



**ABOUT  
THE  
BIBLE**

## Preface

Millions of Christians all over the world believe that the Bible is the Word of God and profess to read it regularly, study it and regard it as a guideline for their lives.

Christians of all ages, and especially young people, are invited to make the Bible an essential part of their lives by reading and studying it in depth. This edition offers interesting and relevant material which directs the reader back to the Scriptures each time so that everyone who reads it can ultimately state with conviction:

*I treasure your word  
above all else;  
it keeps me from sinning  
against you. (Ps 119:11)*

### **News flash!**

*The Jewish Bible contains exactly the same books as the Old Testament in the Christian Bible but is arranged in a different order.*

Apart from a short overview describing how the Bible came into existence and how it was compiled, the additional material also provides numerous applications of Scriptures specially selected to keep young readers on the right path.

## Did you know?

The word Bible is derived from the Greek word **biblia** or “books”, which means the Bible you hold in your hand is actually a miniature library containing a collection of **66** books - **39** books in the Old Testament and **27** books in the New Testament.

## Who wrote the Bible?

The Bible is a remarkable book which came into being over a period of at least **1200 years**. It was written by a **variety of authors** from shepherds to kings as well as prophets like Moses, Daniel and Isaiah. These included learned people like Ezra, kings such as David and Solomon and apostles of Jesus Christ such as Peter and Paul.

Because so many authors wrote from such diverse points of view and circumstances, the reader “hears” the Word of God from **different perspectives**. The miracle of the Bible is that the different books all contain the **same basic message** and concept of who God is. The Bible is truly an awesome book because it speaks to people of all generations and nationalities throughout the ages.

## When was the Bible written?

Long before the invention of writing ( $\pm$  4th millennium BC) the history of God's people was passed on **by word of mouth** from generation to generation by fathers, mothers, leaders in the community and storytellers. As time passed these stories were written down on clay tablets, scrolls of animal hide (leather parchment) and **papyrus scrolls**. The recording and rewriting of these manuscripts went on for many centuries as the scrolls decayed over time. In fact, the Hebrews were so concerned about preserving their writings that they became known as "The People of the Book".



### Newsflash!

The Old Testament books were originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic.

The books of the **Old Testament** came into existence over a period of a thousand years or more. The collection of books, which is divided into three categories (the Law, the Prophets and Writings), was written down during significant crisis periods in the history of the Jewish nation. By the **end of the 1st Century AD** the books of the Hebrew Old Testament had been established. The Greek translation of the Old Testament used in the early church, contained additional books (Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books) which are not part of the Protestant Bible, but are still used by the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Reformation, Protestant churches have used the books of the Hebrew Old Testament only.

The most important laws God gave to his people were the Ten Commandments.  
(Ex 20 or Deut 5)



The Old Testament consists of the following sections:

### The Law

The first five books of the Old Testament from **Genesis to Deuteronomy** are called the law books. These are also referred to as the **Pentateuch** (five scrolls). It tells the story of creation and God's covenant with the Jewish people chosen by him to be his people. It tells the story of many characters who, despite their human weaknesses, are regarded as heroes of the faith.

### Newsflash!

Did you know that Abraham was the 1st person in the Bible to be called a Hebrew?

## History Books

The next twelve books from **Joshua to Esther** relate the history of Israel after their exodus or journey from Egypt through the desert into the land Canaan. We also read about their leaders and kings, their exile to Babylon and their return to Jerusalem.

## Poetry Books

The five books from **Job to Song of Songs** are called the poetic and wisdom books where poetry is used to teach, inspire and worship. The book of Job especially, is regarded as one of the world's literary masterpieces.

### Newsflash!

*The oldest man in the Bible was Methuselah, the strongest man was Samson and the wisest man was Solomon.*

## The Prophets

The 17 books from **Isaiah to Malachi** are known as the books of the prophets (such as Isaiah and Jeremiah). Their task was not only to warn of God's judgement and punishment but to bring God's promises of salvation and comfort to his people in exile.

The New Testament consists of the following sections:

### Newsflash!

*Variations of the words "Don't be afraid" occur 365 times in the Bible.*

The books of the **New Testament** were written relatively **soon after Christ's life on earth**. Paul's letters were written from the early fifties AD while the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were written by **eyewitnesses** between 60 and 100 AD. The complete New Testament was written down within a **century** after the events which are spoken of occurred. Within a century after the writing of the New Testament books, these books were accepted as **true and authentic** and were accepted as such by the general Christian community. By the **end of the 4th century** the entire New Testament was officially adopted by the church.

## Unified vision

The recurring message woven into all of these books confirms that Jesus was born of the family of David and died on the cross in keeping with the many prophecies and writings. He was buried and rose on the third day, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God. He sends his Holy Spirit to his followers empowering them to complete his work on earth.

The **New Testament** was originally written in **Greek** and consists of the following books:

## Historical books

The first five books consist of the **four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)** and the **Acts of the Apostles** which tell the story of Jesus' life, his death and resurrection. The **Book of Acts** which was **written by Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke**, is more than a history book. It describes the birth of the early church and how the Holy Spirit worked through Peter, Paul and others to spread the news about Jesus throughout the world.

**The letters** written by Paul, Peter, John and others to groups of Christians and congregations as well as to certain people in various locations across the ancient world, were written to help believers understand what the Gospel of Jesus Christ meant to them in practical terms and to help them live accordingly.

**Revelation** is the last book in the Bible. It is a vision of the new heaven and the new earth, but at the same time a prophetic book written to encourage believers in difficult circumstances while guiding them on the right path.



### Newsflash!

The sign of the fish, **ichthus**, was used by the early Christians as a secret sign to recognise other Christians. It stands for: **Iesous Christos Theou Uios Soter** (Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Saviour).

## Why can we trust the Bible?

People often question the truth and authenticity of the Bible we have today. The Bible itself tells us that it is the **inspired Word of God** and that God himself inspired human authors to write down the books of the Bible.

Paul puts it clearly to Timothy:

*Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live. (2 Tim 3:16-17)*

At the same time we often read in Scripture: **"The Lord God said to me"** or similar expressions which confirm that these are not just the words of men but the word of God. In **1 Thes 2:13b** we read:

### Newsflash!

The word **Christian** was used for the first time in **Acts 11:26**.

*It came from him, and it isn't something made up by humans.*



Codex Zacynthius

How accurately has the Bible been transmitted throughout the ages?

Although the original manuscripts (clay tablets, parchment and perishable papyrus scrolls) on which the Bible books were originally written no longer exist, **tens of thousands of Old Testament manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts** have been found throughout the ancient world which confirm the **reliability** of the Old Testament. The **Dead Sea Scrolls** dating from the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD contain some of the oldest manuscripts in existence confirming the reliability of the Old Testament text.

**Newsflash!**

*In 1947 walking along the Dead Sea, a little shepherd boy stumbled upon clay pots in a cave filled with antique scrolls which were copies of the Old Testament.*

As far as the New Testament goes, there are nearly **6 000 known manuscripts** and

fragments of manuscripts still in existence.

From the earliest times everything possible was done to prevent errors from occurring in the copying and rewriting of manuscripts. Among some groups a text was buried (in reverence for the text) if it contained more than three mistakes. Fortunately there were so many available manuscripts in existence, that they could be compared enabling scribes to compile the most reliable text possible.

Against this background, one can safely accept that the Bible you hold in your hands has been transmitted through the ages from generation to generation, **without significant changes or omissions**.

The Bible as a book is **anchored in the history** of mankind. It deals with historical nations, characters and events. At the same time it tells the **story of God's involvement** with mankind from creation till today. Through the centuries believers have testified that this library of books is the authentic Word of God in which we hear his voice to this day.

It is therefore with good reason that the Bible is still the **most widely published book in the world** despite many attempts from various quarters to destroy it or to dismiss it as mere tales told by storytellers.

**Newsflash!**

*A complete Bible is available in only 542 of the more than 6 500 languages in the world.*

## What does the Bible mean to me?

In *Psalms 119:105* the Psalmist says:

*Your word is a lamp  
That gives light  
wherever I walk.*

In *Romans 15:4* the Apostle Paul confirms the worth of the Scriptures in our lives: *And the Scriptures were written to teach and encourage us by giving us hope.*



Decorated manuscript

## How do I get answers to my questions?

The Bible is not like a manual or a website offering neat answers and ready-made solutions to various questions and problems. This book speaks to you when you are open to hearing the Word of God and **making it part of your daily life**.

It covers a wide range of issues, events and real life situations that confront readers today. Consequently, a variety of problems and issues are addressed by way of **example, advice and admonishment, as well as direct instructions**.

If at times it seems as if there is no Scripture passage which can be applied to a specific matter, there are usually **broad principles** that may be used as guidelines, e.g. the first commandment, "Do not worship any god except me" does not refer only to images of idols, but also to any possession or object that a person favours above God.

Ultimately, believing the message of the Bible and making it part of your life, is a **matter of faith**. May God, the author of this book inspire you to understand and believe his personal message to you, the reader.