. Approximately forty authors writing from three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe) over a two thousand year span contributed to the collection of writings we now recognize as the Bible.



The word, *bible* itself has a long history. It comes from the Greek *biblion*, derived from the word *byblos*, a name for papyrus. Papyrus was the earliest paper, made from a reed plant common in Egypt. Sheets of papyrus were spliced together to form scrolls.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible\\_translations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_translations)

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Paul Wegner, author of The Journey from Texts to Translations, makes the following observation.

This type of scroll was called a *biblos* in Greek, and thus during New Testament times the word *biblion* simply referred to a roll or book. Once a scroll reached a certain size, however it became awkward to use, as was the case with several of the larger biblical books. For example, the Isaiah Scroll found at Qumran... measured approximately twenty-three feet, about the limit for a scroll.<sup>2</sup>

Take a moment to read Luke 4:16-21 now. Note that if you are reading the King James Version, the word, *biblion* in Greek is translated as “book”. Consider how much time it took for Jesus to get the scroll, open it, and find the place where this passage was written. Remember, this was before they had chapters and verses! He must have been very familiar with the written Word.

Such lengthy scrolls proved to difficult to handle, so eventually a new means of collecting papyrus was developed, called a codex.

The word codex comes from Latin and refers to a “leaf book”. It is a collection of payrus laid on top of one another and folded down the middle, making it much easier to manage. In this way, much larger writings (several individual *biblion*) were able to be copied and brought together in collections (a *biblia*).



When the Jewish scholars translated their Scriptures (the Old Testament) from Hebrew into Greek in 250-100 B.C., they began to use the word *biblia* to refer to the complete collection of writings. It didn't take long for Christians, after adding the New Testament books, to use the same name for the complete collection, known as the *biblia*, or the Bible in modern English.

### didyouknow?

The word, “bible” is used by both Jews and Christians, even though their books are not the same. Even different varieties of Christians use the word “bible” to refer to different collections or translations of books that we would not all agree upon. For example, the Catholic Bible includes the Apocrypha, a collection of Jewish writings that are not largely recognized as the inspired Word of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Wegner, Paul D. (1999). *The Journey from Texts to Translations, The Origin and Development of the Bible*,. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. (JTT) p28.

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### Should I capitalize the word “Bible”?

When you use the word to refer to the book (for example the Christian Bible), it is a proper noun and therefore should be capitalized. If you were to use the word as a common noun, “the Farmer’s Almanac is my planting bible”, it would not be capitalized.

### What are the Testaments?

As we mentioned earlier, the Bible is divided into two testaments, both old and new. What is a testament? The following definition was taken from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

**tes•ta•ment** \ˈtes-tə-mənt\ *noun*

[Middle English, from Anglo-French, from Late Latin & Latin; Late Latin *testamentum* covenant with God, holy scripture, from Latin, last will, from *testari* to be a witness, call to witness, make a will, from *testis* witness; akin to Latin *tres* three & to Latin *stare* to stand; from the witness’s standing by as a third party in a litigation — more at THREE, STAND] 14th century

**1 a** *archaic* : a covenant between God and the human race

**b** *capitalized* : either of two main divisions of the Bible<sup>3</sup>

We learned that a testament is a covenant, a serious commitment between two or more parties. There are numerous covenants found in the Scriptures. Among the notable ones, God made covenants with Noah (Gen. 6:18, 9:9-12), Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, 15:1-21, 17:1-22), the Nation of Israel (Exodus 19:1-20:21, 23:20-24:11), and King David (2 Sam. 7:1-29, Psalm 89:3-4). Within the Old Testament (Covenant), we also read of a new covenant that will be made (Jer. 31:27-34), which Jesus referred to at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:28). When we find so many covenants in Scripture, why are they divided into just two? In their popular text, [A General Introduction to the Bible](#), Norman Geisler and William Nix provide this explanation.

The Old Testament was first called *the* covenant in Moses’ day (Ex. 24:8). Later, Jeremiah announced that God would make a new “covenant” with His people (Jer. 31:31-34), which Jesus claimed to do at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:28, cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-25; Heb. 8:6-8). Hence, it is for Christians that the former part of the Bible is called the “Old” Covenant (Testament), and the latter is called the *New* Covenant.<sup>4</sup>

That is an important point. Jews do not refer to their Scriptures as the Old Testament because it is not old to them. They are still waiting for the new covenant. They call the Old Testament, “the Bible” or the “Tanakh”.

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<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). *Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded). Chicago: Moody Press. (GIB) p22

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### The Old Testament

#### *Organization*

The Christian Old Testament has 39 books that can be divided into various categories. Notice that I said “Christian” Old Testament. We will find that different collections of the Old Testament contain different numbers of books. The Christian Old Testament contains the following divisions:

- The Pentateuch (Genesis – Deuteronomy)
- Historical Books (Joshua – Esther)
- Poetic or Wisdom Literature (Job – Song of Solomon)
- Prophets (Isaiah – Malachi)

How does this correspond with Jesus’ reference to the Old Testament found in Luke 24:44? Consider the Jewish division of the Old Testament Scriptures and provide an explanation.

#### **Law (Torah)**

Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

#### **Prophets (Nebi im)**

##### ***The Former Prophets***

Joshua  
Judges  
Samuel  
Kings

##### ***The Latter Prophets***

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Ezekiel  
The Book of the Twelve

#### **Writings (Kethubim)**

##### ***Poetic Books***

Psalms  
Proverbs  
Job

##### ***Five Scrolls***

Song of Solomon  
Ruth  
Lamentations  
Ecclesiastes  
Esther

##### ***Historical Books***

Daniel  
Ezra-Nehemiah  
Chronicles

This leads us to a very important observation. Consider Geisler and Nix’s comment.

Because the present structure of the English Bible has been subject to several historical variations, it would be too much to assume that it is God-given.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> (GIB) p26-27

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### *Timeline*

What is the oldest book in the Old Testament? Some believe Job to be the oldest book of the Old Testament, written somewhere between 2000 and 1900 B.C. This would place Job's life sometime during the days of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. However, there is no mention of Abraham or his descendants anywhere in the book. The five books of Moses were written somewhere around 1440 B.C. The newest book of the Old Testament is most likely Nehemiah, which was probably written by Ezra the scribe in around 400 B.C. and was originally considered one book with Ezra. This means that the writing of the Old Testament spanned about 1,500 years. To put this in perspective, 1,500 years ago Buddhism was just being introduced to central China; Europe was divided among various fighting kingdoms; people still believed the world was flat, and North America would not be discovered by the Vikings for almost 600 years. Columbus' voyage was almost 1,000 years away. The Mayan civilization was just reaching its peak in Central America. Considered how much has changed in 1,500 years. What does this teach us about the Bible?

### *Authors*

Obviously, if the Old Testament was written over a period of 1,500 years it was not all written by the same human. Although the Holy Spirit authored it all, there are at least 21 individuals clearly responsible for specific books of the Old Testament (Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Solomon, Asaph, Ezra, Daniel, the 12 "minor" prophets).

There are many books of the Old Testament however, that are collections of writings from various people (Psalms and perhaps Proverbs) and some that chronicle hundreds of years of history (Judges, Kings, Chronicles). Sometimes, we just don't know who wrote certain books of the Old Testament (Ruth, Esther, and Job). We also know that some books from the Old Testament relied upon or referred other older books that are no longer around and are not considered Holy Scriptures (see Joshua 10:13, 2 Samuel 1:18, Numbers 21:14, and 1 Chronicles 29:29 among others).

### **didyouknow?**

The Catholic Old Testament contains several books that are not included in the Christian Old Testament. They are commonly called the Apocrypha (the "hidden") and include such books as Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, Greek Esther, Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. Many of these books are considered to be additional chapters to books such as Esther, Daniel, and Psalms. Some Orthodox churches include additional apocryphal books in the Old Testament.

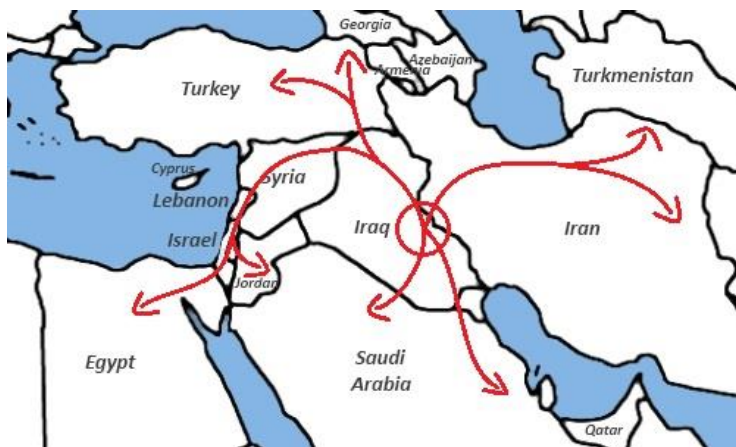
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### Language

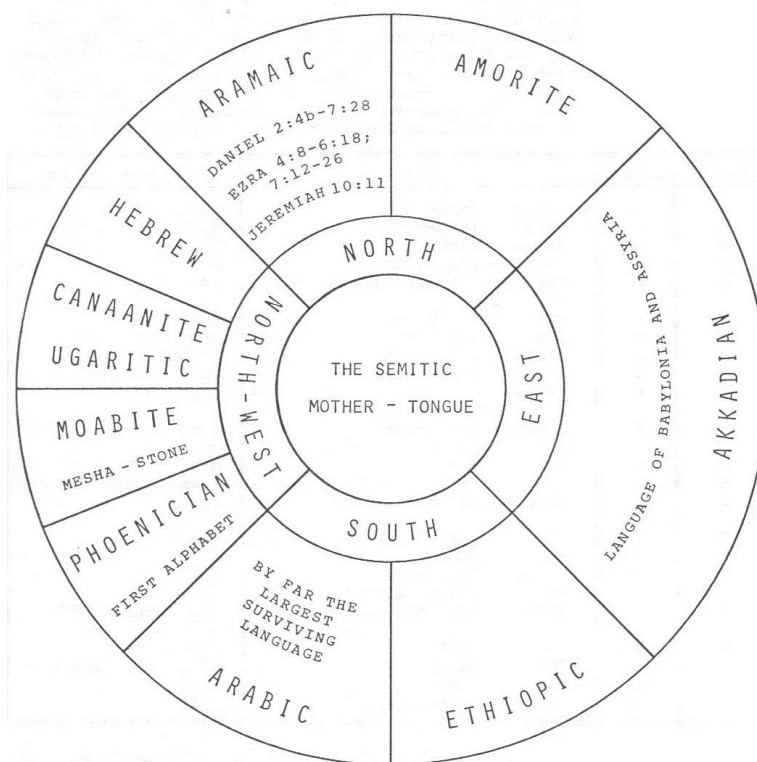
The language of the testaments is significant. Because they are not written in our native tongue, English, we must rely upon the work of good translators or become proficient in the original languages ourselves. The vast majority of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, the native language of the Jewish people. Hebrew is a Semitic language, meaning it is found among descendents of the line of Shem, Noah's



son. After the Tower of Babel, the languages of the people were changed and they began to disperse from Babel (in Modern Day Iraq) and settle throughout the earth (see the illustration above). The Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, and ancient languages such as the Phoenician and Akkadian languages are all Semitic (see the illustration below).<sup>6</sup> When we compare English (a Germanic language) with Hebrew, we won't find many similarities. In fact, Hebrew is read from right to left and books are printed from back to front. The Hebrew characters bear no resemblance to our letters and their dialect contain several sounds that are foreign to English and omit sounds that are common to us.

Small portions of the Old Testament are also written in the Aramaic language. Wegner provides the following explanation.

According to 2 Kings 18:17-37 (cf. Isa. 36:2-22), the more educated person in Israel was able to speak both Aramaic and Hebrew. Five Old Testament passages are written in Aramaic (Gen. 31:47; Jer. 10:11; Dan. 2:4-7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26, and the name..., which refers to the Aramaic language, occurs twice (Ezra 4:7; Dan. 2:4).<sup>7</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Goodrick, Edward W. (1980) Do It Yourself Hebrew and Greek. Multnomah Press.

<sup>7</sup> JTT p83.

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### The New Testament

#### *Organization*

The organization of the New Testament is straightforward and has been generally consistent throughout Christian history. The books are organized as follows:

#### **Gospels**

Matthew  
Mark  
Luke  
John

#### **General Epistles(Letters)**

Hebrews  
James  
1,2 Peter  
1,2,3 John  
Jude

#### **Acts**

The Acts of the Apostles

#### **The Apocalypse**

Revelation

#### **Paul's Epistles (Letters)**

Romans  
1,2 Corinthians  
Galatians  
Ephesians  
Philippians  
Colossians  
1,2 Thessalonians  
1,2 Timothy  
Titus  
Philemon

#### *Timeline*

Compared to the Old Testament, the New Testament had a very compressed timeline for its completion. While the Old Testament was written over 1,500 years, the New Testament was likely written within a span of up to 45 years. Many believe the Book of Galatians to be the first written in 49 A.D. The Book of Revelation was likely the last book written in either the late 60's A.D. or in 95-96 A.D. This is a highly debated subject among scholars based largely upon one's interpretation of the events in Revelation.

#### *Authors*

The identity of the New Testament authors carries significance. Every book of the New Testament was either written by an apostle or a prophet influenced by an apostle. There are five books in the New Testament that were not written directly by an apostle: Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews and James. Mark was written by John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), early traveling companion of the Apostle Paul and Barnabas (Acts

#### **didyouknow?**

The first printed Bible was the Gutenberg Bible, printed in the 1450s. It was an edition of the Latin Vulgate. Prior to this time, all copies of the Bible were hand-written.

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12:25), and disciple to the Apostle Peter (1 Pet. 5:13). Luke, author of both Luke and Acts, was a frequent traveling companion of the Apostle Paul (Col. 4:14, 2 Tim. 4:11). James was the half-brother of Jesus and a pastor and elder in the early church at Jerusalem with several of the apostles (Gal. 2:9). Finally, we come to Hebrews which has an unknown authorship. Scholars argue over who wrote the book, but we know that the writer was in Rome and carried authority (likely apostolic) based upon the post-script in Hebrews 13:18-25.

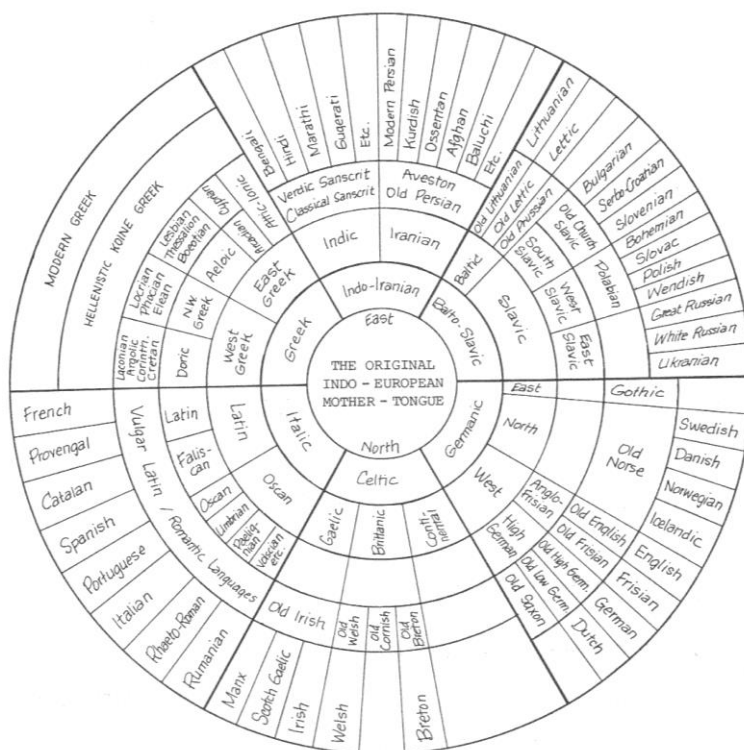
### Language

The New Testament is written exclusively in Koine (Common) Greek. This was the version of the Greek language spoken and written during the time of Christ. It was a world language popularized during the days when the Greeks, under Alexander the Great, conquered much of the known world. When the Romans conquered the Greeks, they retained the Greek trade language because it was already familiar to most people in the conquered lands. The fact that the words of God were recorded in a known and familiar language enabled the gospel to spread throughout the world rapidly.

The Greek alphabet and language is a much closer cousin to the English language, with several English words taking their original meaning from Greek (see the language wheel to the right).<sup>8</sup> Even our word “alphabet” is derived from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet: alpha and beta.

### When did we get Chapters and Verses?

The books of the Bible were not originally written with chapter and verse divisions. They weren't even added later by the original authors. It took over 1,200 years after the last book of the Bible was written (Revelation) for these divisions to be added. The Bible was divided into chapters in the 13th century by Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury in England, and into verses in the 16th century (300 years later) by French printer Robert Estienne. The Scriptures are now universally cited by book, chapter, and verse. Even the Jewish rabbis adopted the method for use in the Tanak (Old Testament).



<sup>8</sup> Goodrick, Edward W. (1980) Do It Yourself Hebrew and Greek. Multnomah Press.