

# 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 faults, 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**

<b>The Old Testament</b>	The first five books are the <b>Law</b> , also known as the <b>Torah</b> ('law' in Hebrew) or <b>Pentateuch</b> ('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.	<b>Genesis Exodus Leviticus</b> <b>Numbers Deuteronomy</b>
	The <b>Old Testament Historical</b> 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.	Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther
	The <b>Wisdom literature</b> 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.	<b>Job Psalms</b> <b>Proverbs Ecclesiastes</b> Song of Songs
	The books of <b>Prophecy</b> 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.	<b>Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel</b> Daniel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi
	The <b>Deuterocanonical books</b> (sometimes called the <b>apocrypha</b> ) 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.	<b>Tobit Judith Wisdom of Solomon Sirach Baruch</b> 1 Maccabees 2 Maccabees Additions to Daniel and Esther
<b>The New Testament</b>	The four <b>Gospels</b> 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.	<b>Matthew Mark</b> <b>Luke John</b>
	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.	<b>Acts</b>
	The <b>epistles</b> ('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.	<b>Romans 1 Corinthians</b> 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon <b>Hebrews</b> James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude
	The only <b>apocalyptic book</b> in the New Testament is Revelation. The word 'apocalypse' means a revelation or unveiling of future events.	<b>Revelation</b>