**Lesson 7X**

**Extra Reading**

**How to Study the Bible**

**BIBLE HISTORY**

**Bible**, also called the Holy Bible, sacred book or Scriptures of Judaism and of Christianity. The Jewish Bible is the Hebrew Scriptures, 39 books, whereas the Christian Bible is in two parts, the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. The version of the Old Testament used by Roman Catholics is the Bible of Judaism plus seven other books and additions to books. The version of the Old Testament used by Protestants is limited to the 39 books of the Jewish Bible. The other books and additions to books are called the Apocrypha by Protestants.

**Order of the Books**

The Bible of Judaism consists of three distinct parts: the Torah, or Law; the Nebiim, or Prophets; and the Ketubim, or Writings. The Christian Old Testament organizes the books according to type of literature: the Pentateuch, corresponding to the Torah; historical books; poetical or wisdom books; and prophetical books. The New Testament includes the four Gospels; the Acts of the Apostles; Epistles; and the Apocalypse, or Book of Revelation.

**Importance and Influence**

The most widely distributed book in human history, the Bible has been enormously influential as the foundational document of Judaism and Christianity as well as in secular contexts. The literature, art, and music of Western culture in particular are deeply indebted to biblical themes and images.

**The Old Testament**

The term *Old Testament* came to be applied to the Hebrew Scriptures on the basis of the writings of Paul and other early Christians who distinguished between the Old Covenant that God made with Israel and the New Covenant established through Jesus Christ. The books of the Old Testament include narratives, poetic works, prophetic works, law, and apocalypses.

Many Old Testament books, including Ruth, Jonah, and Esther, are narratives; some are stories with plot, characterization, and setting description; and some are histories in that they are guided by facts, insofar as the writer can determine and interpret them. They are popular rather than critical works, based on oral traditions that are sometimes unreliable.

The poetic books of the Old Testament include Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (Songs), and in the deuterocanonical books and the Apocrypha, Sirach and the Prayer of Manasseh. Characterized by parallelism or restatement of lines, as well as by rhythm, the poetic books include many diverse genres, including songs of worship, wisdom poetry, and love poetry.

Most Hebrew prophetic books contain three kinds of literature: narratives, prayers, and prophetic speeches. Speeches predominate, as the essence of prophetic activity was to announce the word of God concerning the immediate future, often by forecasting punishment or salvation (*see* Prophecy).

Legal materials are sufficiently prominent in the Hebrew Scriptures that the term *Torah* (Law) came to be applied in Judaism to the first five books, and in early Christianity to the entire Old Testament. Most of the laws are found in Exodus 20 through Numbers 10.

The apocalypse as a distinctive genre arose in Israel after the Babylonian captivity of the Jews (586 to 538 BC). Apocalyptic writings generally reflect the author's historical view of his own era as a time when the powers of evil are gathering to make their final struggle against God, after which a new age will be established. Daniel is the only apocalyptic book as such in the Hebrew Scriptures.

**The Development of the Old Testament**

The literary history of the Old Testament is long and complicated, and many of the facts are not known. Behind many of the present literary works stand oral traditions, which in some cases existed for centuries alongside written materials.

According to Jewish and Christian tradition, Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Modern scholars believe that the writers of the Pentateuch drew upon several different sources, each from a different writer and period. The oldest source is commonly dated in the 10th or 9th century BC, and the latest source is dated in the 6th or 5th century BC. The writers of these documents worked as editors who collected, organized, and interpreted older traditions, both oral and written. In recent years the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings have been recognized as a unified account, called the Deuteronomistic History, of the history of Israel from the time of Moses (13th century BC) to the Babylonian captivity. Based on the last events it reports among other evidence, the Deuteronomistic History seems to have been written about 560 BC. Both the cultic and wisdom poetry of the Old Testament are difficult to date or attribute to particular authors. Few if any of the prophetic books were written entirely by the person whose name serves as the title.

**The Canon**

The Hebrew Bible and the Christian versions of the Old Testament were canonized in different times and places. The Hebrew Bible became Holy Scripture in three stages: evidence indicates that the Torah became Scripture between the end of the Babylonian captivity and the separation of the Samaritans from Judaism, probably by 300 BC. The canonization of the Nebiim occurred by the end of the 3rd century BC. The contents of the Ketubim remained somewhat fluid until after the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in AD 70.

The second canon— what is now the Roman Catholic version of the Old Testament— arose first as a translation of the earlier Hebrew books into Greek. The process began in the 3rd century BC outside of Palestine. By the end of the 1st century AD, the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) was in existence. The last major step in the history of the Christian canon took place during the Protestant Reformation, when Martin Luther removed from his version of the Old Testament the books that were not in the Bible of Judaism and established them as the Apocrypha.

**Texts and Ancient Versions**

All contemporary translators of the Bible attempt to recover and use the oldest text. No original copies exist. With regard to the Old Testament, the chief distinction is between texts in Hebrew and the translations into other ancient languages. The most important, and generally most reliable, witnesses to the Hebrew are the Masoretic texts, those produced by Jewish scholars (called the Masoretes) who assumed the task of faithfully copying and transmitting the Bible. The standard printed Hebrew Bible in use today is a reproduction of a Masoretic text written in AD 1088. Still existing, however, are older Hebrew manuscripts, of individual books. For instance, numerous manuscripts and fragments, many from the pre-Christian era, have been recovered from the Dead Sea region since 1947 (these are referred to as the Dead Sea Scrolls).

The major Greek version of the Hebrew Bible is called the Septuagint. The first Greek translation included only the Torah and was done in Alexandria in the 3rd century BC. Other versions include the Peshitta, or Syriac; the Old Latin; the Vulgate; and the Aramaic Targums, which were not literal translations but rather paraphrases or interpretations of the original.

**The Old Testament and History**

As the history of Israel was told in the Old Testament, it came to be organized in a series of pivotal events or periods: the exodus, the monarchy, the exile in Babylon, and the return to Palestine with the restoration of religious institutions. Although a considerable body of information concerning the history of the ancient Near East is available from the 3rd millennium BC on, a detailed history of Israel can begin only about the time of King David. The monarchy arose during the 11th century BC in the midst of internal strife and external threat. When David became king in 1000 BC, he ended the Philistine threat and established an empire from Syria to the border of Egypt. The northern tribes rebelled under his grandson Rehoboam, and the two nations, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, separated. Both Judah and Israel fell to foreign armies. The Israelites were sent into exile in Babylon; they were set free in 538 BC, when the Persian king Cyrus the Great established the Persian Empire. At some point during the postexilic period, the history of Israel became the history of Judaism.

**Theological Themes of the Old Testament**

The most pervasive theological theme of the Old Testament is that Yahweh (the name of God in the Old Testament) is the God of Israel, of the whole earth, and of history. Two other themes include the covenant, which refers mainly to the pact between Yahweh and Israel sealed at Mount Sinai; and law, which was given as a part of the covenant and concerns relations between human beings and rules for religious practice.

**The New Testament: Text, Canon, and Early Versions**

The New Testament consists of 27 documents written between AD 50 and 150 concerning matters of belief and practice in Christian communities. It is likely that many or all of the documents were written in Greek; however, translations into other languages existed as early as the 2nd century. Critical editions of the Greek New Testament have appeared with some regularity since the work of the Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus in the 16th century.

The 27 books of the New Testament are only a fraction of the literary production of early Christian communities. Many noncanonical Christian writings have been collected and published as New Testament Apocrypha. Knowledge of the literature of the period was increased by the 1945 discovery of the library of a heretical Christian group, the Gnostics (*see* Gnosticism).

It appears that the earliest attempt to establish a New Testament canon was made about 150 by a heretical Christian named Marcion. By 200, 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament were likely regarded as authoritative. In 367 the 27 books that now constitute the New Testament were determined.

**The Literature of the New Testament**

As literature, the documents of the New Testament comprise four major types, or genres: gospel, history, epistle, and apocalypse. Within these four categories of literature, many and varied forms appear; these include poems, hymns, confessional formulas, proverbs, miracle stories, beatitudes, diatribes, lists of duties, parables, and others.

**History in the New Testament**

The New Testament focuses on a historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth (*see* Jesus Christ), and addresses the problems faced by his followers in a variety of specific contexts within the Roman Empire. A number of difficulties are encountered in a historical reconstruction of the period as revealed in New Testament sources. Nevertheless, scholars generally agree as to the broad chronological outline. The Gospel of Luke states that Jesus began his ministry in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius (Luke 3:1), which would be 28-29. All four Gospels agree that Jesus was crucified when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea (25-36).

Little is known of Jesus before his public life. He was from Nazareth in Galilee, although both Luke and Matthew place his birth in Bethlehem, the ancestral home of King David. Only the books of Luke and Matthew contain birth and infancy stories, and these differ in several details. Many of the books of

the New Testament seem to have been written for a later generation; in these books, Jesus' early followers are dead; high expectation of his final return has waned; and the need for preservation, entrenchment, and institutionalization is evident (*see* Eschatology; Second Coming).

**Major Themes in the New Testament**

Consistent with the Old Testament, the God of the New Testament is the creator of all life and sustainer of the universe. However, the New Testament claims in Jesus of Nazareth a unique revelation of God. His person, words, and activities are understood as bringing followers into the presence of God.

Besides Jesus, the Spirit of God, an expression representing the active presence of God, is also used throughout the New Testament. This entity is variously referred to as the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of truth. Other themes include the kingdom of God, salvation, and the inseparable connection between religious belief and moral and ethical behavior.

**The Bible in English**

The history of the English Bible is the story of its movement from possession and use by clergy alone to possession and use by the laity. Although Christianity reached England in the 3rd century, the Bible remained in Latin and almost exclusively in the hands of the clergy for a thousand years. Between the 7th and 14th centuries, portions of the Bible were translated into English, and some rough paraphrases appeared for instructing parishioners. In 1382 the first complete English Bible appeared in a manuscript by the English reformer John Wycliffe, whose goal was to give the Bible to the people. In 1525 the English reformer William Tyndale translated the New Testament from the Greek text. Other versions followed, including the Douay or Douay-Rheims (also spelled Douai-Reims) Bible, completed between 1582 and 1609, which was commonly used by Roman Catholics in English-speaking countries. In 1604 King James I commissioned a new revision of the English Bible; it was completed in 1611. The King James version underwent several revisions, and between 1946 and 1952 the Revised Standard Version (RSV) appeared. Widely accepted by Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic Christians, it provided the basis for the first ecumenical English Bible. Jewish translations of the Hebrew Bible into English have been appearing for two centuries.

**WIDELY USED VERSIONS**

**King James Version**

It was translated out of the original tongues and with previous translations, including that of [William Tyndale](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cdiggs%5CAppData%5CRoaming%5CMicrosoft%5CWord%5CWTT.htm), diligently compared and revised. In the preface of the 1611 edition, the translators stated that it was not their purpose to make a new translation but to make a good one better. It is a revision of the Bishop's Bible of 1568.

It was the desire of the translators to make God's holy Truth more and more known unto the people, even though they may be maligned by those religious persons who would keep the people in ignorance and darkness concerning it. It was presented to King James I when completed in 1611. It has been the standard English translation for almost four hundred years.

It is noted for the quality of translation and the majesty of style. The translators were committed to producing an English Bible that would be a precise translation and by no means a paraphrase or broadly approximate rendering. The scholars were fully familiar with the original languages of the Bible and especially gifted in their use of their native English. Because of their reverence for God and His Word, only a principle of utmost accuracy in their translation could be accepted. Appreciating the intrinsic beauty of divine revelation, they disciplined their talents to render well-chosen English words of their time as well as a graceful, often musical, arrangement of language.

There have been many publishers, many editions, and various features for this version.

**The New King James Version**

The translators, the committees, and the editors sought to maintain the lyrical quality of the [King James Version](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cdiggs%5CAppData%5CRoaming%5CMicrosoft%5CWord%5CKJV.htm) while being sensitive to the late twentieth century English idiom and adhering faithfully to the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. Where obsolescence and other reading difficulties existed, present-day vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar were integrated. Words representing ancient objects which have no modern substitutes were retained. A special feature is the conformity to the thought flow of the 1611 Bible. King James spelling of untranslated words was retained, but made uniform throughout. Standard doctrinal and theological terms were retained. Pronouns and verb endings no longer in use were replaced by modern words. Pronouns referring to God were capitalized. Frequent use of "and" was limited., and, where the original language permitted, replaced by other words. The format was designed to enhance vividness and devotional quality of the Scriptures.

The text used for the Old Testament was the 1967/1977 Stuttgart edition of *Biblia Hebraica*. There was supplementary use of the 1524/1525 Bomberg edition of *Biblia Hebraica, Septuagint,* Latin *Vulgate,* and *Dead Sea Scrolls*.

The New Testament was based on the traditional text of Greek-speaking churches, first published in 1516 and later referred to as the *Received Text*. It is the fifth revision of the New Testament translated from specific Greek texts.

*Thomas Nelson (1990)*

**The New International Version**

This is a completely new translation of the Holy Bible done by over one hundred scholars. It followed several years of exploratory study by committees from the Christian Reformed Church and the National Association of Evangelicals. There were participants from the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in the translating process. The denominations included Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Christian Reformed, Church of Christ, Evangelical Free, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, and others.

Each book was translated by a team of scholars. An Intermediate Editorial Committee revised their work. A General Editorial Committee checked it in detail and revised again. The Committee on Bible Translation reviewed, revised, then released the translation for publication.

The goals were that the translation would be accurate and have clarity and literary quality so as to be suitable for reading, teaching, preaching, memorizing, and liturgical use. A concern was that the English be idiomatic but not idiosyncratic, contemporary but not dated.

Texts used for the Old Testament included the latest *Biblia Hebraica, Dead Sea Scrolls, Samaritan Pentateuch,* ancient scribal traditions, *Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac Peshitta, Targums, Juxta Hebraica,* and others. For the New Testament, the best current Greek New Testament texts were used.

The Tetragrammaton is rendered as LORD, in capital letters. [King James](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cdiggs%5CAppData%5CRoaming%5CMicrosoft%5CWord%5CKJV.htm) pronouns and verb endings were considered to be archaic. Poetic passages are printed as poetry.

*International Bible Society (1978)*

[[Tyndale House](http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk), Cambridge, United Kingdom]