

## Starting with a Question – “What is the Bible?”

**The Bible** – literally means “the Book” – a term which is loaded with a lot of assumptions in the modern world

- typically, one author
- typically, one genre – e.g. science fiction, poetry, history, cooking instructions
- typically, written within a short range of years
- typically, written in only one language
- typically, is the product of only one culture and historical setting
- typically, textual changes or variants are non-existent or very minor

**“The Bible”** – shares none of these characteristics

- Many authors
  - Over as much as a 2000 year period – earliest possible date for books c. 2000 BC, latest maybe 150 AD
  - Diverse life circumstances – e.g. desert nomads, petty kings, professional and semi-professional prophets, educated Roman citizens, unlearned fishermen
  - Diverse cultural and religious beliefs – Abraham ≠ Moses ≠ Peter
- Multiple languages
  - Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek
- Many genres
  - historical narratives, prophetic oracles, liturgical and semi-liturgical hymnography, letters to individuals, letters to groups, general letters, collections of proverbs, probably a small amount of historical fiction, a book of love poetry, etc.
- Multiple, Significantly Different Textual Variants
  - Due to scribal copying, errors
  - Due to intentional revision or correction (in various cases)

**The Bible** – is not a book, it is a collection of books, and even that collection varies somewhat

- Protestants – 66 Books
- Roman Catholics – 73 Books
- Orthodox – c. 78 Books
- We can call it “the Book” in the modern world and refer to it as one “Book,” because it is all encased in one codex, but that is really the only reason
  - Originally, these are dozens and dozens of individual scrolls
  - We still appropriately speak of “books of the Bible”

**The Bible** – even in modern times is not consistently organized, although one might think so due to modern publication techniques

- E.g. Martin Luther adopted the Rabbinic Jewish Bible as his “Old Testament”
  - But Protestants call what Jews call 24 Books 39 books and order them differently

- Books sometimes have alternative names (e.g. 1 Samuel = 1 Kingdoms; Ecclesiasticus = Sirach = Ben Sira; Revelation = the Apocalypse of St. John)
- Codices vary – e.g. Protestant ordering vs. Catholic, Orthodox Study Bible vs. Apostol

## **Organization of Contemporary, Christian Bibles**

### **Two Testaments – Old Testament and New Testament**

- For Christians, the Old Testament is primarily a record of God’s actions in the world which prepare it for the coming of Christ
  - It reflects the pre-Christian religion of the Hebrews or, later, the “Jews”
- The New Testament can be seen as a record of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and of the early Christian communities as they emerged in subsequent decades
- The idea of two Testaments reflect God’s first covenant with Israel and the Tabernacle/Temple worship that came out of it, and God’s subsequent covenant with Israel and the Christian liturgical worship that comes out of it (i.e. sacrificial system, eucharist)

### **The Old Testament – Two Major Divisions**

- **The Law** – the “five books of Moses”
  - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy
  - Most Christians would rank these books as the most important in the OT
    - This follows a Jewish way of reckoning
  - These books cover the Creation of the World down through God’s establishment and reconfirmation of the Sinai Covenant
- **Everything Else**
  - Typically, there is a division among this material into “historical books,” “wisdom books” (or “poetic books”), and “prophetic books”
    - Historical Books – e.g. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, etc.
    - Wisdom/Poetry Books – e.g. Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, etc.
    - Prophetic Books – e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.

### **The New Testament – Two Major Divisions**

- **The Four Gospels**
  - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
  - Recount the life, miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ in narrative form
    - Present the teaching of the “New Covenant” inaugurated by Christ’s death and resurrection
- **Everything Else**
  - Acts of the Apostles, various epistles, mostly by Paul, but also by other early leaders, and Revelation, a work of “apocalyptic” prophecy

**Conclusion** – this is a very basic answer to “what is the Bible” – but much more needs to be said