

# Holy Bible

EASY-TO-READ VERSION



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# Abbreviations

New Testament names are in *italics*.

Acts	Acts	Judges	Judges
Amos	Amos	1 Kings	1 Kgs
1 Chronicles	1 Chr	2 Kings	2 Kgs
2 Chronicles	2 Chr	Lamentations	Lam
<i>Colossians</i>	<i>Col</i>	Leviticus	Lev
<i>1 Corinthians</i>	<i>1 Cor</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>Luke</i>
<i>2 Corinthians</i>	<i>2 Cor</i>	Malachi	Mal
Daniel	Dan	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Mark</i>
Deuteronomy	Deut	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Matt</i>
Ecclesiastes	Eccl	Micah	Mic
<i>Ephesians</i>	<i>Eph</i>	Nahum	Nah
Esther	Esth	Nehemiah	Neh
Exodus	Exod	Numbers	Num
Ezekiel	Ezek	Obadiah	Obad
Ezra	Ezra	<i>1 Peter</i>	<i>1 Pet</i>
<i>Galatians</i>	<i>Gal</i>	<i>2 Peter</i>	<i>2 Pet</i>
Genesis	Gen	<i>Philemon</i>	<i>Phm</i>
Habakkuk	Hab	<i>Philippians</i>	<i>Php</i>
Haggai	Hag	Proverbs	Prov
<i>Hebrews</i>	<i>Heb</i>	Psalms	Ps
Hosea	Hos	<i>Revelation</i>	<i>Rev</i>
Isaiah	Isa	<i>Romans</i>	<i>Rom</i>
<i>James</i>	<i>Jas</i>	Ruth	Ruth
Jeremiah	Jer	1 Samuel	1 Sam
Job	Job	2 Samuel	2 Sam
Joel	Joel	Song of Songs	Song
<i>John</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>1 Thessalonians</i>	<i>1 Thess</i>
<i>1 John</i>	<i>1 John</i>	<i>2 Thessalonians</i>	<i>2 Thess</i>
<i>2 John</i>	<i>2 John</i>	<i>1 Timothy</i>	<i>1 Tim</i>
<i>3 John</i>	<i>3 John</i>	<i>2 Timothy</i>	<i>2 Tim</i>
Jonah	Jonah	<i>Titus</i>	<i>Titus</i>
Joshua	Josh	Zechariah	Zech
<i>Jude</i>	<i>Jude</i>	Zephaniah	Zeph

# Preface

The *Easy-to-Read Version* has been prepared especially for people who want an English translation that accurately expresses the full meaning of the original text in a style that is clear and easy to understand. It is especially helpful for those who have limited experience with English, including children and people who are just learning English. It is designed to help such people overcome or avoid the most common difficulties to reading with understanding.

The writers of Scripture, especially those who produced the New Testament writings, showed by the language style they used that they were interested in good communication. The translators of this English version considered this an important example to follow. So they worked to express the meaning of the Biblical text in a form that would be simple and natural. They used language that, instead of working as a barrier to understanding, would provide a key to unlock the truths of the Scriptures for a large segment of the English-speaking world.

The *Easy-to-Read Version* of the Bible is based directly on the original languages of Scripture. In the case of the Old Testament, the translators followed the Hebrew Masoretic Text as it is found in the latest printed edition of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1984), while referring occasionally to some earlier readings in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In some cases, they also followed the *Septuagint* (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where it has readings that are actually earlier than any known Hebrew manuscript. For the New Testament, the source text was that which is found in both the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* (fourth revised edition, 1993) and the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (twenty-seventh edition, 1993). The occasional variation from these printed editions was guided by reference to the findings of more recent scholarship.

In the Old Testament two different words are translated "Lord." When "Lord" is printed with small capital letters (LORD), it represents the Hebrew YHWH, which in some versions has been transliterated into English as "Jehovah" or "Yahweh." In a few cases, where YHWH is obviously used as the name of God or in place names, it is translated "Yahweh." When the word "Lord" contains lower case letters, it represents the Hebrew word *adonai* or a pronoun that refers to either *adonai* or YHWH. When *adonai* occurs together with YHWH, it is translated "Lord" and YHWH is translated GOD, as in "the Lord GOD." In cases where the speaker does not recognize that the one being addressed is God, *adonai* may be translated "Sir." The same is true in the New Testament for the Greek word *kurios*, which may be translated either "Lord" or "Sir," depending on the context.

Several special features are used to aid understanding. Some words or phrases that need fuller explanation are marked by a letter of the alphabet (<sup>a</sup>) linking them to footnotes that provide explanations or other important information. Included in such footnotes are references to Scripture quotations and information about alternate readings where there are significant differences in the early copies of the Hebrew or Greek

text. Many other words or names that may be unfamiliar or need additional explanation can be found in a Word List at the end of the Bible.

As in all translations, words that are implied by the context are often supplied in the text to make the meaning clear. For example, the phrase that in Greek is simply “David of Jesse” is always translated into English as “David the son of Jesse.” If such explanatory words or phrases are extensive or unusual, they may be marked by half brackets. For example, in the translation, “The Lord gave this command to Moses [for the people],” the phrase in half brackets is added to avoid any misunderstanding that the Lord’s command was intended only for Moses and not for all the people.

Finally, in the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament, the section headings are often followed by cross references. These identify where the same or similar material is found in one or more of the other Gospels.

# Introduction

The word Bible comes from a Greek word meaning “books.” The Bible is actually two collections of books, often referred to as the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament.” The word translated “testament” was used to mean a covenant or agreement. It refers to God’s promise to bless his people. The Old Testament is the collection of writings that relate to the agreement God made with the descendants of Jacob (also called Israel) in the time of Moses. The New Testament is the collection of writings that relate to the agreement God made with all people who believe in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament writings tell about the great things God did for the people of Israel and his plan for them as his chosen people to bring his blessings to the whole world. These writings look forward to the coming of a savior or “Messiah” (see CHRIST in the Word List). The New Testament writings continue the Old Testament story. They describe the coming of that savior (Jesus Christ) and the meaning of his coming for all people. The Old Testament is important for understanding the New Testament, because it provides the necessary background. And the New Testament completes the story of salvation that began in the Old Testament.

## THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament writings are a collection of thirty-nine different books produced by many different authors. They were written mainly in Hebrew, the language of ancient Israel. There are a few sections in Aramaic, an international language in Bible times. Portions of the Old Testament were written over 3500 years ago, and more than 1000 years passed between the writing of the first book and the last. In this collection there are books of law, history, prose, songs, poetry, and wise sayings.

The Old Testament is often divided into three main sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings. The Law contains five books called “The Five Books of Moses.” The first book is *Genesis*. It tells about the beginning of the world as we know it, the first man and woman, and their first sin against God. It tells about the Great Flood and the family God saved through that flood, and it tells about the beginnings of the nation of Israel, the people God chose to use for a special purpose.

## THE STORY OF ABRAHAM

God made an agreement with Abraham, a great man of faith. In that agreement God promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation and to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan. Abraham was circumcised to show that he had accepted the agreement, and circumcision became the proof of the agreement between God and his people. Abraham did not know how God would do what he had promised but trusted him to make it happen. This pleased God very much.

God told Abraham to leave his home in Mesopotamia and led him to Canaan (later called the land of Israel, which was approximately the same geographical area known today as Palestine). In his old age Abraham had a son named Isaac, who had a son

named Jacob. Jacob (also called Israel) had twelve sons and a daughter. This family became the nation of Israel, but it never forgot its tribal origin. It continued to refer to itself as the twelve tribes of Israel—descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. The three main ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel)—are known as the “fathers” or “patriarchs” of Israel.

Abraham was also a “father” of another kind. Many times in ancient Israel, God called certain people to speak for him. These special people, or prophets, were God’s representatives to the rest of his people. Through the prophets God gave the people of Israel promises, warnings, laws, teachings, lessons drawn from past experiences, and lessons based on future events. Abraham “the Hebrew” is the first prophet mentioned in the Scriptures.

### **ISRAEL SET FREE FROM SLAVERY**

The family of Jacob (Israel) grew to include about 70 of his direct descendants. One of his sons, Joseph, became a high official in Egypt. Times were hard, so Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, where there was plenty of food and life was easier. This tribe of Hebrews grew to be a small nation, and the Pharaoh (the title or name of the king of Egypt) made them serve as slaves. The book of *Exodus* tells about how finally, after 400 years, God used the prophet Moses to free the people of Israel from slavery and lead them eventually to settle again in Palestine. The price for freedom was high, but the Egyptians were the ones who had to pay. God punished them with a series of ten plagues, demanding with each one that his chosen people be set free. But following each disaster, the king stubbornly refused to free them. The final plague, however, brought about the death of the firstborn sons of all the families of Egypt, including the Pharaoh’s son. This caused the king finally to agree to let the Israelites go free.

The people of Israel had been given special preparations to make for their trip to freedom. Dressed and ready for the escape, each family killed and roasted a lamb. They put the blood from the lamb on their doorposts as a special sign to God. They hurriedly baked bread without yeast and ate their meal. That night the Lord went through the land. If the blood of the lamb was not on the doorposts, the firstborn of that family died. This is why the firstborn sons of the Egyptians were put to death, while the Lord “passed over” the homes of his people. This night and the events surrounding it were later remembered in many ways in the worship and sacrifices of the people of Israel. After the Israelite slaves were set free and were leaving Egypt, the Pharaoh changed his mind again. He sent his army to catch them and bring them back, but God saved his people. He divided the Red Sea, making a path through it to lead them to freedom on the other side. Then he released the waters to destroy the army of Egyptians that was following them. After Moses led the people in a song of praise to God for his protection and kindness, he led them on a long and difficult journey. Finally, they came to a mountain in the desert of Sinai on the Arabian Peninsula, where God made a special agreement with his people.

### **THE LAW OF MOSES**

God’s rescue of the people of Israel and his agreement with them at Mount Sinai set this nation apart from all others. This agreement contained promises and laws for the people of Israel. A part of this agreement, known as the Ten Commandments, was written by God on two stone tablets and given to the people. These commands contain the

basic principles for the kind of life God wanted the people of Israel to live, including their duty to God, family, and others.

The Ten Commandments and the rest of the rules and teachings given at Mount Sinai became known as “the Law of Moses” or simply “the law.” Many times these terms are used to refer to the first five books of the Scriptures and often to the entire Old Testament.

Besides the Ten Commandments and other rules of conduct, the Law of Moses contains rules about priests, sacrifices, worship, and holy days. These rules are found in the book of *Leviticus*. According to the Law of Moses, all priests and their helpers came from the tribe of Levi. These helpers were called “Levites.” The most important priest was called the high priest.

The Law of Moses included instructions for building the Holy Tent (“Tabernacle”), or Meeting Tent, the place where the people of Israel went to worship God. It also has instructions for making all the things to be used in their worship. This prepared the Israelites for the building of the Temple, the holy building in Jerusalem on Mount Zion, where the people would later go to worship God. The rules about sacrifices and worship forced the people to see that they sinned against each other and against God. But they also gave the people a way to be forgiven and to be reunited with one another and with God. These sacrifices prepared the way for a better understanding of the sacrifice God was preparing to give for all the people of the world.

The Law of Moses also contained instructions for celebrating a number of holy days or festivals. Each festival had its own special meaning. Some festivals were happy occasions to celebrate special times of the year, especially harvest times. These included the Festival of Harvest in the spring and the Festival of Shelters in the fall. (See these terms in the Word List.)

Other festivals were for remembering the wonderful things God had done for his people. Passover was this kind of holy day. Each family relived the escape from Egypt, gathering in their homes to remember this part of Israel’s history and to sing songs of praise to God. A lamb was slaughtered and the meal prepared. Each cup of wine and piece of food reminded the people of the things God had done to save them from a life of pain and sadness. One holy day, in particular, was very serious. Every year, on the Day of Atonement, the people had to remember the many wrong things they had done to others and to God. This was a day of sadness, and the people did not eat. But on that day the high priest offered special sacrifices to “cover over” or atone for their sins.

The agreement between God and Israel was very important to the writers of the Old Testament. Almost all the books of the Prophets and Holy Writings are based on the fact that the nation of Israel, and every citizen of Israel, had made a very special agreement with their God. They called it the “agreement of the LORD” or simply “the agreement.” Their books of history interpret events in light of the agreement: If the individual or nation was faithful to God and the agreement, then God rewarded them. If the people abandoned the agreement, then God punished them. God sent his prophets to remind the people of their agreement with him. The poets of Israel sang of the wonderful things God did for his obedient people, and they mourned the pain and punishments that came to those who disobeyed. These writers based their concepts of right and wrong on the teaching of the agreement. And when innocent people suffered, the poets struggled to understand why.

## THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

The story of ancient Israel is the story of people who were always leaving God, God rescuing the people, the people turning back to God and eventually leaving him again. This cycle began almost as soon as the people had accepted God's agreement, and it was repeated again and again. At Mount Sinai the people of Israel agreed to follow God, and then they rebelled and were forced to wander 40 years in the desert. Finally, Moses' helper, Joshua, led the people into the promised land. Then came the battles to gain control of the different areas and settle the first parts of what later came to be known as the land of Israel. For the first few centuries after this settlement, the people were governed by local leaders called judges.

Eventually, the people wanted a king. The first king God appointed for them was Saul. But Saul did not obey God, so God chose a shepherd boy named David to be the new king. The prophet Samuel came and poured oil on his head, anointing him king of Israel. God promised David that the future kings of Israel would be his descendants from the tribe of Judah. David conquered the city of Jerusalem and made it his capital and the future site of the Temple. He organized the priests, prophets, songwriters, musicians, and singers for the Temple worship. David even wrote many of the songs (or psalms) himself, but God did not let him build the Temple.

When David was old and about to die, with God's blessing he made his son Solomon king of Israel. David warned his son to always follow God and obey the agreement. As king, Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem that David had planned, and he expanded Israel's borders. At this time Israel was at the high point of its power. Solomon became famous, and Israel became strong.

## JUDAH AND ISRAEL—THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

At Solomon's death there was disagreement and a struggle among the people, and the nation was divided. The northern ten tribes called themselves Israel. The southern tribes called themselves Judah. (The modern term "Jew" comes from this name.) Judah remained loyal to the agreement, and David's dynasty (family of kings) continued ruling in Jerusalem for several hundred years.

In the northern kingdom (Israel) numerous kings and dynasties came and went, because the people did not follow the agreement. The kings of Israel had several capital cities at various times, the last of which was Samaria. In order to strengthen their hold on the people, the kings of Israel changed the way to worship God. They chose new priests and built two new temples—one at Dan (on the northern border of Israel) and the other at Bethel (along Israel's border with Judah). There were many wars between Israel and Judah.

During this time of civil war and troubles, God sent many prophets to Judah and Israel. Some of the prophets were priests; others were farmers. Some were advisors to kings; others lived a much simpler life. Some of the prophets wrote their teachings or prophecies; many others did not. But all the prophets spoke for justice, fairness, and the need to depend on God for help.

Many prophets warned that the people would be defeated and scattered if they did not turn back to God. Some prophets saw visions of future glories as well as future punishments. Many of them looked forward to the time when a new king would come to rule the kingdom. Some saw this king as a descendant of David who would lead the people of God into a new Golden Age. Some spoke of this king as ruling forever over an eternal kingdom. Others saw him as a servant who would suffer many things in order to

bring his people back to God. But all of them saw him as the Messiah, the one anointed (chosen) by God to bring in a new age.

### **THE DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH**

The people of Israel did not listen to God's warnings. So in 722/721 B.C. Samaria fell to the invading Assyrians. The people of Israel were taken from their homes and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire, lost forever to their brothers and sisters in Judah. Then the Assyrians brought in foreigners to resettle the land of Israel. These people were taught about the religion of Judah and Israel, and many of them tried to follow the agreement. These people came to be known as the Samaritans. The Assyrians tried to invade Judah. Many cities fell to the invaders, but God saved Jerusalem. The defeated king of Assyria returned to his homeland, and there he was murdered by two of his sons. So Judah was saved.

For a while the people of Judah changed. They began to obey God, but only for a short time. They, too, were finally defeated and scattered. The nation of Babylon rose to power and invaded Judah. At first they took only a few important people away as captives. But a few years later, in 587/586 B.C., they returned to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. Some of the people escaped to Egypt, but most of them were taken as slaves to Babylon. Again God sent prophets to the people, and they began to listen. It seems that the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon brought about a real change in the people. The prophets spoke more and more about the new king and his kingdom. One of the prophets, Jeremiah, even spoke of a new agreement—an agreement that would not be written on tablets of stone, but would be in the hearts of God's people.

### **THE RETURN TO PALESTINE**

Meanwhile, Cyrus came to power over the Persian Empire and conquered Babylon. Cyrus allowed people to return to their homelands. So after 70 years of exile, many of the people of Judah went back home. The people tried to rebuild their nation, but Judah remained small and weak. The people rebuilt the Temple, although it was not as beautiful as the one Solomon had built. Many of the people truly turned to God and began studying the Law, the writings of the prophets, and the other holy writings. Many men became scribes (special scholars), who made copies of the Scriptures. Eventually, these men organized schools for studying the Scriptures. The people began meeting together on the Sabbath (Saturday) to study, pray, and worship God together. In their synagogues (meetings) they studied the Scriptures, and many people began looking for the Messiah to come.

In the West, Alexander the Great gained control of Greece and soon conquered the world. He spread the Greek language as well as the customs and culture of Greece to many parts of the world. When he died, his kingdom was divided. Soon another empire grew and gained control of a large part of the known world, including Palestine, where the people of Judah lived.

The new rulers, the Romans, were often cruel and harsh, and the Jewish people were proud and not willing to submit to Roman rule. In these troubled times there were many Jews who were looking for the Messiah to come in their own lifetime. They wanted to be ruled only by God and the Messiah who God had promised to send them. They did not understand that God planned to save the world through the Messiah. They thought that God's plan was to save the Jews from the world! Some were content to wait

for God to send his Messiah. Others thought that they should “help” God establish his new kingdom by making sure that the Law of Moses was observed and that the Temple, the land, and the Jewish people were kept pure. In order to make this happen, they were willing to suffer, to die, or to kill anyone, foreigners or other Jews, who threatened these goals. Such Jews eventually came to be known as “Zealots.”

### **THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS GROUPS**

By the first century B.C., the Law of Moses had become extremely important to the Jews. They had studied and argued over it for centuries. The people understood the law in different ways, but many Jews were ready to die for that law. There were three major religious groups among the Jews, and there were scribes (scholars or experts in the law) in each group.

#### **The Sadducees**

One of the groups was called the Sadducees. This name probably comes from the name Zadok, the high priest in King David’s time. Many of the priests and the people in authority were Sadducees. These men accepted only the law (the five books of Moses) as their authority in religious matters. The Law of Moses taught many things about the priests and sacrifices, but it did not teach about life after death. So the Sadducees did not believe that people would ever be raised from death.

#### **The Pharisees**

Another group was called the Pharisees. This name comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to interpret (explain)” or “to separate.” These men tried to teach or interpret the Law of Moses to the common people. The Pharisees believed that there was an oral tradition going back to Moses’ time. They believed that people of each generation could interpret the law in a way that would allow it to meet the needs of that generation. This meant that the Pharisees could accept not only the Law of Moses as their authority, but also the Prophets, the Holy Writings, and even their own traditions. These men tried very hard to follow the law and their traditions. So they were very careful about what they ate and what they touched. They were careful about washing their hands and bathing. They also believed that people would be raised from death, because they understood many of the prophets to say that would happen.

#### **The Essenes**

The third major group was the Essenes. Many of the priests in Jerusalem did not live the way God wanted them to. Also, the Romans had appointed many of the high priests, and some of these men were not qualified according to the Law of Moses. Because of this, the Essenes did not think that the worship and sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple were being done properly. So they moved out into the Judean desert to live. They formed their own community, where only other Essenes could come and live. They fasted, prayed, and waited for God to send the Messiah to purify the Temple and the priesthood. Many scholars believe that the Essenes were connected in some way with the Qumran Community and the many ancient writings (including the Dead Sea Scrolls) found at Qumran and other places in that area of the Judean desert.

### **THE NEW TESTAMENT**

God had begun his plan. He had chosen a special nation. He had made an agreement

with those people that would prepare them to understand his justice and his goodness. Through prophets and poets he had revealed his plan to bless the world by establishing a perfect spiritual “kingdom” based on a new and better agreement. This plan would begin with the coming of the promised Messiah. The prophets had spoken of his coming in great detail. They had told where the Messiah would be born, the kind of person he would be, and the work he would have to do. It was now time for the Messiah to come and begin the new agreement.

The part of the Bible that is now called the New Testament (which means “new agreement”) describes how God’s new agreement was revealed and put into effect by Jesus, who was the Christ (meaning “the Anointed One,” the Messiah). This collection of writings teaches that this agreement was to be for all people. And it tells how people in the first century responded to God’s kind offer of love and became a part of the new agreement. The New Testament writings explain how many things that were part of the first agreement are given new meaning under the new agreement, especially ideas related to Israelite worship, such as temple, priesthood, and sacrifice. These writings give instructions to God’s people about how to live in this world. They also describe the blessings that God promises his people for a full and meaningful life here and for life with him after death.

The New Testament writings include twenty-seven different “books” by at least eight different writers. All of them wrote in Greek, which was widely spoken in the first-century world. More than half of the total writing was done by four “apostles,” men chosen by Jesus to be his special representatives or helpers. Three of these, Matthew, John, and Peter, were among the twelve closest followers of Jesus during his life on earth. The fourth, Paul, was chosen as an apostle later by Jesus through a miraculous appearance.

The first four books, called “Gospels,” are separate accounts of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Generally, these books emphasize Jesus’ teaching, the purpose of his appearance on earth, and the special significance of his death, rather than just the historical facts of his life. This is especially true of the fourth book, the *Gospel of John*. The first three Gospels are very similar in content. In fact, much of the material in one is found in one or both of the others. There are differing points of emphasis in each one, however, and each writer seems to have been addressing a different audience, with perhaps a different goal or goals in view.

The four Gospels are followed by *Acts*, a history of the events following the death of Jesus. It describes how God’s offer of love to all people was announced throughout the world by Jesus’ followers. It tells how the proclaiming of this “gospel” or “Good News” resulted in the conversion of thousands of people throughout Palestine and the Roman world to faith in Jesus Christ. The book of *Acts* was written by a medical doctor named Luke, an eyewitness of much that he recorded. Luke was also the author of the third Gospel. His two books make a logical unit with *Acts* being the natural sequel to his account of the life of Jesus.

Following *Acts*, there is a collection of letters written to individuals or groups of believers in Christ. These letters were sent from leaders in the faith, such as Paul and Peter, two of Jesus’ apostles. These letters were written to help the people of that time deal with problems they were facing. They serve to inform, correct, teach, and encourage not only those people but all who become followers of Jesus in regard to their faith, their life together, and their life in the world.

The final book of the New Testament, *Revelation*, is very different from all the others, although its purpose is similar to that of other letters to churches. It begins with words

of criticism, encouragement, and instruction addressed to groups of believers in seven different cities of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). But it continues with a picture of spiritual warfare that is of interest to all followers of Christ. It uses highly figurative language and tells of visions seen by the author, the apostle John. Many of the figures and images are from the Old Testament and can best be understood by comparing them to the Old Testament writings. This last book of the New Testament is a message of hope given to God's people through the Holy Spirit. This message assures believers in Jesus Christ of ultimate victory over the forces of evil.

### THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The following additional information on each of the New Testament books should be helpful in preparation for reading each book:

*Matthew.* Matthew is the name of one of Jesus' twelve closest followers. Matthew was a Jewish tax collector when Jesus chose him as one of his apostles. Matthew's writing shows the influence of his Jewish background and interests. He seems especially interested in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the life of Jesus. Matthew really focuses his book, however, around the teaching of Jesus.

*Mark.* John Mark was a young companion to some of the apostles. Mark's style of writing is brief and full of action. Unlike Matthew and Luke, he shows very little interest in Jesus' teachings. Mark apparently aimed his writing at the Roman, non-Jewish mind and focuses on the actions of Jesus that prove him to be the Son of God. Mark seems mainly interested in people knowing that Jesus came to earth for the purpose of saving them from the consequences of sin.

*Luke.* This is one of two books written by a traveling companion of the apostle Paul. Luke was a well-educated medical doctor and a talented writer. He seems familiar with Mark's Gospel and much of the material in the Gospel of Matthew, but he chooses to include mainly the parts that would be attractive and understandable to his non-Jewish audience. More than the other Gospel writers, he seems interested in an orderly account of Jesus' life as a historical reality. Emphasis, however, is not on the events in Jesus' life, but on Jesus himself as a loving, caring person who taught people the real meaning of life and who reached out to the needs of all people with power to help and save.

*John.* This Gospel is very different from the first three. This is seen immediately from the beautiful but profound introduction. John introduces much material that is not found in the other Gospels. His main interest is in proving Jesus to be the Messiah (Christ), the divine Son of God and savior of the world.

*Acts.* This book, written by Luke, takes up where his first book ends. It begins with Jesus' instructions to his followers to go throughout the world announcing the "Good News," a message about God's love for all people. Jesus wanted them to tell what they now knew about his divine mission to save people from the consequences of their wrongdoing. Luke traces the exciting fulfillment of this assignment, focusing on the activities of two main characters, Peter and Paul. He shows how the movement that began shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus spread rapidly from a small beginning in Jerusalem into the surrounding regions of Judea and Samaria, and eventually to the farthest areas of the Roman empire.

The next group of New Testament writings consists of the Letters of Paul. The apostle Paul (originally named Saul) was a well-educated Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia (Southeast Turkey). Educated in Jerusalem, he was a leader among the Pharisees,

and he was violently opposed to the movement made up of followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus appeared to him in a vision, however, and changed the whole direction of his life. About ten years later, he began traveling all over the Roman world to proclaim the message about Christ. During this period he wrote many letters to churches (groups of believers in Christ) and to individuals. Thirteen of these letters are included in the New Testament.

Paul's letter to the *Romans* is the longest and fullest of all his letters. Most of his letters are to groups of believers in cities where he had pioneered in teaching people about Christ and forming churches. However, when he wrote this letter to "Christ followers" living in Rome, he had never been there. He was in Greece about 57 A.D., and not being able to travel on to Rome as he had wanted, he wrote his teaching in this letter. Besides dealing with a number of other issues, he includes a carefully-written presentation of the fundamental truths regarding faith in Jesus.

The letters of *1 Corinthians* and *2 Corinthians* are two of several that Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, a city in southern Greece. In the first of these two letters, Paul deals with some problems that had developed among the believers there and answers questions that some of them had sent to him. Among the many subjects Paul covers are unity, marriage, sexual sin, divorce, and Jewish customs. Of particular interest is chapter 13, Paul's famous writing on love, which he sees as the solution to their problems. The second letter follows up on the Corinthians' response to the first letter.

Paul's letter to the *Galatians* deals with a problem of a different kind among the believers in Galatia. Gal had proclaimed the message about Christ there and had formed some churches. Then a group of Jewish teachers went there and taught some ideas that were very different from the true teaching of Christ. The problem was a crucial one, because it involved the basis for a person's good relationship with God. Being unable to travel to Galatia at the time, Paul strongly confronted the problem in this letter. Like his letter to the Romans, it also includes a presentation of the basics of faith in Jesus, but for a different reason.

Paul wrote the letter to the *Ephesians* while he was in prison, but it is not certain where or when. The theme of this letter is God's plan to bring all people together under the rule of Christ. Paul encourages believers to live their lives in harmony with each other and with complete commitment to God's purpose for them.

Paul's letter to the *Philippians* was also written from prison, probably from Rome. Paul was facing many troubles at the time, but he trusted God, and this letter is full of confidence and joy. Paul wrote to encourage the believers in Philippi and to thank them for some financial help they had sent to him.

Paul wrote the letter to the *Colossians* to confront some false teachings that were troubling the church in Colossae, a city in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Parts of this letter are similar to the letter to the Ephesians. Paul gives some practical lessons for living the way a follower of Christ should.

The letters of *1 Thessalonians* and *2 Thessalonians* were probably among the first of Paul's letters. On Paul's first trip to Macedonia (northern Greece), he told the people of Thessalonica the message about Christ. Many people believed, but Paul had to leave after a short time. Paul wrote to encourage the people in their new faith. He also discusses some things the people did not understand, especially concerning Christ's expected return. The second letter continues this discussion.

The letters of *1 Timothy*, *2 Timothy*, and *Titus* were written toward the end of Paul's life to two of his close companions. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete

to help with some problems about the organization and function of the churches there. Apparently Timothy and Titus were to help the churches in these places prepare for independent leadership and operation. In the first letter to Timothy and the letter to Titus, Paul gives some guidelines for the selection of leaders as well as instructions for dealing with various problems and situations. The second letter to Timothy, written from prison as Paul faced what he felt was the end of his life, is very personal. The letter is full of advice and encouragement as he urges Timothy to follow his own example of faith, courage, and endurance.

*Philemon* is a short letter written by Paul at the same time he wrote the letter to the Colossians. Philemon, a believer in Colossae, was the master of a runaway slave Onesimus, who had become a follower of Christ through Paul's influence. The letter is Paul's appeal to Philemon to forgive Onesimus and welcome him back.

In addition to the letters of Paul, there are eight letters written by other followers of Jesus. The author of *Hebrews* is unknown, but it is clear that it was written to Jewish believers in Christ. They were in danger of being pulled away from their belief in Jesus. This letter was written to encourage and strengthen the faith of these believers. The writer emphasizes the superiority of Jesus Christ over all other beings and persons. He teaches that the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ and the "better agreement" are superior to the Old Testament priesthood and the "first agreement." The writer closes by encouraging the people to trust in God and to live for Him.

The word "practical" is almost always used in describing the letter of *James*, "a servant" of God and Jesus. Some people think this is one of Jesus' brothers. The Jewish background of James is clear as he teaches about fairness and justice, helping the poor, friendship with the world, wisdom, self-control, trials and temptations, doing and hearing, and faith and works. He also encourages people to pray and be patient.

The letters of *1 Peter* and *2 Peter* were written by the apostle Peter to followers of Christ who were living in many different places. Peter teaches such believers about their living hope and their real home in heaven. Because of the hard times they are facing, Peter assures them that God has not forgotten them. They will be better because of their suffering. He reminds them that God has blessed them and has forgiven their sins through Jesus Christ. They should respond by living right. In his second letter, the apostle confronts false teachers. He teaches about true knowledge and the second coming of Christ.

The letters of *1 John*, *2 John*, and *3 John* were written by the apostle John. John's letters of love assure the believers that God will always accept them. John teaches that people show their love to God by loving the people around them and by doing the things God wants them to do. The second and third letters appeal to Christ's followers to love one another, and they warn against false teachers and ungodly behavior.

The writer of the letter *Jude* is a brother of James and probably a brother of Jesus. This letter encourages faithfulness and speaks out against troublemakers and false teachers.

The *Revelation* of the apostle John begins with words of criticism, encouragement, and instruction addressed to groups of believers in seven different cities of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). But it continues with a picture of spiritual warfare that is of interest to all followers of Christ. It uses highly figurative language as it tells of visions seen by the author. Many of the figures and images are from the Old Testament and can best be understood by comparing them to Old Testament writings. This last book of the New

Testament writings assures believers of ultimate victory over the forces of evil through the power of God and Jesus Christ, their leader and helper.

### **THE BIBLE AND TODAY'S READER**

Today's reader of the Bible should keep in mind that these books were written thousands of years ago for people who lived in cultures very different from ours today. Because of the distance between the ancient world and our own, you may find parts of the Bible that seem somewhat strange. A fuller understanding of these unfamiliar customs or ideas may require some additional information about life in the age of the Bible. But the lessons to be learned from the Biblical accounts are important in any age. For example, Jesus told a story about a man sowing grain in a field that had different types of soil conditions. Those exact conditions may be unfamiliar to a person today, but the lessons Jesus draws from the example are appropriate for people in any time or place. The Bible remains meaningful for our own time, because it deals with people's basic spiritual needs, which never change.

If you read the Bible with an open mind, you can expect to receive many benefits. You will gain knowledge about the history and culture of the ancient world. You will learn about the life and teachings of Jesus, God's Chosen King, and what it means to be his follower. You will gain basic spiritual insights and learn practical lessons for living a dynamic and joy-filled life. You will find answers to life's most difficult questions. There are, therefore, many good reasons for reading this book, and if you read it with a sincere and receptive spirit, you may well discover God's purpose for your life.



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