

This chapter introduces the Bible, the written Word of the one true God. The Greek word “*biblos*” means “book.”

The Bible has 66 separate books.

We also use the word “Scripture” to refer to the Bible. It comes from a Latin word which means “writing.”

OBJECTIVES: When you finish this chapter you should be able to:

- Write the Key Verse from memory.
- Explain where the Bible came from.
- Describe how the CEB differs from the KJV
- Explain why a Bible translation is not like a paraphrase
- Know the major purposes of the Bible
- Identify the Old Testament and New Testament as the two major parts of the Bible
- Explain how the books of the Bible are united
- Understand that the Bible has different moods and types of writing
- Name the four kinds of Old Testament books
- Name the four kinds of New Testament books
- Identify the person the Old and New Testaments point to
- Take a Self-Test on this chapter
- Write the abbreviations for each book of the Bible

KEY VERSE: No prophecy ever came by human will. Instead, men and women led by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Pet 1:21, CEB).

ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE: God used about forty people to write down his words over 1500 years. These people came from several different cultures. Some of the writers wrote down exactly what God said. For example, the Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah, “Take a scroll and write in it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah, and all the nations from the time of Josiah until today” (Jer 36:2).

Other writers wrote about what happened to them or what God showed them about the future. In the Apostle John’s vision of Jesus in heaven, Christ told him, “Write down what you have seen, both the scene now before you and the things that are about to unfold after this” (Rev 1:19).

COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE: A copy of a modern translation of the Bible will help you. It can be a physical book or online. The references in this course will come from the Common English Bible (CEB), unless the name of another version is written. Bible Gateway offers a free app which has many versions of the bible in different languages. It also has some audio versions.

How do we know that the CEB reflects what God said? Let’s look what manuscripts the translators of the CEB used:

For the Old Testament (OT) the CEB uses a Hebrew Bible based upon a manuscript copied in 1008 AD called the BHS. In 1947, a young shepherd found manuscripts we call the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) in a cave. They date from the 3rd century BC–first century AD and include parts of every Old Testament book except Esther. Scholars use the Dead Sea Scrolls to check the accuracy of the manuscript from 1008.

Comparing the BHS to other ancient translations and the DSS shows that it usually matches the Hebrew in the Bible dating back to 100 AD [see Old Testament Textual Criticism for more information on this process]. In 1896, two archaeologists digging in an ancient trash dump in Egypt found the largest papyrus collection ever discovered. These included pieces of personal letters, business papers, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and the New Testament. Since then, people have found over five thousand Greek manuscripts, dating back to AD 200. A fourth century AD manuscript contains the oldest complete New Testament.

Some New Testament scholars do what we call “textual criticism”. It involves looking at a manuscript to decide how old it is, knowing where it was found, and seeing how good the copy is. This helps us to decide what was most likely the original writing of the biblical authors. Experts have put together the most likely copies into the 28th edition of the Greek New Testament. It is called the *Novum Testamentum Graecae* (NA²⁸). We feel sure that at least 97% of the NA²⁸ matches the original documents.

A large group of manuscripts that match each other date from the 9th through 14th centuries. They make up 80–90% of all known New Testament manuscripts. However, as one expert has noted, “Ten thousand copies of a mistake do not make it any less a mistake.”[1] While a great success in 1611, the KJV and the NKJV depend upon those newer manuscripts. They did not have the 2nd–4th century manuscripts which translators of the CEB used.

So, entire verses are “missing” from some modern translations. Compare these two translations of Matt 18:10–12:

¹⁰“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. ¹¹For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. ¹²How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?” (KJV)

¹⁰“Be careful that you don’t look down on one of these little ones. I say to you that their angels in heaven are always looking into the face of my Father who is in heaven.^[a] ¹²What do you think? If someone had one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, wouldn’t he leave the ninety-nine on the hillsides and go in search for the one that wandered off?” (CEB).

[a] Matt 18:11 is omitted in most critical editions of the Greek New Testament....

What do you notice about verse 11? Why do you think the CEB has a footnote where verse 11 would be? Do we still know that Jesus came to save lost people from their sins without it?

In the same way, we do not have manuscripts that show Mark 16:9–20 before the fifth century. Experts cannot decide if Mark 16:1–8 was the original ending of that gospel or if, coming at the end of a rolled-up scroll, it was lost. Since Mark 16:8 ends so quickly, it looks like people who copied earlier manuscripts wrote the two other endings. For the entire New Testament, unless you hold deadly snakes or drink poison as part of your worship (Mark 16:18), no major teaching changes whether you use the CEB or the KJV.

TRANSLATIONS vs. PARAPHRASES: Translation groups use different ways to make new versions of the Bible. Some stay closely to each word of the original languages. We call these “word-for-word translations.” The NASB and KJV are two examples of this. Other translations try to bring us the thought behind the words. The CEB and the NLT do this. They are easy to understand but still give us the idea of what the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts say.

Different from translators of the original languages, people who write Bible paraphrases begin with an English translation and put it into modern language based upon their understanding of the passage. They are often less like what the original language says. For this course, please avoid using a Bible paraphrase, such as The Message or The Living Bible [see English Bible Translation Differences].

PURPOSES OF THE BIBLE: God reveals himself to us through the Bible. “The Lord proclaims, ‘The learned should not boast of their knowledge, nor warriors boast of their might, nor the rich boast of their wealth. No, those who boast should boast in this: that they understand and know me. I am the Lord who acts with kindness, justice, and righteousness in the world, and I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord” (Jer 9:23–24).

We use the Bible to make our relationship with God strong, to teach what is true, to correct ourselves and others from evil, and to teach people how to act in righteousness. Knowing what the Bible says will help you live right and make you more ready to work for God.

“Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good” (2 Tim 3:16–17).

MAJOR DIVISIONS OF THE BIBLE: The Bible is divided into two major sections called the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). They have a total of 66 books (39 OT and 27 NT). Hundreds of years ago, scholars divided each book into chapters and verses to make it easy to find verses in God’s Word. It would be very hard to find a specific verse if the books were all one long paragraph without numbers.

The word “testament” means “covenant.” A covenant is a legal agreement between at least two people or groups. We see two kinds of covenant in the Old Testament.

In a royal grant, a king gave land or something else to a faithful servant as an *unconditional* gift. It passed to his heirs only if they showed the same loyalty their father had. **Royal grants put the duty on the person with the most power.** The Old Testament records royal grants with humanity through Noah (Gen 9:8–11), Abraham (Gen 15:9–18), Phineas (Num 25:10–13), and

David (2 Sam 7:9–16). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God made the promise of a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34) which he did through his Son, Jesus Christ.

In suzerain-vassal covenants a great king made an agreement with a someone under his power. This was often another king. The greater king made *conditions* and curses if the other person failed. He demanded full loyalty and promised to protect the lower king only if he stayed faithful and did what the stronger king commanded. **The duty was on the person with less power.** God made suzerain-vassal covenants with Adam (Gen 2:16–17; Hos 6:7), Abraham (Gen 17:1–2, 9–11), and with Israel through Moses (Exod 19:1–6). Not keeping this kind of covenant brought punishment.

God’s covenants with Moses and through Jesus both brought sinful people into right relationships with himself. He made a law that sin can be forgiven only with blood. The writer of Hebrews wrote, “The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9:22).

Under God’s agreement in the Old Testament, priests made blood sacrifices of animals for people so God would forgive their sins. This pointed to the blood sacrifice Jesus Christ would make under the new agreement with God. Through Jesus’s birth, life, death, resurrection, and return to heaven, he made a final sacrifice for sin:

“But Christ has appeared as the high priest of the good things that have happened. He passed through the greater and more perfect meeting tent, which isn’t made by human hands (that is, it’s not a part of this world). He entered the holy of holies once for all by his own blood, not by the blood of goats or calves, securing our deliverance for all time.

“If the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkled ashes of cows made spiritually contaminated people holy and clean, how much more will the blood of Jesus wash our consciences clean from dead works in order to serve the living God? He offered himself to God through the eternal Spirit as a sacrifice without any flaw.

“This is why he’s the mediator of a new covenant (which is a will): so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance on the basis of his death. His death occurred to set them free from the offenses committed under the first covenant” (Heb 9:11–15).

We use the terms “Old” and “New” Testaments to tell the difference between God’s agreement with humanity before and after the arrival of Jesus Christ. Both testaments are the Word of God and we must study both to understand the Lord’s message. We do not avoid the Old Testament simply because it is called “Old.”

UNITY OF THE BIBLE: When we speak of the unity of the Bible, we mean two things:

ONE: THE BIBLE IS UNITED IN CONTENT: “Scripture interprets Scripture” describes a very important idea for studying the Bible. Although the Bible was written by many writers over many years, one author does not deny what the others say. It’s important to learn the history and the culture of that time. We can then take the meaning of the author and apply it to our time and place. This

stops us from trying to make the Bible fit with our time and culture. When we understand them in their cultures, Peter's writing does not go against Paul's.

The Bible talks about many difficult topics which create different opinions. Yet, the writers of the Bible spoke about them with harmony from the first book of Genesis through the last book of Revelation. This happened because the Holy Spirit helped the human authors (2 Pet 1:21). Where we see them disagreeing, we should try to see how the passages fit within the whole story line of the Bible. In general, the teaching of a New Testament book has more value than a discussion of the same topic in the Old Testament. Hebrews 12:18–29 explains this well. Overall, the Bible agrees with itself.

TWO: THE BIBLE IS UNITED IN THEME: Some people think the Bible is a group of 66 books on different subjects. They do not know that the Bible is united by one major theme. Redemptive history is God's plan to save his people and advance his kingdom. The plan of the Bible follows several patterns of Creation/ Covenant, Sin, Exile, and Resurrection/Restoration (the CSER Structure). We should read every part of the Bible knowing which of these events had already happened. This overview of the Bible is a great way to teach your church about the major events in Biblical history [see Chapters then An Overview of the Bible: Creation, Sin, Exile, and Resurrection/Restoration].

From beginning to end, the Bible reveals God's special purpose: "God revealed his hidden design to us, which is according to his goodwill and the plan that he intended to accomplish through his Son. This is what God planned for the climax of all times: to bring all things together in Christ, the things in heaven along with the things on earth. We have also received an inheritance in Christ. We were destined by the plan of God, who accomplishes everything according to his design" (Eph 1:9–11). The Bible's main theme reveals God's creation of the world, his plan to save sinful humanity, and to renew all creation through Jesus our savior. When Christ was challenged by some religious leaders, he said, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for Moses wrote about me" (John 5:46).

What are the main ways the Old Testament points to Jesus?

The first of these is through prophecies of a coming savior, as in Gen 3:15, where the Lord informed the serpent, "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel" (CSB).

Another way is by people, things, or events which remind us of the coming of Christ. Examples of these are Noah, who built an ark which saved his family and the animals from God's judgment (Gen 6:17–19 and 1 Pet 3:20–21); the bronze serpent lifted up on a pole that saved people from the bites of poisonous snakes (Num 21:4–9 and John 3:14–15, NIV); and the first Passover feast, when a lamb's blood saved Israel's firstborn sons from death (Exod 12:1–13 and John 1:29–30).

On the day of his resurrection from the dead, Jesus met two disciples as they walked to Emmaus. Since they could not tell who he was, they talked about how sad they were that Jesus died. "Then Jesus said to them, 'You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the

prophets talked about. Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets" (Luke 24:13–27).

Later that day, Jesus saw his disciples in Jerusalem. "Jesus said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. "He said to them, 'This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things'" (Luke 24:44–48).

Jesus was saying that the Old Testament contains important clues about him and what he did. The Old and New Testaments both tell the story of Jesus. The Old Testament makes us ready for Christ's arrival and the New Testament tells how it happened. This unites the Bible into one major theme.

The people who looked forward to Jesus under the Old Testament were saved from their sins through faith in God's promise. For example, Job lived around the time of Abraham. Yet, he said, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth" (Job 19:25, NIV). Everyone who looks back and trusts in God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ is saved in the same way: through faith that it happened just as God promised. The Old Testament is like a set of puzzle pieces of God's plan to renew everything he made. Seeing how they fit together after reading the New Testament makes reading the Old Testament very exciting.

DIVERSITY OF THE BIBLE: When we speak of the "diversity" of the Bible we mean that it has variety. The Bible records different ways God dealt with people and the different ways they responded to him. Its authors wrote in moods ranging from great joy to deep sadness. The Bible also includes different types (genres) of writing.

While we should usually read the Bible literally, we must keep the type of writing we are reading in mind. For example, historical narratives, psalms, proverbs, and prophecy tell us about the heart and mind of God to us in different ways. Biblical writers wrote historical reporting, poetry, and everything in between them (Ezra 1:9–11; Song 4:11–15).

Skilled readers decide where a passage falls on that scale to avoid misunderstanding the author's meaning. Taking a literal meaning from a passage which the author did not intend his readers to read literally is *not* a literal interpretation.

FOUR OLD TESTAMENT DIVISIONS: The books of the Old Testament fall into four major groups: law, history, poetry, and prophecy. All thirty-nine books were accepted as part of the bible by the first century AD.

THE BOOKS OF THE LAW: There are five books of law (Torah). Together, they form the Pentateuch ("five books" in Greek). All bible traditions say that Moses wrote them. The names of these books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books talk

about God's creation of humanity and the world. They record the early history of humanity and tell how God raised up the nation of Israel to show himself to the nations of the world (Deut 4:6–8). As we might expect, these books also record the laws of God. The best-known parts are the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1–17). According to Jesus, the greatest of all commandments is Deut 6:5, and the second greatest commandment is Lev 19:18 (Matt 22:37–40).

THE BOOKS OF HISTORY: There are 12 books of history in the Old Testament. The names of the books of history are Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. In English Bibles, they come right after the books of law. The books of history cover a thousand-year history of God's people, Israel. While they do not tell everything that happened, they record the major events and show the results of both following and ignoring God's law.

THE BOOKS OF POETRY: Virtually every book of the Old Testament contains some poetry, often in songs or prophecies. Since the Old Testament was written for people who learned best by hearing and often could not read, poetry helped them remember what had been read or sung to them. There are six whole books which are poetry. The names of the books of poetry are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Song of Songs. These books are the worship and wisdom books of Israel. Many Jews and Christians still use the psalms to worship today.

Just as we understand poetry differently from a historical story in our culture, we must know when we are reading poetry Old Testament. It affects how literally we read those parts of the Bible. As with Hebrew proverbs, a saying in a poem or song may talk about a promise or fact which is often, but not always, true. Unlike King David, I have seen the children of the righteous "begging for bread" (Ps 37:25).

An important thing to remember when reading biblical poetry is to read the whole poem before applying it to our lives. In fact, all one hundred fifty psalms taken together talk about different parts of life. For example, where some of these songs say that a person who walks with God is safe (Ps 1), others talk about how short and fragile our lives are (Ps 39). Both are true.

Hebrew poets wrote mainly for worship as a group. Sometimes, they wrote for their own use to respond to what happened in their lives. Therefore, when possible, we should read them while knowing what was happening to the author. This helps us understand their meaning better. David likely wrote Ps 63 while running from King Saul in the wilderness. Knowing this helps us to understand what he was feeling.

THE BOOKS OF PROPHECY: The sixteen books of prophecy in the Old Testament are in two groups: Major and Minor Prophets. This does not mean the Major Prophets are more important than the Minor Prophets. Major Prophets are just longer books than the Minor Prophets.

Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel

Minor Prophets: Hosea, Nahum, Joel, Habakkuk, Amos, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Haggai, Jonah, Zechariah, Micah, and Malachi

These books tell what happened to the prophets and are messages from God to his people about future events. Many of the prophecies have already happened, but others will occur in the future. Some prophecies have already been happened and will happen again in a different way. In English Bibles, they are the last books in the Old Testament. To help us understand the story line of the Old Testament better, we will be studying these books close to the order in which they were written.

For example, 1 and 2 Chronicles repeats what is in 1 and 2 Kings but from the viewpoint of people who returned to Israel after being exiled in Babylon. This was to help them understand why God had sent their ancestors away. So, we will study 1 Kings, then the books of prophecy from the time of 1 Kings. After that, we will study 2 Kings, then the books of prophecy written during the time of 2 Kings. Then, we will read 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles before studying the books which prophets wrote during Israel's exile.

FOUR NEW TESTAMENT DIVISIONS: We can divide the New Testament into four groups: gospels, history, letters, and prophecy. Roman Catholic Bibles include books not accepted by Protestants called the Apocrypha. An important paper called the Muratorian Fragment (ca. 190 AD) helps us tell what is an apocryphal book from what is in the first complete Greek Bible, the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus.

The Muratorian Fragment lists all the New Testament books, except for James and Hebrews. Its writer said that *The Shepherd of Hermas* is good for personal reading. However, he wrote that churches should not read it during worship because someone from his own time wrote it, not one of the apostles or prophets from the days of Christ.

Between 367–397 AD, church leaders agreed upon the twenty-seven books which make up the New Testament for Protestants today.

THE GOSPELS: The four books in the gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They tell about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They show that he is the Savior, the Son of God. According to John 20:30–31, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples’ presence, signs that aren’t recorded in this scroll. But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.”

THE BOOK OF HISTORY: We have one history book in the New Testament, called Acts. It talks about how Jesus gave his disciples the job of sharing the gospel before he rose up into heaven. After the Holy Spirit came into the first Christians, the church grew fast. They began to follow Christ’s command to spread the gospel throughout the world.

LETTERS: There are twenty-one letters in the New Testament, written by several different people. They are meant to give Christians strength in life and to help us obey Jesus’s commands.

Paul wrote many of the letters. They are in our Bibles in order of their length on a scroll. Romans is the longest, so it comes first. He wrote some of them to a church or to groups of small churches in one city. Others, he wrote to people he knew. His letters include Romans, 1 and 2

Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

We call the other letters the General Letters because they were written to many believers, not to one church or person. We do not know who wrote Hebrews. That book encourages Christians from a Jewish background to stand firm during persecution. A half-brother of Jesus wrote James. The Apostle Peter wrote 1 Peter and, most likely, 2 Peter. John wrote 1, 2, and 3 John. Another half-brother of Jesus wrote Jude.

PROPHECY: Revelation is the only book of prophecy in the New Testament. It talk about the final victory of Jesus and his people, encouraging believers to live as Christians should until the end of time. Revelation 2:10 says, “Don’t be afraid of what you are going to suffer. Look! The devil is going to throw some of you into prison in order to test you. You will suffer hardship for ten days. Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

CHAPTER 1 SELF TEST:

1. Write the Key Verse (2 Pet 1:21) from memory:

2. What do the letters in the CSER Structure mean?

3. Why do the Dead Sea Scrolls help us trust the CEB?

4. What are the two major parts of the Bible?

How many books are there in each major part of the Bible?

6. Name the four major groups of Old Testament books:

7. What are four main purposes of the Bible? Give a Bible verse to support your answer.

8. What do we mean by the “unity of the Bible”?

9. What do we mean by the “diversity of the Bible”?

10. Read each sentence. If it is TRUE put the letter T on the blank in front of it. If the sentence is FALSE put the letter F on the blank in front of it:

- a. ____ The Bible is the written Word of the one true God.
- b. ____ Although God put what he wanted into the Bible, he used people to write down his words.
- c. ____ We should always read the Bible literally.
- d. ____ There is no one theme of the Bible. It is just a group of books on different subjects.
- e. ____ The Major Prophets of the Old Testament are more important than the Minor Prophets.
- f. ____ Because God helped people write the Bible, we don’t need to understand the cultures of the people who first received it.
- g. ____ The CEB uses older manuscripts, so we should trust it less than the KJV.
- h. ____ The OT has people, events, and things which point us to Jesus.

ANSWERS TO SELF TEST:

1. No prophecy ever came by human will. Instead, men and women led by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Pet 1:21).
2. CSER stands for Creation/Covenant, Sin, Exile, Resurrection/Restoration
(Creation/Sin/Exile/ and Restoration is also okay)
3. The Dead Sea Scrolls are two thousand years old and include every OT book except Esther.
4. Old Testament and New Testament.
5. 39, 27.
6. Law, history, poetry, prophecy.
7. For teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16–17).
8. The Bible agrees with itself and has one major theme.
9. The Bible has differences in its moods and in its kinds of writing.
10. a. True; b. True; c. False; d. False; e. False; f. False; g. False; h. True

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Bible Book Abbreviations and Genres

Old Testament	Type of Book	New Testament	Type of Book
Gen	Genesis	Matt	Matthew
Exod	Exodus	Mark	Mark
Lev	Leviticus	Luke	Luke
Num	Numbers	John	John
Deut	Deuteronomy	Acts	Acts
Josh	Joshua	Rom	Romans
Judg	Judges	1 Cor	1 Corinthians
Ruth	Ruth	2 Cor	2 Corinthians
1 Sam	1 Samuel	Gal	Galatians
2 Sam	2 Samuel	Eph	Ephesians
1 Kgs	1 Kings	Phil	Philippians
2 Kgs	2 Kings	Col	Colossians
1 Chr	1 Chronicles	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians
2 Chr	2 Chronicles	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians
Ezra	Ezra	1 Tim	1 Timothy
Neh	Nehemiah	2 Tim	2 Timothy
Esth	Esther	Titus	Titus
Job	Job	Phlm	Philemon
Ps	Psalms	Heb	Hebrews
Prov	Proverbs	Jas	James
Eccl	Ecclesiastes	1 Pet	1 Peter
Song	Song of Songs	2 Pet	2 Peter
Lam	Lamentations	1 John	1 John
Isa	Isaiah	2 John	2 John
Jer	Jeremiah	3 John	3 John
Ezek	Ezekiel	Jude	Jude
Dan	Daniel	Rev	Revelation
Hos	Hosea		
Joel	Joel		
Amos	Amos		
Obad	Obadiah		
Jonah	Jonah		
Mic	Micah		
Nah	Nahum		
Hab	Habakkuk		
Zeph	Zephaniah		
Hag	Haggai		
Zech	Zechariah		
Mal	Malachi		