

# Studying the Bible

(or if you want to call it something else 'Using the Bible')

A series on how to  
engage with your Bible  
and let the BOOK that we read, read us.

## Part I

### The Bible: a book?

"Yes, the bible is a book", so most people will answer. But is this really true?

If you are thinking in terms of books, it would be more precise to say that the Bible is whole library. From a purely literary point of view, it is a library composed of 84 volumes - I have included in this count the listing of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures known as either the Deuterocanonical Books (because some still debate their place in the Bible) or the Apocryphal Books (or "hidden" or "secret" books). There is sadly, still a debate among Christians about the validity of some of the books and whether they should be in, what is termed the Canon of the Bible. What ever side one takes, they are all a good read and as I said in the introduction to this series God uses human languages in many ways - no human "Church" has a monopoly on God's inspired word.

All Christians though have agreed on the same Canon of twenty-seven Christian Scripture books.

The books in the library were written over a period from about 1000 years before Jesus was born to about 70 to 100 years after his death. Some of these "volumes" are:

- mere two-page letters, like the one to Philemon;
- others are much more substantial epistles, stories and testimonies;

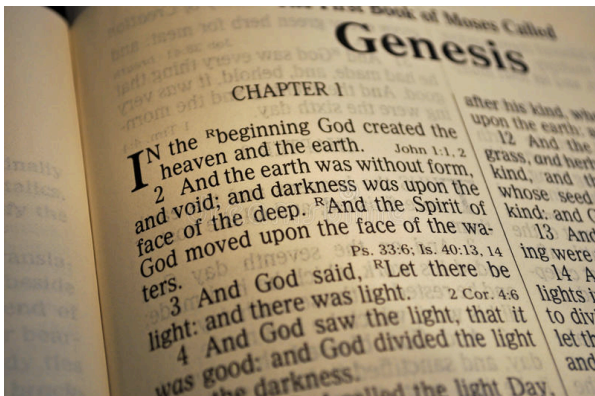
## BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

<b>OLD TESTAMENT</b>		<b>JOB</b>	<b>HABAKKUK</b>	<b>COLOSSIANS</b>
<b>GENESIS</b>	<b>EXODUS</b>	<b>PSALMS</b>	<b>ZEPHANIAH</b>	<b>1 THESSALONIANS</b>
<b>LEVITICUS</b>	<b>NUMBERS</b>	<b>PROVERBS</b>	<b>HAGGAI</b>	<b>2 THESSALONIANS</b>
<b>DEUTERONOMY</b>	<b>SONG OF SOLOMON</b>	<b>ECCLESIASTES</b>	<b>ZECHARIAH</b>	<b>1 TIMOTHY</b>
<b>JOSHUA</b>	<b>ISAIAH</b>	<b>MALACHI</b>	<b>NEW TESTAMENT</b>	<b>2 TIMOTHY</b>
<b>JUDGES</b>	<b>JEREMIAH</b>	<b>MATTHEW</b>	<b>PHILEMON</b>	<b>HEBREWS</b>
<b>RUTH</b>	<b>LAMENTATIONS</b>	<b>MARK</b>	<b>JAMES</b>	<b>1 PETER</b>
<b>1 SAMUEL</b>	<b>EZEKIEL</b>	<b>LUKE</b>	<b>2 PETER</b>	<b>1 JOHN</b>
<b>2 SAMUEL</b>	<b>DANIEL</b>	<b>JOHN</b>	<b>2 JOHN</b>	<b>3 JOHN</b>
<b>1 KINGS</b>	<b>HOSEA</b>	<b>ACTS</b>	<b>ROMANS</b>	<b>JUDE</b>
<b>2 KINGS</b>	<b>JOEL</b>	<b>1 CORINTHIANS</b>	<b>2 CORINTHIANS</b>	<b>REVELATION</b>
<b>1 CHRONICLES</b>	<b>AMOS</b>	<b>GALATIANS</b>	<b>EPHESIANS</b>	
<b>2 CHRONICLES</b>	<b>OBADIAH</b>	<b>PHILIPPIANS</b>		
<b>EZRA</b>	<b>JONAH</b>			
<b>NEHEMIAH</b>	<b>MICAH</b>			
<b>ESTHER</b>	<b>NAHUM</b>			
<b>LAW • HISTORY • POETRY &amp; WISDOM • MAJOR PROPHETS</b> <b>MINOR PROPHETS • GOSPELS • HISTORY • LETTERS OF PAUL</b> <b>GENERAL LETTERS • PROPHECY</b>				

- several are complicated literary documents in which an editor has put together different sources, accounts and interpretations of the same series of events, for example the books of Genesis and Exodus;
- the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were such a new type of literature that for a long time people did not know what to call them;
- there are volumes in this library, like the book of Psalms or the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, which consists of small, separate libraries in themselves;
- and, you will find in it history, poetry, prophecy and law.

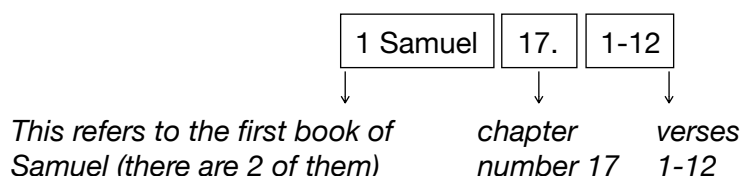
But, if you see the Bible in the first place as ‘only’ a book, as a collection of literary documents only, you do no justice to how the biblical traditions of faith have functioned in the course of history, and how God uses human literature to be a vehicle of God’s word.

Wonder for a moment, how the masses of people had access to the biblical messages before book printing was invented in the 15<sup>th</sup> century? For although biblical manuscripts existed in the centuries before that, they were rare and costly. Moreover, a large percentage of Church members could not read. The bibles as a manuscript or a book remained a treasure inaccessible to them. Yet they also did “Bible study”, though in ways which we may not immediately recognise as such, because for most of us both the term “Bible” and “study” have almost exclusively literary connotations.



I digress for a moment. The Bible bursts with life. It’s exciting reading - well most of it. In it there are heroes, villains, love songs, assassinations, questions about life and death, and people who make the same sort of mistakes we do. But the Bible is more than just exciting reading. By opening it up you can learn more about God, your God: The God who created you, and about Jesus, who came to give us a fresh start and about the Holy Spirit who is the activity of God. More on this later.

Open up the Bible and you find each book is split into chapters and verses making it easier to find your way round. Here is an example:



Here are a few passages for you to read. Try them and after you have read them, maybe make a note in the spaces below of what you think the passage is about; what you think its meaning is. Then write down whether you think the passage has anything to tell you about you, about the world, about God. There are no right answers to seek. Just get a feel for engaging in the passage and interpreting it. If I may offer one piece of advice, listen for God’s voice speaking to you in the passages.

Here are the passages:

I Samuel 17

Psalm 139.1-8

Act 42