

# THE BIBLE



## Canon of Scripture

The Bible is the source of Christianity's main beliefs and is considered to have been inspired in some way by God. Although it is usually referred to as one book, it is in fact a collection of different books written by many authors over a period of more than a thousand years.

In early times there was no need for a written holy book as religious accounts were passed on by the oral tradition because most people could not read or write. The stories were shared by word of mouth. Scribes began to write down parts of the oral tradition from around 1,000 BC. Similarly, the accounts of the life of Jesus were not recorded straight away as there was a strong belief that Jesus would return to earth very soon. The realisation that this was not the case and that eye witnesses were dying out, prompted the writing of the first New Testament writings. What became the accepted version of the Bible was agreed, after much discussion, by Pope Damasus I in the fourth century. The accepted list of the books that make up the Bible in the Catholic tradition is called the Canon of Scripture.



### Source of Wisdom and Authority

*'In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at the time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current.'* CCC110

## How the Bible is structured

The Bible is divided into two large sections called the Old and New Testament. The word 'testament' means 'covenant, which is an agreement between two different groups.

## Revelation and Inspiration

Christians describe the Bible as the Word of God. They believe that through the Bible God is making himself known to them; he is speaking to his people, providing them with a way to live and be holy. Christians believe that God reveals himself to humans in other forms too, for example, through creation, through other people and most importantly, in the person of Jesus. This is known as revelation. In Genesis, it is described how God breathed into Adam so that he could live. God's spirit was shared with human beings. Christians believe that God continues to send his spirit to guide people towards goodness and truth today, and this is known as inspiration. God's Holy Spirit guided the writers of the Bible, so that Bible is 'the Word of God'; meaning that the Holy Spirit inspired believers to accept God's message in their lives and in turn to share it with others.

## Literary Forms

Living in the current age provides us with a greater variety of forms of communication than our ancestors could have ever dreamed of: email, text messages, online newspapers as well as traditional books full of examples of poetry, fiction, non fiction and plays. It is very easy to misunderstand writing. Think about text messages; we sometimes get offended needlessly because we can't hear the tone of the persons writing, we only see the words themselves. To understand any piece of writing fully it is helpful to know who wrote it, when, why, what life was like at the time and the reason they wrote it in the first place. This is also true of the books contained in the Bible as there is a whole library full of variety included within it.

## Interpreting the Bible – The Catholic View

Not all Christians read or understand the Bible in the same way. The Catholic Church teaches that the authors of the Bible were inspired and gained truthful insights about God but that not everything they wrote was historically or literally accurate, for example, their understanding of science was very limited. The Church, therefore, asks that in order to fully understand what God wanted to reveal to humanity, readers should consider the context in which it was written and the meaning of the literary form used; a poem is very different from a piece of historical writing. For Catholics, the accounts given in Genesis 1-3 can be considered myths; stories that, whilst not being 'true', contain great 'truths'.

46 books

## The Old Testament

The Old Testament has 46 books according to the Catholic Canon; it begins with the origins of the universe and human beings. It traces the relationship between God and the Jewish people before the arrival of Jesus. It is made up of:

- ✓ **Law** – the first five books form the Pentateuch. These books give instructions on how to live life according to God and contain the Ten Commandments.
- ✓ **History** – Joshua, Samuel and Chronicles are some of the books that trace the history of God's people from when they entered the Promised Land, detailing how they were guided by God and encouraged to keep the Covenant God had made with Abraham and later with Moses.
- ✓ **Prophets** – a prophet is a messenger sent by God to inspire and challenge those who are failing to stay faithful to God; Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel are some of the most famous prophets.
- ✓ **Wisdom** – these books encourage people to stay close to God in their lives and come in the form of songs, poetry, prayers and sayings.

27 books

## The New Testament

The New Testament has 27 books according to the Catholic Canon; it contains the accounts of the life of Jesus and the growth of the Church after he had returned to heaven. This section of the Bible contains:

- ✓ **Gospels** - The books of 'Good News' that detail the life of Jesus. The four Gospel writers were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- ✓ **Acts of the Apostles** - these document the growth of the early Church.
- ✓ **Letters** – these were written by early Christian leaders, like Peter and Paul, to encourage, guide and sometimes criticise people in the Church.
- ✓ **Book of Revelation** – written by John, this is full of symbolism that some Christians believe refers to the end of the world.

## Other Christian Views

Other Christians, such as Fundamentalists, believe that God inspired the biblical writers, so the Bible does not contain any errors. It is just as accurate in today's world as it was when it was written, even if it seems to conflict with the modern world. Some Fundamentalists are literalists, taking everything in the Bible as being literally true.



Fundamentalist Christians would reject the discovery of fossils as evidence of evolution

## Knowledge Check

1. How many books in the Bible are there?
2. What does 'testament' translate to?
3. Christians believe that the authors of the Bible were guided. What were they guided by?
4. How do Catholics interpret the Bible?
5. Initially there was no need for the books of the Bible to be written. Why is this?
6. What is the term used to describe the accepted list of books that make up the Bible in the Catholic tradition?
7. What are the four types of writing in the Old Testament?
8. What are the four types of writing in the New Testament?

## Choose a Task

1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

### CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

## Exam Question

- b) Describe Catholic beliefs on the structure and origins of the Bible [5]*  
*b) Describe different Christian views on the interpretation of the Bible [5]*

# Summary

- The Bible was inspired by God and is an important source of authority for Christians
- God has made himself known through the Bible; he has revealed his love for all humanity and has given them guidance on how to live a life according to his laws
- The Bible contains many different kinds of literature, written by many different people over a very long period of time
- Christians have different views about how to interpret the writings in the Bible; Catholics accept the idea of a biblical myth, while most Fundamentalist Christians do not.
- The Catholic Church teaches that the Bible should be read in context. However, because it is divinely inspired, it is always much more than a piece of historical writing.
- There is also a diversity within Judaism regarding the nature of divinely inspired scripture.