

An overview of the Bible

Why is the Bible a 'Source of Wisdom'?

All religious texts are seen as in some way inspired by a divine being, or as holding deep and important truths. The Christian Bible is no exception.

For Christians, the Bible is where they can read the word of God. All Christians share the belief that the Bible was written by human authors who were inspired by God to write what they did. They believe that the Bible has God's authority, and that it reveals what God is like and how people can live the good life which they believe God intends for them. However, as we will see, not all Christians interpret the Bible in the same way.

The Bible is divided into two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is then divided up into books (which were originally written as separate books, then put together to form the Bible).

Not all Bibles have the same number of books. All Christians share the same 66 books of the Bible. Most Protestants accept only these 66, whereas Catholics have an extra seven books, bringing their Bible to 73 books. This shows that different Christian traditions sometimes have different ideas about which writings belong in the Bible.

There are 40 biblical authors, including a fisherman, a tax collector, a doctor and a king. The biblical authors wrote in different times, using different styles and languages and for different purposes, but Christians believe that they were all inspired by their experience of God.

*Ever since you were a child, you have known the Holy **Scriptures**, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **All scripture is inspired by God** and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting fault and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.*

2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 15-17

Scripture = a religious text. For Christians, 'scripture' means the Bible.

To do...

This passage comes from a letter attributed to the early Christian leader Paul, written in about 63 CE. Paul assures his readers that they can trust the Bible because it is inspired by God. Another way of translating this from its original Greek into English is to say that 'All scripture is breathed out by God'.

 What does Paul say about **why** Christians should use the Bible?

 What do you think Paul would say about **how** Christians should use the Bible?

Reading the Bible is not always easy or straightforward. Christians do not just pick it up and find their life planned out for them, and they differ in how they interpret the Bible's meaning for themselves.

A **literal** reading of the Bible holds that it reports actual events with the accuracy of history. Biblical events and timespans occurred exactly as the Bible describes.

A **non-literal** reading of the Bible accepts that some work may be needed to interpret it for modern times. The Bible was written by authors from particular times and cultures, and modern audiences may need to interpret what these authors meant before it can be applied to their lives. Some passages might not be considered as historically true, but all of the Bible is still seen as being the word of God and containing spiritual truths.

Christians might use the Bible in a range of contexts, including hearing it read in church, and studying it either as part of a small group or privately by themselves. Many try to follow a daily or weekly routine in which they set aside a specific time for Bible study.

The books of the Old Testament are also considered scripture by Jews. In Judaism these books are called the Tanakh.

To do...



Why might Christians describe the Bible as containing wisdom and having authority?

While it is the main source of wisdom for many Protestant churches, in the Catholic Church the Bible's wisdom stands alongside that of the 'magisterium'. This describes the authority the church is believed to have in interpreting and teaching Christian truths. In addition, Catholics regard the Pope's teachings as authoritative.

The Orthodox Church also recognises other forms of authority alongside the Bible, including the 'Holy Tradition', the collected teachings of the Patriarchs (senior church leaders) over hundreds of years.

In the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and some Protestant churches, the writings of early Christian leaders (often known as the Church Fathers) are important because they established traditions which are still followed today.

Christians are also guided by their own conscience, and they develop their own moral sense through prayer.

To do...



For Christians, is the Bible like...?

A mirror

A gateway

A revolving door

A cloak

A guidebook

A bag of Lego

A packet of seeds

The internet

The Old Testament	<p>The first five books are the Law, also known as the Torah ('law' in Hebrew) or Pentateuch ('five scrolls' in Greek). They tell the story of creation and of how God made the Israelites his chosen people and gave them instructions about how to live as God's people.</p>	<p>Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy</p>
	<p>The Old Testament Historical books continue the story of the Israelites, during which they were ruled by kings (including King David) and built the Temple in Jerusalem. They were conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians and sent into exile. After some time, they were allowed to return home and they rebuilt the Temple.</p>	<p>Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther</p>
	<p>The Wisdom literature asks the 'big questions' about God, humanity, suffering, what the world is like and why it is like it. Some of the wisdom books are written as poetry, and the Psalms are hymns.</p>	<p>Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs</p>
	<p>The books of Prophecy tell the stories of the prophets, ordinary people who were chosen to be messengers of God. Their prophecies often warned the Israelites that there would be consequences for disobeying God. Christians believe that many of their prophecies foretold the life of Jesus.</p>	<p>Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi</p>
	<p>The Deuterocanonical books (sometimes called the apocrypha) are included in Roman Catholic Bibles, but not in all Protestant Bibles. Therefore they represent Catholic but not always Protestant teaching, reflecting the diversity in ways the Bible can be read by different denominations.</p>	<p>Tobit Judith Wisdom of Solomon Sirach Baruch 1 Maccabees 2 Maccabees Additions to Daniel and Esther</p>
The New Testament	<p>The four Gospels tell the story of the life of Jesus. 'Gospel' means 'good news', referring to the 'good news' that Jesus' life symbolises for Christians. The first three share much of the same content and are known as the synoptic Gospels. John tells the same story, but in a more symbolic way.</p>	<p>Matthew Mark Luke John</p>
	<p>Acts of the Apostles (often known as just 'Acts'), tells the story of the early Christians. It was written by the same author as Luke's Gospel.</p>	<p>Acts</p>
	<p>The epistles ('letters' in Greek) are letters which were written by early Christian leaders to other Christians in the first century CE. They explain Christian beliefs and give instructions and guidance on how to live as a Christian.</p>	<p>Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon Hebrews James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude</p>
	<p>The only apocalyptic book in the New Testament is Revelation. The word 'apocalypse' means a revelation or unveiling of future events.</p>	<p>Revelation</p>


Creation

Do all Christians believe the same things about the creation of the world?

The book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible. 'Genesis' means 'beginning'. The first chapter of Genesis tells the story of creation. It describes how, over the course of six days, God first created the universe, and then the world and everything in it. For Christians, this shows God's infinite creativity and power.


Christians believe in one God. This is called monotheism.

To do...

 Highlight a reference to 'the Spirit of God'

Some translations of the Bible say 'an expanse' instead of 'a dome'.

To do...

 At the end of each day, how does God feel about creation?

The story of Creation

1st day

In the beginning, when **God** created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water. Then God commanded, "Let there be light"—and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, and he named the light "Day" and the darkness "Night." Evening passed and morning came—that was the first day.

2nd day

Then God commanded, "Let there be a **dome** to divide the water and to keep it in two separate places"—and it was done. So God made a dome, and it separated the water under it from the water above it. He named the dome "Sky." Evening passed and morning came—that was the second day.

3rd day

Then God commanded, "Let the water below the sky come together in one place, so that the land will appear"—and it was done. He named the land "Earth," and the water which had come together he named "Sea." And God was pleased with what he saw. Then he commanded, "Let the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit"—and it was done. So the earth produced all kinds of plants, and God was pleased with what he saw. Evening passed and morning came—that was the third day.

4th day

Then God commanded, "Let lights appear in the sky to separate day from night and to show the time when days, years, and religious festivals begin; they will shine in the sky to give light to the earth"—and it was done. So God made the two larger lights, the sun to rule over the day and the moon to rule over the night; he also made the stars. He placed the lights in the sky to shine on the earth, to rule over the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God was pleased with what he saw. Evening passed and morning came—that was the fourth day.

Genesis chapter 1 verses 1-19

In verses 1–19 of the creation story, God creates the world. In the second half of the story, God populates it with animals and people.

5th day

Then God commanded, "Let the water be filled with many kinds of living beings, and let the air be filled with birds." So God created the great sea monsters, all kinds of creatures that live in the water, and all kinds of birds. And God was pleased with what he saw. He blessed them all and told the creatures that live in the water to reproduce, and to fill the sea, and he told the birds to increase in number. Evening passed and morning came—that was the fifth day.

Then God commanded, "Let the earth produce all kinds of animal life: domestic and wild, large and small"—and it was done. So God made them all, and he was pleased with what he saw.

6th day


Then God said, "And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small." So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, "Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals. I have provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruit for you to eat; but for all the wild animals and for all the birds I have provided grass and leafy plants for food"—and it was done. God looked at everything he had made, and he was very pleased. Evening passed and morning came—that was the sixth day.

7th day

And so the whole universe was completed. By the seventh day God finished what he had been doing and stopped working. *He blessed the seventh day and set it apart as a special day*, because by that day he had completed his creation and stopped working. And that is how the universe was created.


Genesis chapter 1 verse 20 – chapter 2 verse 4

To do...

 Highlight where God appears to be plural – 'we' and 'us'. You'll come back to this and the reference to the Spirit of God on page 21.

God spends six days creating the world, and rests on the seventh day. This is the basis for having a day of rest on the Sabbath for Jews (on Saturday) and Christians (on Sunday).

To do...

 At each stage of the story, God makes creation happen by commanding it to happen. List all of God's commands in order:

1. Let there be light
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Genesis is an ancient book. Traditionally, Moses was thought to be its author. However, most Bible experts argue that Genesis was the work of a number of writers over a long period of time, and that it was passed on as an oral story for generations before it was written down.

There are some disagreements, including among Christians, about whether or not Genesis chapter 1 should be understood as a literally true, historically accurate account. Here are two different ways to understand Genesis 1, as well as some beliefs about God and creation that all Christians have in common:

Literal understanding


Some Christians believe that the creation story in Genesis is literally true, and can be understood as an historical account of how the world was created in six days of 24 hours.

Non-literal understanding

Some Christians do not believe that the creation story in Genesis is literally true. They might see it more as a poem or myth, a story which isn't intended to be literally true – its purpose was to explain some important religious truths. It might matter less for them how the world was created than that it was created by God. They might accept scientific explanations of creation but see them as being caused by God. They might understand a 'day' as meaning a period of time rather than literally 24 hours.

Shared understanding

All Christians find truth about God and the world in Genesis, whether they read it literally or non-literally. For example, all Christians believe God created the world.

 Which lines from Genesis chapter 1 describe these beliefs which all Christians hold in common?

- a) Creation was initiated by God

- b) God is supremely powerful

- c) God is pleased with his creation

Choose three adjectives to describe what Christians can learn about what God is like from the creation story.



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