

What is the Bible?

The Bible is a collection of individual books that comprise the Scriptures of the Protestant Christian canon. These books form a collection of ancient writings conveying the story about God and God's relationship to humankind. Organizationally, the Protestant Bible consists of sixty-six books. Thirty-nine of the books form the Old Testament, and twenty-seven form the New Testament.

According to at least one commentator, "The Bible is probably the most maligned Book that ever has been written" (McGee, 1991, p. vii). Although it has been attacked throughout the years, the Bible has ministered to millions of people around the world. This unique book continues to provide inspiration, illumination, interpretation, and illustration for people seeking meaning and fulfillment in their lives. Wayne Meeks (1993, p. xvii) has asserted that the Bible is one of the most familiar, most published, and most widely owned books in the world.

Translations

The original physical manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament have not survived over time. However, very old copies of some of the original handwritten manuscripts still exist and have been translated into many dialects from the original biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. This work of Bible translation is ongoing.

Translating the Bible involves determining the original text, establishing its meaning, and discovering the best way to express that meaning. In an introductory note, editors of the *Harper Collins Study Bible* report that the Bible is an ancient collection of books:

that were formed and written in cultures distant from our own not only in time and space but also in character. Indeed, what is required of us as readers is rather to enter, through these texts, into another world of meaning. Only when we have sensed the peculiarity and integrity of that other world can we build a bridge of understanding between it and our own. (Meeks, 1993, p. xviii)

Subtleties in interpretation exist from one version or translation to the next. In addition, some translations have been revised to incorporate inclusive language or subtle variations in words with multiple meanings. People seeking a deep understanding should practice reading and studying the Bible using a number of translations to enhance understanding and discernment in the present day.

Here, in *God of Our Fathers: Genesis*, the King James Version of the Bible is used. It has its foundation in the Church of England when James I ascended to the English throne. This translation was published in 1611 and has been revised a number of times since then (Achemier, 1996, p. 291). Seventeenth century English language is not familiar to most readers in the modern day. However, the King James Version, as a public domain text, is highly accessible and has been used widely in many churches for a number of years. What people get out of the Bible depends in part on their ability to interpret the text for themselves and apply its timeless wisdom to their everyday situations.

Documentary Hypothesis

In recent years, scholars have proposed that sources of the Bible were written at various times in the history of the Hebrew people. Readers interested in more information about the Documentary Hypothesis should refer to a good Bible dictionary for additional details.