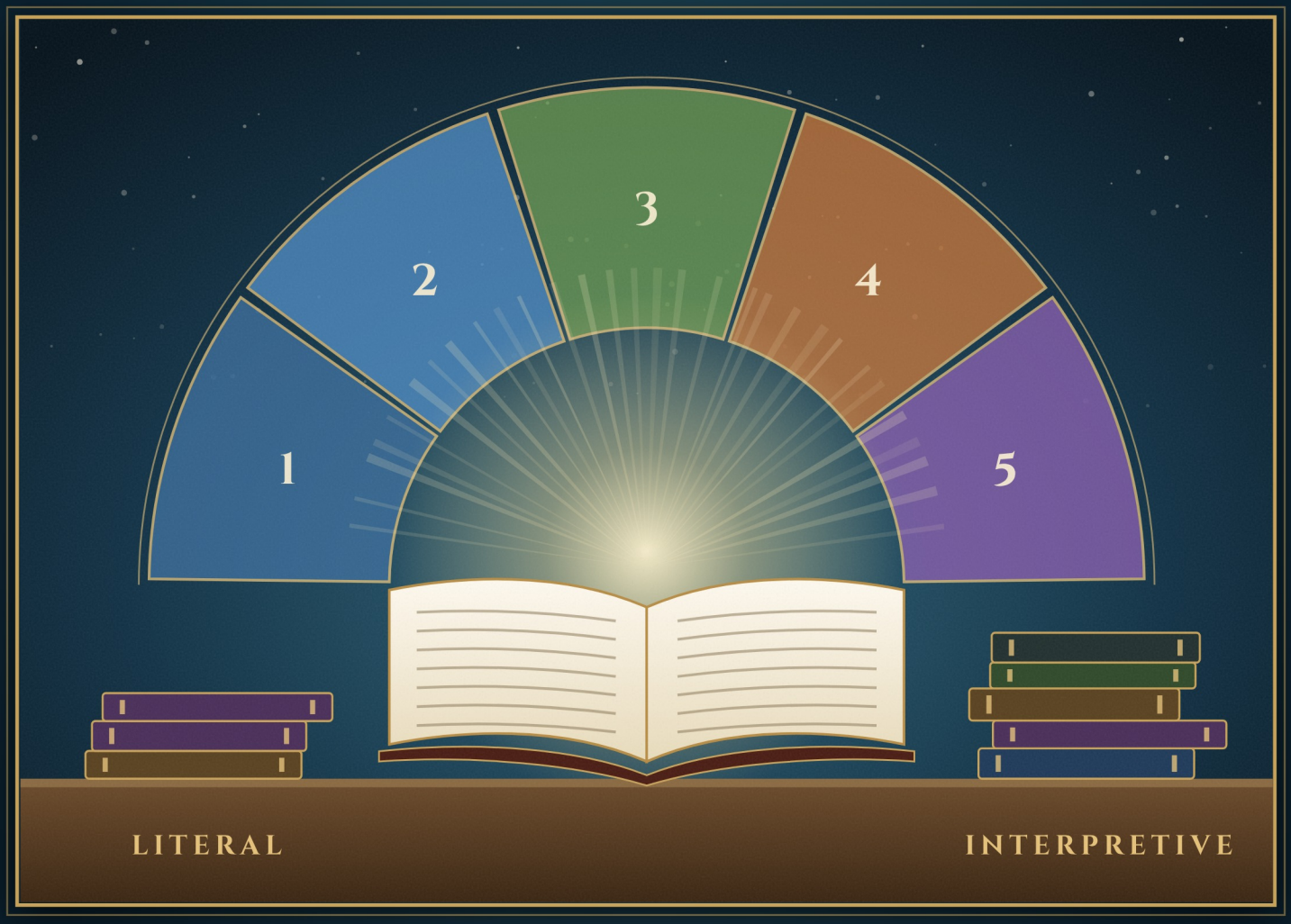
WHICH BIBLE, WHICH BOOKS?

A Plain Guide to English Translations and the Canon of Scripture



From word-for-word to paraphrase, and from 66 books to 81: what the sources actually say

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Which Bible, Which Books?

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Andrew Dominguez

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Translation placements and canon tables summarize published sources named in the notes. Publishers' and churches' statements are reported, not endorsed. Facts were checked against the sources as of November 2026.

Free download: trinfinityenterprises.com. Questions and corrections: andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com

A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction: Two Questions People Ask Me

There are two questions I hear more than almost any others when the subject turns to the Bible. The first one is, "Which Bible should I read?" The second one usually comes a little later, and a little quieter: "Why does my friend's Bible have more books in it than mine?"

Both are good questions. Both have honest answers. And both get muddied fast. Go online and you'll find people who say only one translation is the real Word of God, people who say the church hid books from you, and people selling a "complete" Bible with books nobody has ever heard of. Most of them sound very sure of themselves.

I wrote this book because I wanted to sort it out for myself first. I'm not a seminary professor. I'm someone who has spent a lot of years studying the Bible, teaching it, and writing Bible studies. When I don't know something, my habit is to go to the source and check it. So that's what I did here. I read the published translation guides. I read what the publishers say about their own Bibles. I read the church documents themselves, the councils and confessions and catechisms, and I read the scholars who study them. Then I lined it all up side by side.

This book is what I found.

What This Book Will Do

Part 1 is about translations. You'll learn how we got an English Bible in the first place, what "word-for-word" and "thought-for-thought" really mean, and where about sixty English Bibles sit on the spectrum from most literal to most interpretive. You'll see the same verses in several translations side by side, and you'll get plain advice on how to pick a Bible that fits how you'll use it.

Part 2 is about the canon, the list of books a church accepts as Scripture. You'll see which books the Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Ethiopian traditions count, how those lists took shape over many centuries, and what the books outside every major canon actually are. We'll take on a few popular myths along the way, like the one that says a single council picked the books of the Bible.

What This Book Will Not Do

This book will not tell you your church is wrong. I'm a Protestant, and I'll tell you plainly where I land and why. But when I describe what Catholics, Orthodox Christians or the Ethiopian church believe, I want those believers to read it and say, "Yes, that's what we teach." I've tried to report every tradition the way its own documents describe it.

This book will not crown one translation as the best. I'll tell you which Bible I read and which one I quote in my books, and why. But a Bible is a tool, and the right tool depends on the job.

How I Label Things

When you're reading about history, it helps to know how solid a claim is. I sort what I report into a few plain categories, and I use the same words throughout the book:

- **Verified fact:** shown by a primary document or a reliable reference, and not in dispute.
- **Scholarly view:** what scholars conclude from the evidence, like the date a book was written. Reasonable people can differ.
- **Church position:** what a church teaches about its own Bible. I report it; I don't grade it.
- **Disputed claim:** the sources disagree, or the claim is widely challenged.
- **Not verified:** I couldn't confirm it, and I'll tell you why.

Every chapter has numbered notes at the end, so you can check my sources for yourself. I hope you will. The Bereans were "examining the Scriptures every day to see if these things might be so" (Acts 17:11), and that's a good habit for any of us.

Using This Book With a Group

Every chapter ends with questions for discussion, so this book works for a Sunday school class or a small group as well as for reading on your own. Most chapters take about fifteen minutes to read. If your group meets once a week, take the Introduction and Chapter 1 the first week and two chapters at a time after that, and you'll finish in about nine weeks. Ask everyone to bring the Bible they normally read. Chapter 4 goes best when people can see several translations at once, so keep a phone or a Bible website handy. When you reach Part 2, remind the group that we're describing what each church teaches, not arguing with anyone at the table. If a word is new to you, look for it in Key Terms at the back.

A Word About the Bible in This Book

The Bible I read and quote is the SLB (Steadfast Literal Bible), a word-for-word translation in today's language that I prepared from the ancient Scripture sources, the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. You can read all of it free at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. You'll find my reasons in the note at the front of this book and again in Chapter 6. Unless I say otherwise, every Scripture quotation in these pages comes from the SLB, and words added for sense are set in bold italics. Because the SLB is my own work, I've tried hard to keep it in its place. It is one translation among many, not the standard I measure the others by. In Chapter 4 you'll see it side by side with the BSB (Berean Standard Bible), a few short samples of the NASB 1995, and some older public-domain Bibles, so you can compare them for yourself.

At the back you'll find a short list of key terms and three appendices: a table of the translations covered in Part 1, a table comparing the canons, and a timeline of how the lists took shape. There's also a list of every source I used, with a rating for how strong it is as evidence, and a permissions table showing what I quoted and on what basis.

Let's start with how the Bible got into English in the first place.

Part 1: Translations

Which Bible should I read?

CHAPTER 1

How We Got an English Bible

Every English Bible you have ever held is a translation. That sounds obvious when you say it out loud, but most of us don't think about it when we open our Bibles on a Sunday morning. The words on the page were not first written in English. Somebody had to carry them across.

The Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew, with a few sections in Aramaic, a related language. The New Testament was written in Greek, the common language of the eastern Roman world in the first century. Nobody has the original pages the prophets and apostles wrote. What we have are copies, and copies of copies, made by hand over many centuries. Translators work from printed editions of those manuscripts, and different translations use different editions. You'll see that in the tables later in this book, where the source text is named for each Bible.

So when we ask, "Which Bible should I read?" we're really asking two questions at once. Which original-language text did the translators start from? And how did they choose to carry it into English? This chapter is about the history. The next chapter is about the choices.

Before English: The Latin Bible

For roughly a thousand years, the Bible of the Western church was in Latin. Jerome, a scholar of the late 300s, produced the Latin translation that came to be called the Vulgate. You'll meet Jerome again in Part 2, because he had strong opinions about which books belonged in the Bible.

For most people in medieval England, Latin was a church language, not a home language. If you couldn't read Latin, you heard the Bible read and preached, but you couldn't read it for yourself.

Wycliffe: The First Complete English Bible

The first complete Bible in English is linked to John Wycliffe and his followers in the late 1300s. Christian History magazine says two versions appeared between 1380 and 1397; the later revision is usually credited to John Purvey.[1] It was copied by hand, because the printing press had not yet come to England. And it was translated from the Latin Vulgate, not from Hebrew and Greek. So the Wycliffe Bible was a translation of a translation.

Tyndale: Back to the Greek and Hebrew

William Tyndale changed that. His English New Testament was translated from the Greek, and it was the first part of the Bible printed in English. A first printing at Cologne in 1525 was stopped partway, and only a fragment survives. The first complete edition was printed at Worms in 1526. He also translated part of the Old Testament from Hebrew. His work raised such fears of heresy in England that it had to be printed in Germany, and in 1536 Tyndale was burned at the stake.[2] His words lived on in the English Bibles that followed.

Coverdale, Geneva and the Bishops' Bible

In 1535 Miles Coverdale published the first complete printed English Bible. He drew on the Latin Vulgate, on Tyndale's work, and on Luther's German translation. Two years later, in 1537, John Rogers, writing under the name "Thomas Matthew," combined Tyndale's and Coverdale's work into what is called Matthew's Bible. In 1539 came the Great Bible, requested by King Henry VIII.[3]

English Puritans who had fled the persecution of Queen Mary Tudor produced the Geneva Bible in Geneva, Switzerland, with the New Testament in 1557 and the complete Bible in 1560. It was a revision of Tyndale's New Testament worked from Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, and it became the Bible of ordinary English Protestants for generations.[4]

The Church of England produced its own revision of the Great Bible in 1568, known as the Bishops' Bible, under Archbishop Matthew Parker. It became England's official version before the King James Version.[5]

On the Catholic side, English Catholic scholars produced the Douay-Rheims Bible, with the New Testament in 1582 and the Old Testament in 1609 and 1610. It was translated from the Latin Vulgate and later revised by Bishop Richard Challoner between 1749 and 1752.[6]

The King James Version

In 1604 King James I called a conference at Hampton Court, and translators were appointed to produce a new English Bible. It was published in 1611. The King James Version, or KJV, shaped English-speaking Christianity for centuries, and it still ranks third in Bible sales today.[7]

Here's something many people don't know. The KJV most of us read today is not the exact text of 1611. Spelling and printing were updated over time, and the standard text in use today dates from 1769.[8] The words are almost all the same, but the spelling is not.

I love the KJV's language. Many of the phrases we use in everyday English came from it. But English has changed a great deal since 1611. Some words that were plain then mean something different now, and that matters when we talk about readability in Chapter 5.

The Revisions: From 1881 to Today

For nearly three hundred years, the KJV was the English Bible for most Protestants. Then, in the late 1800s, scholars in England began a revision of it. The English Revised Version came out in stages, with the New

Testament in 1881 and the complete Bible in 1885. An American edition, the American Standard Version, or ASV, followed in 1901.[9]

The Revised Standard Version (RSV, 1952) was a revision of the ASV. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) was completed in 1971 and updated in 1977, 1995 and 2020.[10] Even The Living Bible (1971), one of the most free-flowing paraphrases ever published, began as a paraphrase of the ASV.[11]

Then came a wave of new translations in the late twentieth century. The New International Version (NIV) appeared in 1978, with its current text from 2011. The New King James Version (NKJV) came in 1982, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) in 1989, the New Living Translation (NLT) in 1996, and the English Standard Version (ESV) in 2001.[12] Newer still are the Christian Standard Bible (CSB, 2017), the Legacy Standard Bible (LSB, 2021), a direct update of the NASB 1995, and the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), first printed in 2016 under the name Berean Study Bible.[13]

Why So Many?

You might ask, "Why do we need so many English Bibles?" It's a fair question. There are three honest reasons.

First, English keeps changing. A Bible that read naturally in 1901 sounds stiff today, and a Bible written for today will sound dated someday too.

Second, scholars keep learning. Older manuscripts have been found, and our understanding of ancient Hebrew and Greek words has grown. New translations try to use that knowledge.

Third, translators make different choices about how closely to follow the original wording. That's the subject of the next chapter, and it's the biggest reason two good Bibles can read so differently.

There's a fourth reason too, and I'll be honest about it: Bibles are also a business. Publishers compete, and some new editions exist partly to sell. That doesn't make them bad Bibles. It just means you should read the marketing with your eyes open.

What This Means for You

When you hold your Bible, you're holding the work of many hands across many centuries: scribes who copied, scholars who edited the Hebrew and Greek, and translators who chose English words. Most of them worked with great care, and some paid with their lives. That should make us grateful.

It should also make us humble. No English Bible is the original. Every one is a translation, and every translation involves choices. In the next chapter, we'll look at what those choices are.

Questions for Discussion

1. Before reading this chapter, had you ever thought about your Bible as a translation? What difference does it make to you?
2. Why do you think Tyndale and others were willing to risk so much to put the Bible in English?
3. The KJV most people read today uses a 1769 text, not the exact 1611 printing. Does that surprise you? Why or why not?

4. Which of the reasons for "so many Bibles" seems most important to you?

Notes

1. Christian History magazine, issue 100 (2011), "Pre-KJV English translations," christianhistoryinstitute.org; "English Versions," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (1915), biblestudytools.com.
2. Christian History (note 1) gives about 1525; the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (note 1) gives 1526. The two dates fit the Cologne fragment and the complete Worms edition. Which Old Testament books Tyndale finished is not verified in the sources I read.
3. Christian History (note 1).
4. Christian History (note 1); International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (note 1), which notes its nickname, the "Breeches Bible."
5. Christian History (note 1).
6. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (note 1); Bible Gateway, "Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition" version information page.
7. Bible Gateway, "King James Version" version information page; Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA), Bible Translations Bestsellers, September 2026.
8. Logos (Faithlife) Bible Translation Spectrum lists the KJV (1900), AV 1873 and AV 1769 editions.
9. Bible Gateway, "American Standard Version" version information page; Logos (Faithlife) Bible Translation Spectrum.
10. Bible Gateway, "Revised Standard Version" and "New American Standard Bible" version information pages.
11. Wikipedia, "The Living Bible."
12. Publisher pages for each version: thenivbible.com, Bible Gateway (NKJV), Tyndale House (NLT), Crossway (ESV); Logos (Faithlife) Bible Translation Spectrum for the NRSV date.
13. Lifeway (CSB); Legacy Standard Bible FAQ, lsbible.org; Berean Standard Bible 3rd edition copyright page (Bible Hub). Wikipedia, "Legacy Standard Bible," for the LSB's dates (New Testament February 2021, complete Bible November 2021).

CHAPTER 2

Word-for-Word or Thought-for-Thought?

Picture two people translating the same sentence from Spanish into English. The first one writes down an English word for each Spanish word, in the same order, as far as English will allow. The second one reads the whole sentence, asks what it means, and writes what an English speaker would naturally say. Both are honest. Both are trying to be faithful. And their two sentences can look quite different.

That, in a nutshell, is the difference between a word-for-word Bible and a thought-for-thought Bible. Every translator has to decide how closely to follow the wording and word order of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and how much to reshape it into natural English. Those decisions line Bibles up along a spectrum, with the most literal on one end and the freest on the other.

The Two Big Ideas

Scholars have names for the two ends of the spectrum.

Formal equivalence tries to match the form of the original: its words, its word order where English allows, its sentence structure. The Logos (Faithlife) Bible Translation Spectrum puts it this way: "Formal equivalence seeks literal rendering."[1] People call these Bibles "word-for-word" or "essentially literal."

Dynamic equivalence, sometimes called **functional equivalence**, tries to match the meaning. The translator asks, "What did this mean to the first readers?" and then says it the way a modern reader would understand it. People call these Bibles "thought-for-thought."

Past the thought-for-thought Bibles you find **paraphrases**, which restate the text in everyday, conversational language. The Logos chart describes that end as seeking "meaning using contemporary colloquialism."[2] A paraphrase often reads more like a retelling than a translation.

The Five Bands

To keep things simple, I group Bibles into five bands. Literal sits on the left, interpretive on the right.

Band	What it means	How it reads
1 Interlinear or very literal	Follows the original wording and word order as closely as English allows, sometimes with the English word printed under each Hebrew or Greek word.	A study tool. Hard to read straight through.
2 Formal (word-for-word)	Keeps the wording and structure as far as English grammar allows.	Accurate to the words; can feel stiff.

Band	What it means	How it reads
3 Balanced (mediating)	Stays close to the words but smooths them where a literal rendering would confuse.	A middle path between the two ends.
4 Functional (thought-for-thought)	Translates the meaning of each sentence into natural English.	Reads easily; the translator interprets more.
5 Paraphrase	Restates the text in contemporary, everyday language.	Very readable; furthest from the wording.

The bands are my way of lining the guides up side by side. They're not a law of nature. Some Bibles sit right on a line, and some guides disagree about where a Bible belongs. When that happens, I'll show you both views.

What the Publishers Say About Themselves

It helps to hear how publishers describe their own Bibles. Here are a few, in their own words:

- The Lockman Foundation describes the NASB (New American Standard Bible) 1995 as following "formal equivalence, or a word-for-word approach."[3]
- Crossway calls the ESV (English Standard Version) an "essentially literal" translation.[4]
- Lifeway says the CSB (Christian Standard Bible) "balances contemporary English readability with linguistic precision of the original languages."[5]
- Tyndale House says the NLT (New Living Translation) translators rendered the text "as simply and literally as possible when that ... yielded an accurate, clear, and natural English text," and more dynamically when it didn't.[6]
- Bible Gateway's publisher page says Eugene Peterson, who wrote The Message, "decided to strive for the spirit of the original manuscripts."[7]

Notice that each publisher picks words that put its Bible in a good light. That's natural, and it's why I keep publishers' descriptions separate from the independent guides when I place a Bible on the spectrum. A company describing its own product is a different kind of evidence than an outside guide comparing many products.

More Literal Is Not Automatically More Accurate

Here is the one idea I most want you to take from this chapter. A more literal translation is not automatically more accurate.

You might ask, "How can that be? Isn't word-for-word the most faithful?" It's simple: Hebrew and Greek don't line up with English one word at a time. Hebrew has idioms, like any language. If I told you a friend "kicked the bucket," and you translated it word for word into another language, you'd get a sentence about a man and a pail. Every word would be "accurate," and the meaning would be wrong.

So even the most literal Bible has to interpret. Its translators still decide which English word best fits a Hebrew word that has several meanings, how to handle a Greek verb tense English doesn't have, and when an idiom needs to be explained. A formal translation interprets less often, and it shows you more of the original's shape. A functional translation interprets more often, and it gives you the meaning more smoothly. Both can be done faithfully. Both can be done badly.

That's why many serious Bible readers keep one of each. I'll come back to this in Chapter 7.

What About Interlinears?

An interlinear Bible prints the original Hebrew or Greek with an English word under each word. It's the most literal format there is, and it's a wonderful tool for study. But it isn't really meant to be read like a book, because the English comes out in the original word order.

As it happens, none of the guides I read placed any Bible in band 1. Interlinears like Green's and the Berean Interlinear Bible belong there by their format, but no guide actually rated them, so in my tables they're marked "Not placed." I didn't want to place them myself and pretend a guide had done it.

Where We Go From Here

Now that you know what the bands mean, the next question is obvious: where does my Bible sit? That's the next chapter.

Questions for Discussion

1. In your own words, what is the difference between formal and functional equivalence?
2. Can you think of an English idiom that would make no sense if translated word for word into another language?
3. Why might a publisher's description of its own Bible be a different kind of evidence than an outside guide's?
4. Have you ever been surprised by how different the same verse sounds in two Bibles? What was the verse?

Notes

1. Logos (Faithlife) Bible Translation Spectrum, read in three copies: the Logos forum thread, the Logos wiki page, and a fuller copy of the table hosted by Central Church NC.
2. Logos (see note 1).
3. The Lockman Foundation, "NASB 1995 - History, Updates, and Translation Philosophy," lockman.org.
4. Crossway, "Translation Philosophy," esv.org.
5. Lifeway, "CSB Translation Philosophy," lifeway.com.
6. Tyndale House Publishers, "NLT Translation Process," sites.tyndale.com/nlt. Quoted in part.
7. Bible Gateway, "The Message" version information page.

CHAPTER 3

Where the Bibles Sit

I wanted to answer one question as fairly as I could: where does each English Bible sit on the spectrum? Not where I think it sits, and not where its publisher says it sits, but where the people who compare Bibles for a living place it.

So I gathered the published translation guides I could read, wrote down what each one says about each Bible, and put those words into the five bands from Chapter 2. Then I took the middle value, the median, of the guides that place each Bible. That's its overall position. This chapter shows you the results, where the guides agree, and where they don't.

The Guides I Used

Five guides gave me placements I could use:

- **Logos (Faithlife) Bible Translation Spectrum.** A large table used in the Logos Bible software community. It groups Bibles as Word for Word, Thought for Thought, or Paraphrase, with a mark showing whether a Thought for Thought Bible leans more literal or freer than the NIV (New International Version).[1]
- **Bible Gateway's 2025 guide to Bible versions.** A careful guide covering twelve major Bibles, with reading levels.[2]
- **Christianbook's Bible Buying Guide.** A seller's guide with short descriptions.[3]
- **Tyndale House's article on choosing a Bible.** A short publisher article that sorts six Bibles into word-for-word and thought-for-thought.[4]
- **Olive Tree's blog post on the BSB (Berean Standard Bible).** The only guide I found that places the BSB.[5]

I tried several more. A few ministry charts were images I couldn't read, and one matrix had marks I couldn't match to its columns. I left those out rather than guess.[6]

I also kept two things out of the median on purpose. The publisher's own description of its Bible is shown separately, because a company describing its own product is a different kind of evidence. And I gave no 0-100 scores. Scores like that look precise, but nobody can say what a 73 means.

The Results

Here's where the guides put each Bible. A value like "Between 2 and 3" means the guides split, and the median landed between two bands.

Band	Bibles the guides place here (* = ECPA top 10, September 2026)
1 Interlinear or very literal	None placed by any guide
2 Formal (word-for-word)	ASV, Coverdale, Darby, Douay-Rheims, EOB-NT, ESV*, Geneva, JPS Tanakh, KJV*, LEB, LES, LSB, MEV, NASB 1995*, NASB 2020*, NETS, NKJV*, NRSV*, NRSVue*, RSV, RV, Tyndale, WEB, Wuest, YLT
Between 2 and 3	AMP
3 Balanced (mediating)	BSB, CEB, CSB*, EBR, EHV, ERV, HCSB, ICB, NAB, NABRE, NET, NIrV*, NIV*, NJB, TBfE, TLV, TNIV
4 Functional (thought-for-thought)	CEV, CJB, GNT, GW, ISV, NCV, NEB, NLT*, REB
Between 4 and 5	TPT
5 Paraphrase	CPG, Harwood, MSG, Phillips, TLB, Voice

A few things jump out right away.

First, nobody places anything in band 1. As I said in the last chapter, interlinears belong there by format, but no guide I read rated one.

Second, the most popular Bibles cluster in bands 2 to 4. The ten best-selling translations in September 2026, according to the ECPA (Evangelical Christian Publishers Association), were the NIV, ESV (English Standard Version), KJV (King James Version), NLT (New Living Translation), NKJV (New King James Version), a Spanish Bible (the Reina Valera), CSB (Christian Standard Bible), NIrV (New International Reader's Version), NASB (New American Standard Bible) and NRSV (New Revised Standard Version).[7] Popularity measures sales, not quality, but it tells you which Bibles you're most likely to see in church.

Third, many less common Bibles are placed by just one guide. That doesn't make the placement wrong, but it does make it less certain. In the table in Appendix A, every Bible shows how many guides placed it.

Where the Guides Agree

For the big formal Bibles, the guides agree. Every guide that places the NASB, ESV and KJV puts them in band 2, and the NASB and ESV publishers describe their Bibles the same way. The same is true on the other end for The Message, which the guides call a paraphrase. When the guides and the publisher all point to the same band, I give that placement high confidence.

Where the Guides Disagree

A few Bibles split the guides. Here are the ones worth knowing about.

The NIV. Logos, Bible Gateway and Christianbook put it in the balanced middle. Bible Gateway says it "leans just slightly toward a functional equivalence." Tyndale, which publishes the NLT, groups it with the thought-for-thought Bibles. The median lands at 3, balanced, and that matches how the NIV's own translators describe their aim: to balance faithfulness to the original with clarity of meaning.[8]

The Amplified Bible (AMP). Logos puts it with the word-for-word Bibles. Bible Gateway says it balances "word-for-word equivalence and paraphrase." So it lands between bands 2 and 3. That makes sense: Christianbook describes the AMP as expanding the meaning "through the use of additional word clarifications."[9]

The Passion Translation (TPT). Logos calls it a paraphrase. Christianbook calls it a "dynamic equivalence" translation. It lands between bands 4 and 5. Its lead translator, Brian Simmons, has described his aim as seeking "to amplify the heart of God and to approach the scriptures from an emotive level."[10] Some ministries have questioned whether it should be called a translation at all.[11]

Where Publishers Disagree With the Guides

Two publishers describe their Bibles as more literal than the guides do. The publisher of GOD'S WORD Translation (GW) describes a mediating method, but the Logos chart puts it in the thought-for-thought band. The publisher of The Voice also describes a mediating method, while Logos calls it a paraphrase.[12] I report both and let you judge.

Bibles Nobody Placed

Eighteen Bibles in my workbook have no placement at all, because none of the guides I could read rates them. They include Webster's Bible, Wycliffe, the Bishops' Bible, the Literal Standard Version, Green's Literal Translation and the King James 3. Some are historic, some are newer and less common. I listed them so you know they weren't forgotten, and so nobody thinks a blank means they're good or bad.

What About the BSB?

I quoted the BSB in my books before I finished my own translation, and many people read it, so I owe you a straight answer about it. Only one guide places it. The Olive Tree blog puts it in the balanced middle, band 3. The BSB's own publisher doesn't use a method term like "formal" or "dynamic." It says each word is connected back to the Greek or Hebrew to produce a transparent text.[13]

So I treat the band 3 placement as tentative. It fits my own experience reading the BSB, which reads a little smoother than the NASB without wandering far from the words. But one seller's blog is not much evidence, and I'd rather tell you that than overstate it.

What About the SLB?

You might ask where my own translation, the SLB (Steadfast Literal Bible), sits. No guide has rated it. It's new, and I made it, so I'm not going to place it myself and pretend a guide did. What I can tell you is what I aimed for: word for word wherever English keeps the meaning, and the writer's meaning in plain words where a literal phrase would mislead. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see them. That aim puts it toward the word-for-word end of the spectrum, but you should judge that for yourself. Chapter 4 puts it beside five other Bibles, and the whole text is free at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.

How Sure Can We Be?

I rated each placement High, Medium or Low confidence. High means two strong, independent sources support the band, usually the publisher and the Bible Gateway guide. Medium means one does. Low means the placement rests only on comparison charts or seller descriptions. Most Bibles come out Low, simply because only one guide names them. The big, popular Bibles tend to come out High.

That's an honest picture. The spectrum is real, and the guides agree on the big picture. But the exact spot for a less common Bible is often one source's opinion.

Questions for Discussion

1. Where does the Bible you read most often sit on the spectrum? Does that match what you expected?
2. Why do you think the guides split on the NIV, the AMP and the TPT?
3. Why might it matter that a placement rests on just one guide?
4. If someone told you their Bible is "the most accurate," what questions would you ask after reading this chapter?

Notes

1. Logos (Faithlife) Bible Translation Spectrum, forum, wiki and fuller hosted copy, counted as one source.
2. Jacob Edson, "Complete Guide to Bible Versions" (updated 2025), Bible Gateway.
3. Christianbook.com, "Bible Buying Guide."
4. Tyndale House Publishers, "How to Choose the Right Bible for You."
5. Brad Hoffman, "Look Inside: Berean Standard Bible," Olive Tree Blog, 2022.
6. Chapter 3 Ministries and notjustanotherbook.com chart images, and the Pastor Daniel translation matrix, could not be read.
7. ECPA, Bible Translations Bestsellers, September 2026, from Circana BookScan data, readgoodbooks.com.
8. Bible Gateway guide (2025); Tyndale article; The NIV Bible, "Translation Philosophy of the NIV," thenivbible.com (summarized).
9. Christianbook (see the guide list above).
10. Premier Christianity interview with Brian Simmons, 13 December 2018.
11. Chapter 3 Ministries, "Bible Translations Comparison Charts," calls it a re-written Bible rather than a translation.
12. Bible Gateway version information pages for GW and The Voice; Logos (see note 1).
13. Berean Bible home page, berean.bible; Olive Tree (see the guide list above).

CHAPTER 4

Same Verse, Different Words

Talking about translation theory only goes so far. At some point you have to put the Bibles side by side and look. That's what this chapter does.

I picked eight verses that show different kinds of translation choices: an idiom, a familiar psalm, a word choice, a theological term, a long sentence, and a couple of commands. For each one, you'll see six Bibles:

- **SLB** (Steadfast Literal Bible), my own word-for-word translation and the Bible I quote in my books. Words added for sense are in bold italics.
- **BSB** (Berean Standard Bible), a modern translation that has been dedicated to the public domain.
- **NASB 1995 (New American Standard Bible), quoted here** under The Lockman Foundation's free-quote terms.
- **KJV** (King James Version), in the standard 1769 text, public domain.
- **ASV** (American Standard Version, 1901), public domain.
- **YLT** (Young's Literal Translation), a very literal nineteenth-century Bible by Robert Young, public domain.

The more popular modern Bibles like the NIV (New International Version), ESV (English Standard Version) and NLT (New Living Translation) are copyrighted, so I haven't printed them here. You can see any of these verses in those Bibles for free at Bible Gateway or a similar site. I'd encourage you to pull one up beside this chapter.

One note on the NASB 1995: it prints words added for sense in italics. I've printed them in regular type here, so the italics don't get confused with emphasis. The SLB marks its added words in bold italics, and I've kept that so you can see where it supplied a word.[1]

An Idiom: Amos 4:6

Amos 4:6

Version	Text
SLB	"And also I, I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.
BSB	"I afflicted all your cities with cleanness of teeth and all your towns with lack of bread, yet you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.
NASB 1995	"But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities And lack of bread in all your places, Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

Version	Text
KJV	And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.
ASV	And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah.
YLT	And I also--I have given to you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, And lack of bread in all your places, And ye have not turned back unto Me, an affirmation of Jehovah.

Look at the phrase "cleanness of teeth." Every Bible in this table keeps it. That's the Hebrew picture: if there's no food, your teeth stay clean. A formal Bible keeps the picture and trusts you to work it out, and the second half of the verse helps by talking about a lack of bread. Many thought-for-thought Bibles explain the picture instead of keeping it. Pull up a band 3, 4 or 5 Bible and compare.

This is the trade-off in miniature. Keeping the picture shows you what the prophet actually said. Explaining it makes sure you don't miss the point. Neither is dishonest.

A Familiar Psalm: Psalm 23:1

Psalm 23:1

Version	Text
SLB	The LORD ***is*** my shepherd; I will not lack.
BSB	The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
NASB 1995	The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
KJV	A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
ASV	A Psalm of David. Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want.
YLT	A Psalm of David. Jehovah is my shepherd, I do not lack,

Not much changes here, and that's worth noticing too. For many verses, all the major translations say nearly the same thing. The differences people argue about are real, but they're often in a small number of verses. Most of the time, a reader of any good translation is reading the same Bible.

The one small difference is worth a look. The SLB and YLT say "lack" where the others say "want." When the older Bibles were made, "want" meant "lack," so "I shall not want" means "I will lack nothing." Today "want" usually means "wish for," and that can turn the verse upside down. We'll see the same kind of drift with the word "careful" in a few pages.

An Idiom That Stays: Matthew 5:3

Matthew 5:3

Version	Text
SLB	"Blessed ***are*** the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.
BSB	"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
NASB 1995	"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
KJV	Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
ASV	Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
YLT	`Happy the poor in spirit--because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

"Poor in spirit" appears in every Bible here. It's a Hebrew-flavored way of describing a person who knows his own need before God. Some freer translations spell that out in plainer words. Formal translations keep the phrase and leave the explaining to teachers and study notes. Notice too that the SLB and YLT say "the heavens," because the Greek word is plural. The others say "heaven." The meaning is the same; one shows you the form of the Greek, and the other reads like everyday English.

A Word Choice: John 1:14

John 1:14

Version	Text
SLB	And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from ***the*** Father, full of grace and truth.
BSB	The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
NASB 1995	And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
KJV	And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.
ASV	And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth.
YLT	And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth.

Here's a real difference. The SLB, NASB 1995, KJV, ASV and YLT say "only begotten." The BSB says "one and only." The Greek word behind both is debated by scholars: older Bibles connected it with "begotten," and many newer Bibles take it to mean "unique" or "one of a kind." This isn't a question of one Bible believing in Jesus more than another. Both renderings point to Jesus as the unique Son of the Father. They just weigh the Greek word differently. I kept "begotten" in the SLB, and its preface explains why.

A Theological Term: Romans 3:25

Romans 3:25

Version	Text
SLB	whom God set forth ***as*** a propitiation through faith in His blood, for a demonstration of His righteousness because of the passing over of the sins that had previously occurred, in the forbearance of God;
BSB	God presented Him as an atoning sacrifice in His blood through faith, in order to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had passed over the sins committed beforehand.
NASB 1995	whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;
KJV	Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;
ASV	whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God;
YLT	whom God did set forth a mercy seat, through the faith in his blood, for the shewing forth of His righteousness, because of the passing over of the bygone sins in the forbearance of God--

The SLB, NASB 1995, KJV and ASV use "propitiation," a word that means turning away God's wrath by a sacrifice. The BSB says "atoning sacrifice," which is easier for most readers but folds the meaning into a more general phrase. YLT says "mercy seat," connecting the word to the lid of the ark of the covenant where blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement.

This is a good example of why I like having a formal Bible nearby. "Propitiation" is a hard word, but it's the right word, and once you learn it you won't forget it.

Worship: Romans 12:1

Romans 12:1

Version	Text
SLB	Therefore I exhort you, brothers, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies ***as*** a living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God, your reasonable service.
BSB	Therefore I urge you, brothers, on account of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.
NASB 1995	Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.
KJV	I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.
ASV	I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service.
YLT	I call upon you, therefore, brethren, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies a sacrifice--living, sanctified, acceptable to God--your intelligent service;

The BSB and NASB 1995 both say "spiritual service of worship." The KJV and the SLB say "reasonable service." The Greek word can carry both ideas, something reasonable or logical, and something spiritual. Each translation picks one side, and a footnote in many Bibles mentions the other.

A Long Sentence: Ephesians 4:29

Ephesians 4:29

Version	Text
SLB	Let no rotten word go out of your mouth, but whatever ***is*** good for building up of the need, so that it may give grace to those who hear.
BSB	Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up the one in need and bringing grace to those who listen.
NASB 1995	Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.
KJV	Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.
ASV	Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear.
YLT	Let no corrupt word out of your mouth go forth, but what is good unto the needful building up, that it may give grace to the hearers;

Look at the word counts here. The NASB 1995 uses more words than the others because it spells out the structure of the Greek. Notice "edification" in the NASB 1995 and "building up" in the BSB and the SLB. They mean the same thing; one is a church word and one is everyday English. The older Bibles say "corrupt," the BSB and NASB 1995 say "unwholesome," and the SLB says "rotten," which is the plain picture behind the Greek word.

A Command: Philippians 4:6

Philippians 4:6

Version	Text
SLB	Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God;
BSB	Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
NASB 1995	Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
KJV	Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.
ASV	In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.
YLT	for nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer, and by supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God;

The KJV says "careful" where the others say "anxious." In 1611, "careful" meant "full of care," which is to say worried. Today "careful" means cautious, which is almost the opposite of what Paul meant. That's not a mistake by the KJV translators; it's English changing under their words. We'll come back to that in the next chapter.

Notice too that the BSB says "petition" where the other five say "supplication." Same idea, simpler word.

What These Eight Verses Show

Put these side by side and a few things become clear.

Most of the time, good translations agree. The differences are real, but they show up in particular words and phrases, not in the message as a whole.

Formal Bibles keep more of the original's pictures and technical terms, like "cleanness of teeth" and "propitiation." That's a strength for study, and it asks a little more of the reader.

Newer Bibles use simpler words, like "petition" and "building up." That's a strength for reading, and it sometimes folds a precise term into a general one.

Older Bibles carry words whose meaning has drifted, like "careful." That's a reason to read them with a little help, not a reason to stop reading them.

Eight verses are a sample, not a full audit. But they're enough to show you that the spectrum from Chapter 2 is real, and enough to help you see what to look for when you compare Bibles yourself.

Questions for Discussion

1. Which of these eight verses showed the biggest difference between translations? Why do you think so?
2. Did any of the older words, like "careful" or "supplication," surprise you?
3. Pick a verse you love and look it up in three translations. What do you notice?
4. When does a hard word like "propitiation" help you, and when does it get in the way?

Notes

1. The Lockman Foundation permits up to 1,000 verses to be quoted without written permission, provided the verses are not a complete book of the Bible and do not make up more than 50% of the work. This chapter quotes eight. See the copyright page for the full notice.

CHAPTER 5

Readability and Older English

If you've ever handed a KJV (King James Version) to a teenager, you've seen the look. It's not that the King James is a bad Bible. It's that English has moved on. Readability matters, because a Bible you can't understand is a Bible you won't read.

But readability is slippery. People throw around grade levels as if they were exact measurements, and they're not. In this chapter I want to sort out what we actually know about how hard each Bible is to read, and what we don't.

Three Different Things Called "Readability"

When someone tells you a Bible reads at a certain grade level, ask where that number came from. There are three very different sources, and I keep them apart.

What guides say. Some comparison guides give a reading level for each Bible. Bible Gateway's 2025 guide gives grade levels for twelve major Bibles, and the Logos chart gives a reading level number too.[1] These are useful, but the guides don't always say how they measured.

What publishers say. Publishers describe their own Bibles as "clear," "natural" or "easy to read." That tells you what they were aiming for, not whether they hit it.

What can actually be measured. A readability formula counts sentence length and syllables and turns them into a grade level. The most common is the Flesch-Kincaid grade. It can only be run on a text you have in full.

What I Measured

I ran the Flesch-Kincaid grade on the Bibles whose full text I could legally use: the public-domain historic versions (the KJV; the ASV, or American Standard Version; the Darby and Webster Bibles; and the YLT, or Young's Literal Translation), the BSB (Berean Standard Bible), the NASB (New American Standard Bible) 1995, and my own SLB (Steadfast Literal Bible). My sample was all of Genesis, Psalms and John, so it covers narrative, poetry and a Gospel.

Bible	Measured grade (Genesis, Psalms and John)
BSB	4.8
NASB 1995	6.0
SLB	6.0

Bible	Measured grade (Genesis, Psalms and John)
Darby	6.4
Webster	6.4
KJV (1769 text)	6.6
ASV	6.9
YLT	8.5

Before you take these numbers anywhere, here's the catch. Bible verses use lots of colons and semicolons, and the formula only counts a sentence as ending at a period, question mark or exclamation point. Bible text also uses many short, common words. Both of those pull the score down. So these numbers run low for every Bible. They're only useful for comparing these Bibles with each other, not with a newspaper or a school textbook.[2]

Even with that caution, the pattern makes sense. The BSB reads easiest of the group. The NASB 1995 and the SLB sit in the middle, at the same grade. The KJV and ASV are a bit harder. Young's Literal Translation, which follows Hebrew and Greek word order closely, is the hardest by a good margin.

Why the KJV Is Harder Than Its Score

The KJV scores close to the NASB 1995, which may surprise you. That's because a formula can count syllables, but it can't tell when a word has changed its meaning. And that's the KJV's real readability problem.

We saw one example in the last chapter. In Philippians 4:6, the KJV tells us to be "careful for nothing." In 1611, "careful" meant full of care, or worried. Today it means cautious. A modern reader can read every word of that verse and come away with the wrong idea, and no readability formula will catch it.

There are many words like that in older English. Some are obvious, like "thee" and "thou." The dangerous ones look familiar but have shifted underneath, so you don't know you're misreading.

I'm not telling you to give up the KJV. Generations of believers have loved it, memorized it and been shaped by it, and its language is beautiful. I'm telling you to read it with a little help, like a modern Bible beside it or a good dictionary of older English.

Readability Is Not Accuracy

One more caution. A Bible that is easier to read is not automatically less accurate, and a Bible that is harder is not automatically more faithful. Sometimes a Bible is hard because it keeps the original's shape. Sometimes it's hard because its English is old. Sometimes it's easy because the translators found a clear way to say exactly what the text means. And sometimes it's easy because the translators smoothed over something that should have stayed rough.

That's why readability is one question you ask, not the only one.

What This Means for You

If you're a new believer, or you're buying a Bible for a child or a new reader, start with something easy to read. You can add a more literal Bible later.

If you've read the Bible for years and want to dig deeper, a formal Bible will show you more of the original's shape, even if it takes more effort.

If you love the KJV, keep reading it, and keep a modern Bible close by to check the words that have drifted.

Questions for Discussion

1. Has an older word in the Bible ever confused you? What was it?
2. Why can't a readability formula tell you whether a word has changed its meaning?
3. Who in your life would benefit from an easier-to-read Bible right now?
4. What would you look for in a Bible for a child or a new believer?

Notes

1. Jacob Edson, "Complete Guide to Bible Versions" (updated 2025), Bible Gateway; Logos (Faithlife) Bible Translation Spectrum.
2. Syllables were counted with the Pyphen hyphenation dictionary. Every other Bible in this book is "not measured," because its full text is under copyright and was not available to me.

CHAPTER 6

The Bible I Read and Quote

People sometimes ask which Bible I use and why. It's a fair question, and I'd rather explain it plainly than leave anyone guessing. I read and quote the SLB (Steadfast Literal Bible), my own translation. I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources. Here's how I got there.

Where I Started: The NASB 1995

For a long time the NASB (New American Standard Bible) 1995 was my study Bible. I liked it because it sticks close to the words. Every guide I read that places the NASB puts it in the word-for-word band, and its publisher, The Lockman Foundation, describes it the same way: "formal equivalence, or a word-for-word approach."[1]

When I was studying a passage and wanted to know what it actually said, as closely as English would let me get, that's where I went. It also prints added words in italics, which tells you when the translators supplied a word the original doesn't have. That's the kind of honesty I appreciate in a study Bible, and I built the same idea into the SLB.

The NASB 1995 isn't the newest NASB. Lockman updated it in 2020. They say the two editions reflect "slightly different translation decisions" and differ "primarily in how contemporary English is applied."[2] Lockman has also worked with Three Sixteen Publishing on the LSB (Legacy Standard Bible), which they describe as a direct update of the NASB 1995 that keeps its wording where no change was needed.[3] The 1995 edition is the one I knew best.

Why My Books Quote the SLB

When I write a Bible study, I want to print the Scripture right there on the page, often whole chapters and sometimes whole books, with my comments alongside. That's where copyright comes in.

The NASB 1995 is copyrighted, and Lockman sets limits on how much of it can be quoted without written permission. Its rules don't allow complete books of the Bible to be reproduced in a work like mine. I respect that. It's their translation, and they have every right to protect it.

For a while my books quoted the BSB (Berean Standard Bible). Its publishers have dedicated the text to the public domain, which means anyone can quote it, print it and share it without asking permission.[4] That's a gift to churches, teachers and writers, and I'm grateful for it.

But I wanted my books to quote a Bible that reads the way I study: as close to the words of the original as English allows. So I prepared one. The SLB (Steadfast Literal Bible) is a word-for-word English translation of the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. My books now quote it, and anyone can read, search, download and print the whole thing free at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.

What Kind of Bible Is the SLB?

I have to be extra careful here, because I made it, and it would be easy to oversell my own work. So here are the plain facts.

The Old Testament is translated from the Westminster Leningrad Codex, a standard edition of the traditional Hebrew text. The New Testament is translated from the Received Text (Textus Receptus), the Greek text behind the King James Version, in the 1894 edition by F. H. A. Scrivener. That's why the SLB has a few verses, like John 5:4 and Acts 8:37, that many modern Bibles move to the footnotes. Scholars disagree about which Greek text is best, and good Christians land on both sides. I chose the Received Text for the SLB, and I'd rather tell you that up front than have you find it on your own.

The aim is word for word wherever English keeps the meaning, and the writer's meaning in plain words where a literal phrase would mislead. Words added for sense are set in bold italics, the same idea as the NASB's italics, so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

No guide has rated the SLB yet, and I won't rate it for them. It scored the same readability grade as the NASB 1995 in Chapter 5, which fits a word-for-word Bible. In Chapter 4 you saw it next to five other Bibles. It agrees with the older formal Bibles on words like "only begotten," "propitiation" and "reasonable service," and it is plainer in a few places, like "rotten" in Ephesians 4:29. Read it beside another Bible you trust and judge it for yourself.

How I Use It

So here's how it works for me. I study from the SLB, and when I write for you, I quote it. When a translation choice makes a real difference to what a verse means, I check it against other faithful translations, say so and explain it.

I'm not telling you to do what I do. I'm telling you what I do and why, so you can see that it's a practical choice, not a claim that one Bible is holy and the others aren't. The NASB, the BSB and the other faithful translations in this book were made by people who took God's Word seriously, and I've tried to do the same.

A Word About Respecting Copyright

You might ask, "Why does copyright matter? It's the Bible." The Bible itself belongs to God. A particular English translation is the work of scholars and publishers who spent years and real money producing it. Respecting their copyright is simple honesty, and the Bible has a few things to say about honesty.

The good news is that you don't have to choose between a faithful Bible and a free one. The public-domain Bibles, from the KJV (King James Version) to the BSB, are there for anyone to use, and the SLB is free to read and quote too.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you use more than one Bible? How do you use each one?
2. What do you look for in a study Bible that might be different from what you want in a Bible for daily reading?
3. Why do you think some publishers choose to place their translations in the public domain?
4. Have you ever thought about copyright when sharing Scripture? What did you learn here?

Notes

1. The Lockman Foundation, "NASB 1995 - History, Updates, and Translation Philosophy," lockman.org.
2. The Lockman Foundation, NASB page, lockman.org.
3. Legacy Standard Bible FAQ, lsbible.org.
4. Berean Standard Bible 3rd edition copyright page (Bible Hub 2025 printing).

CHAPTER 7

How to Choose a Bible

Walk into a Christian bookstore and you'll find a wall of Bibles: different translations, different sizes, study Bibles, journaling Bibles, Bibles for teens and Bibles for men. It can feel overwhelming. Let me make it simpler.

The right Bible depends on what you'll use it for. That's really the whole chapter, but let me break it down.

Start With Your Purpose

Ask yourself what you'll do with this Bible most of the time.

Close study. If you want to dig into a passage, trace a word, or check what the text actually says, use a formal Bible from band 2. The NASB (New American Standard Bible), ESV (English Standard Version), LSB (Legacy Standard Bible), NKJV (New King James Version) and KJV (King James Version) all sit there.

Daily reading. If you want to read large portions, understand the flow of a book, and come away with the big picture, a balanced or functional Bible from band 3 or 4 reads more easily. The CSB (Christian Standard Bible), NIV (New International Version), BSB (Berean Standard Bible) and NLT (New Living Translation) are popular choices.

Reading aloud and memorizing. Some people choose the Bible their church reads from the pulpit, so they hear and read the same words. That's a good reason by itself.

New readers and children. Start with something easy, like a band 3 or 4 Bible, or a Bible made for younger readers such as the NIrV (New International Reader's Version) or the ICB (International Children's Bible).

Read Two Side by Side

If I could give you only one piece of advice, it would be this: read two Bibles side by side, one formal and one functional. You saw in Chapter 4 how much that shows you. Where they agree, you can be confident you're reading what the text says. Where they differ, you've found a spot where the translators had to make a choice, and that's exactly where a little study pays off.

You don't need to buy two printed Bibles to do this. Bible websites and apps let you put several translations side by side for free.

Be Careful With Paraphrases

A paraphrase like The Message can be refreshing. It can help you see a familiar passage with new eyes. But a paraphrase is the translator's retelling, and it carries more of the translator's own interpretation than any other kind of Bible. I'd never build a doctrine on a paraphrase alone. Check it against a formal translation first.

The same caution applies to any Bible where the guides disagree about whether it's a translation or a paraphrase, like The Passion Translation, which we looked at in Chapter 3.

Don't Let Popularity Decide for You

The best-selling Bible isn't automatically the best Bible for you, and a less common Bible isn't automatically suspect. The ECPA (Evangelical Christian Publishers Association) list measures sales.[1] Sales tell you what other people are buying. They don't tell you what fits how you'll use your Bible.

Watch Out for Two Extremes

There are two opposite mistakes I see often.

The first is the idea that only one translation is the real Word of God, and every other one is corrupt. I understand the love people have for a particular Bible, especially the KJV. But every English Bible is a translation, made by people working from Hebrew and Greek, and good translations from different eras all carry God's Word faithfully.

The second mistake is the idea that it doesn't matter at all which Bible you read. It does matter. Some Bibles are careful translations by large teams of scholars. Some are one person's paraphrase. Some are written to push a particular group's teaching. Knowing where a Bible sits on the spectrum, and who made it, helps you read it wisely.

A Simple Checklist

When you're choosing a Bible, ask these questions:

1. What will I use it for most: study, daily reading, reading aloud, or teaching others?
2. Where does it sit on the spectrum, and do the guides agree?
3. Who translated it: a committee, a publisher's team, or one person?
4. Can I read it comfortably for twenty minutes without getting lost?
5. Does it have the features I need, like cross-references, footnotes or study notes?
6. Will I use it alongside another Bible to compare?

The Best Bible

Here's the honest truth: the best Bible is the one you'll actually read. A shelf full of fine translations does nothing for you if they stay closed. Pick one that fits, open it every day, and let God speak through it.

That closes Part 1. In Part 2, we turn to the second question people ask me, the quieter one: why do some Bibles have more books than others?

Questions for Discussion

1. What will you use your Bible for most? Does the Bible you have now fit that purpose?
2. Have you ever compared two translations side by side? What did you notice?
3. What would you say to someone who believes only one translation is trustworthy?
4. Which question on the checklist do you think matters most? Why?

Notes

1. ECPA, Bible Translations Bestsellers, September 2026, readgoodbooks.com.

Part 2: Canon

Which books are in the Bible?

CHAPTER 8

What "Canon" Means

The word "canon" comes from a Greek word for a measuring rod, a straight stick a builder used to check his work. Over time it came to mean a standard or a rule, and then a list that meets the standard. When Christians talk about the canon of Scripture, they mean the list of books a church accepts as the Word of God.

That's the whole definition. The hard part is what comes next: different churches have slightly different lists.

The Lists Today

Here is how the major traditions count their books today.

Tradition	Old Testament	New Testament	Total
Jewish Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible)	24 books (the same content as the Protestant 39)	None	24
Protestant	39	27	66
Roman Catholic	46	27	73
Eastern Orthodox	More than 46; no single fixed list for all Orthodox churches	27	Varies
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo	54 (narrower canon) or 46 (broader canon)	27 or 35	81

The Protestant count comes from confessions like the Westminster Confession, which lists 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books by name.[1] The Catholic count comes from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which says the canon has 46 Old Testament books (45 if Jeremiah and Lamentations are counted as one) and 27 New Testament books.[2] The Orthodox and Ethiopian numbers need more explaining, and they get it in Chapters 12 and 13.

The Good News First

Before we get into the differences, notice how much everyone agrees on.

Every Christian tradition in this table accepts the same 27 New Testament books. The Ethiopian church adds some books in its broader count, but its narrower canon has the same 27.[3]

Every tradition accepts the 39 books of the Protestant Old Testament. The Jewish Tanakh contains the same content, counted as 24 books. The Catholic, Orthodox and Ethiopian Bibles include those same books and then add others.

So the differences are real, but they sit at the edges. Nobody is reading a different Gospel of John. Nobody has a different book of Romans. When people say "Catholics have a different Bible," what they mean is that Catholic Bibles have seven more Old Testament books and longer versions of Esther and Daniel.

Why Would the Lists Differ at All?

You might ask, "If God gave us the Bible, why don't all Christians agree on the list?" It's a fair question, and it deserves a straight answer.

The books of the Bible were written over many centuries, by many authors, in different places. They weren't delivered as a bound volume with a table of contents. God's people recognized these writings as Scripture over time, as they read them, taught from them and saw God speak through them.

For most books, that recognition came early and was never seriously questioned. Nobody in the early church doubted Genesis or the Gospel of Mark. For a small number of books, churches in different places weighed them differently. Some read them as Scripture. Some read them as helpful but not on the same level. And some didn't use them much at all.

Eventually each tradition settled its list. But they settled it at different times, in different places, for their own reasons. That's why the lists still differ at the edges today.

Recognized, Not Invented

One word in that last section matters a great deal: "recognized." Most Christians, Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox alike, would say the church didn't create the canon. The church recognized which books God had inspired. A list is a church saying, "These are the books we receive as God's Word."

That's an important difference. It means the authority of Scripture doesn't come from a council's vote. It comes from God. A council can recognize it, confirm it and settle disputes about it, but it can't make a book inspired.

I'll come back to this idea when we look at the popular myth that a single council "picked" the books of the Bible.

What the Rest of Part 2 Covers

Here's where we're headed.

Chapter 9 looks at the Hebrew Scriptures: why the Jewish count is 24, why Josephus counted 22, and why it's the same content as our 39.

Chapter 10 covers the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and the books that appear in it but not in the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 11 tells how the 27 New Testament books came to be recognized.

Chapter 12 takes on the biggest question: the books Catholics call "deuterocanonical" and Protestants call the "Apocrypha."

Chapter 13 explains the Ethiopian canon, the largest of all.

Chapter 14 looks at books outside every major canon, like Enoch, Jasher and the Gospel of Thomas.

Chapter 15 answers the myths that won't die.

Chapter 16 closes with a word about holding the Bible you have.

Questions for Discussion

1. Before reading this chapter, how would you have defined "canon"?
2. Were you surprised by how much the different traditions agree on?
3. What's the difference between a church "creating" the canon and "recognizing" it? Why does that matter?
4. What questions do you hope Part 2 will answer for you?

Notes

1. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1, section 2, ccel.org/creeds/westminster.htm.
2. Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 120, vatican.va.
3. R. W. Cowley, "The Biblical Canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Today," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 23 (1974): 318-323.

CHAPTER 9

The Hebrew Scriptures: 24, 22 or 39?

Open a Protestant Bible and count the Old Testament books. You'll get 39. Open a Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, and you'll count 24. Read the first-century Jewish historian Josephus and he'll tell you there are 22. Three different numbers. Same books.

How can that be? It's simple: they count differently.

One Content, Three Counts

The Jewish Bible is arranged in three parts: the Torah (the Law), the Prophets, and the Writings. The name "Tanakh" comes from the first letters of the Hebrew words for those three parts. The Jewish Encyclopedia describes the count of 24 books in three sections: the Torah (5 books), the Prophets (8 books) and the Writings (11 books).[1]

The difference from our 39 comes from books that are joined in the Jewish count and split in ours:

- 1 and 2 Samuel are one book, Samuel.
- 1 and 2 Kings are one book, Kings.
- 1 and 2 Chronicles are one book, Chronicles.
- Ezra and Nehemiah are one book.
- The twelve Minor Prophets, from Hosea to Malachi, are one book, called the Twelve.

Do the math: 39 minus 1 for Samuel, 1 for Kings, 1 for Chronicles, 1 for Ezra-Nehemiah, and 11 for the Twelve gives you 24. Same content, different counting.

Josephus and the 22 Books

Josephus wrote near the end of the first century. In a work called *Against Apion*, he said the Jews had 22 books: five books of Moses, thirteen books written by the prophets, and four books of hymns and instructions for life.[2] He didn't name each book, so exactly how he grouped them is a matter of interpretation. The Jewish Encyclopedia notes that the count of 22, used by Josephus and later by the Christian scholar Origen, came from combining some of the 24 books.[3]

The important point is that Josephus is a first-century Jewish witness to a fixed collection of Scriptures, with a clear number, in his day.

The Order of the Books

The Jewish order is different from ours too. The Babylonian Talmud (in a tractate called Baba Batra) gives an order for the Prophets and Writings. The Prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Twelve. The Writings are Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra and Chronicles.[4]

Notice that Daniel sits among the Writings in the Jewish Bible, not among the Prophets, and Chronicles comes last. When Jesus spoke of "the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms," He was naming the parts of the Scriptures as His hearers knew them. Psalms is the longest and best-known book of that third section.

> And He said to them, "These ***are*** the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things which are written concerning Me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44)

Were Some Books Debated?

Yes, a few. The Jewish Encyclopedia records ancient discussions among the rabbis about Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Esther.[5] These were debates about books already in use, not about adding new ones. In the end, all three stayed in.

When Was the Hebrew Canon Settled?

Here the honest answer is, "We don't know exactly." Scholars hold different views. The Jewish Encyclopedia, writing in 1906, dated the close of the Prophets to around 200 B.C. (before Christ) and the close of the Writings to sometime after the Maccabean period.[6] Other scholars put it earlier or later.

What we can say is that by the time of Josephus, he could describe a fixed number of books. And the New Testament quotes from the Law, the Prophets and the Writings again and again as Scripture.

What About the "Council of Jamnia"?

You may have read that a Jewish council at a town called Jamnia (also called Yavneh) closed the Hebrew canon around A.D. 90 (A.D. stands for anno Domini, Latin for "in the year of our Lord"). That idea goes back to a historian named Heinrich Graetz in 1871, and for a long time it was repeated in textbooks.

Today most scholars have dropped it. Studies by Jack Lewis in 1964 and Sid Leiman in 1976, among others, showed that the rabbis at Yavneh discussed some books, but there's no evidence of a council that fixed the canon.[7] So if you see "the Council of Jamnia closed the Old Testament," treat it as a disputed claim, not a fact.

Why This Matters for Christians

The Hebrew Scriptures are the Bible Jesus read. When He said, "It is written," He was quoting them. Paul says the Jewish people "were entrusted with the oracles of God," that is, the very words of God.

> Much in every way. For first, indeed, ***it is*** that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. (Romans 3:2)

That's one reason Protestants hold to the 39-book Old Testament: it's the same collection the Jewish people received and Jesus quoted. Catholics and Orthodox include more books, for reasons we'll look at in the next chapters. But everyone agrees on these.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did you know the Jewish Bible counts the same books differently? Does that change how you see the "39 versus 24" difference?
2. Why do you think Jesus named the Scriptures by their three parts in Luke 24:44?
3. Why is it important to separate a scholar's theory, like the Council of Jamnia, from established fact?
4. What does Romans 3:2 tell you about the role of the Jewish people in giving us the Bible?

Notes

1. "Bible Canon," Jewish Encyclopedia (1906), by Emil G. Hirsch, Ludwig Blau, Kaufmann Kohler and Nathaniel Schmidt, jewishencyclopedia.com.
2. Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.37-43, Whiston translation, lexundria.com.
3. Jewish Encyclopedia (see note 1).
4. Jewish Encyclopedia (see note 1), giving the order from Baba Batra 14b.
5. Jewish Encyclopedia (see note 1).
6. Jewish Encyclopedia (see note 1). B.C. means "before Christ"; some scholars write BCE, "before the Common Era," for the same years.
7. Wikipedia, "Council of Jamnia," summarizing Lewis (1964), Leiman (1976) and F. F. Bruce.

CHAPTER 10

The Septuagint and the Books in Between

Some three centuries before Jesus was born, a lot of Jewish people no longer lived in the land of Israel. Many lived in Egypt, especially in the great city of Alexandria, and they spoke Greek. Over time, many of them couldn't read Hebrew well. So the Scriptures were translated into Greek.

That Greek translation is called the Septuagint, often shortened to LXX, the Roman numeral for seventy. It matters for our story because it's where most of the extra books in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles come from.

The Story Behind the Name

An ancient document called the Letter of Aristeas tells a story about how the Septuagint began. It says King Ptolemy II of Egypt asked for the Jewish Law to be translated into Greek, and seventy-two Hebrew scholars, six from each tribe, did the work. That's where the name "seventy" comes from.

Most scholars today don't take the letter as a true historical account. Many consider it pseudepigraphal, meaning it was written under a false name or with an invented backstory.[1] But the name stuck.

When It Was Translated

Scholars generally agree that the Torah, the five books of Moses, was translated into Greek first, probably in the third century B.C., in Alexandria. The rest of the Old Testament followed over the next two centuries or so.[2] (B.C. means "before Christ." Some scholars write BCE, "before the Common Era," for the same years.)

So by the time of Jesus, Greek-speaking Jews had the Scriptures in Greek. When the apostles carried the gospel into the Greek-speaking world, the Septuagint was the Old Testament many of their hearers knew.

The Books in Between

Here's where it gets important for the canon question. Greek copies of the Old Testament contain some books and additions that aren't in the Hebrew Bible. These include Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and longer versions of Esther and Daniel. Some copies include more, like 1 Esdras, 3 and 4 Maccabees and the Prayer of Manasseh.

Most of these books were written in the last few centuries before Christ, during the time Protestants often call the "intertestamental period," the years between the Old and New Testaments. They include

history (like 1 Maccabees, which tells of the Jewish revolt against a Greek king), wisdom writing (like Sirach and Wisdom), and stories (like Tobit and Judith).

There Was No Single "Septuagint Canon"

This is a point that often gets missed. People sometimes talk as if there were one official Septuagint, with a fixed list of books, that the early church simply adopted. There wasn't.

The Septuagint was really a collection of translations made at different times by different people. The great handwritten copies that survive from the fourth and fifth centuries, called Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus, don't contain exactly the same books.[3] One has a book another lacks. The edges of the collection were not fixed.

So when Catholic and Orthodox Christians say the extra books came from the Septuagint, they're right. And when Protestants say the Septuagint never had a single agreed list, they're right too.

How the Early Church Used These Books

Because the early church used the Greek Old Testament so widely, Christians read these extra books from early on. Some church leaders quoted them. Some councils listed them as Scripture. Other leaders, especially those who knew Hebrew, noticed they weren't in the Hebrew Bible and set them apart.

We'll look at who said what in Chapter 12. For now, the key point is this: these books were part of the church's reading from very early, and their status was debated from very early too.

What This Means for You

If you're a Protestant, don't think of these books as strange or dangerous. They're ancient Jewish writings that tell us a lot about the world Jesus was born into. 1 Maccabees, for example, is a key source for the history of the years between the Testaments. You can read them with profit, even if you don't count them as Scripture.

If you're Catholic or Orthodox, you'll recognize these as books your church reads in worship and counts as Scripture. Knowing where they came from helps you explain that to others.

And for all of us, the Septuagint is a reminder that God's Word has always been carried across languages. The Greek translators in Alexandria were doing what Tyndale, the King James Version (KJV) translators and every modern translation team have done since: putting God's Word into the language of the people.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think Greek-speaking Jews needed the Scriptures in Greek?
2. What does it mean that there was no single fixed Septuagint list?
3. Have you ever read any of the books in between, like 1 Maccabees or Tobit? What did you think?
4. How does the Septuagint connect to the history of English translation from Part 1?

Notes

1. Wikipedia, "Septuagint," citing the scholarly consensus on the Letter of Aristeas.
2. Wikipedia, "Septuagint," citing Ross (2021), Beckwith (2008), Tov (1988) and Dines (2004). Dates for most individual books are tentative.
3. Wikipedia, "Septuagint": the codices are "not uniform in their contents."

CHAPTER 11

The New Testament: How 27 Books Were Recognized

The New Testament has 27 books, and every major Christian tradition agrees on them. But it took a few centuries for the whole church to settle on exactly those 27. This chapter tells how that happened.

The Core Was Never in Doubt

Let's start with what was settled early. The four Gospels, Acts, and the letters of Paul were read in churches as Scripture from very early on. By the late second century, Christian writers were treating them as the church's authoritative books.

The debates were about a handful of shorter books near the end of our New Testament, and about a few books that some churches read but that didn't make the final list.

Marcion: A Shortened Bible

One early push to define the list came from a man the church rejected. Marcion was a teacher in Rome who was excommunicated in 144. He taught that the God of the Old Testament was different from the Father of Jesus, and he made his own list of Scriptures: a shortened version of Luke's Gospel and ten letters of Paul.[1]

Some scholars think Marcion's list pushed the church to state its own list more clearly. Others think the church already had a working list. Either way, Marcion shows that the question "Which books?" was being asked by the middle of the second century.

The Muratorian Fragment

An early list of New Testament books survives in a Latin manuscript discovered in Milan and published by Ludovico Muratori in 1740. It's called the Muratorian Fragment, because its beginning is missing.[2]

The surviving part lists Luke and John, Acts, the letters of Paul including Philemon, Titus and Timothy, Jude, two letters of John, and Revelation. It doesn't mention Hebrews, James, 1 or 2 Peter, or 3 John. It accepts the Apocalypse of Peter, though it notes some don't want it read in church. It says the Shepherd of Hermas may be read privately but not publicly in church. And, interestingly, it includes the Wisdom of Solomon.[3]

Most scholars date the list to around 180-200, in or near Rome. A minority argue for the fourth century instead.[4] So it's an early witness, but its date is a disputed claim.

Eusebius: Four Groups

In the early 300s, the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea sorted the books he knew into four groups.[5]

- **Accepted:** the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation "if it seem proper."
- **Disputed:** James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John. These were known and used by many, but not by all.
- **Spurious:** books like the Acts of Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Didache. He also notes that some placed Revelation here.
- **Heretical:** books like the Gospels of Peter, Thomas and Matthias, which he said should be rejected outright.

Eusebius is helpful because he shows us the state of things honestly. In his day, most of the New Testament was accepted everywhere, a few books were still being discussed, and some popular books were being set aside.

Athanasius and the Year 367

The first list we know of that names exactly our 27 New Testament books comes from Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, in a letter he sent to his churches in 367.[6] He also mentions books that are "appointed ... to be read" but are not in the canon, including the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas. We'll see in the next chapter that he handled some Old Testament books the same way.

The North African Councils

Toward the end of the fourth century, councils in North Africa listed the books of Scripture: Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397, with the list repeated in 419. Their New Testament is our 27 books.[7] These were regional councils, not a ruling for the whole church, but they show where the Western church had settled.

What About Rome in 382?

You may read that a council in Rome in 382 issued the list. That claim rests on a document called the Decretum Gelasianum. Many scholars think it's actually a sixth-century text from Gaul (France) and doubt that it reflects a council in 382.[8] So treat the "Rome 382" list as a disputed claim.

Revelation: Last to Be Settled in the East

The book of Revelation had the longest road in the East. It was accepted early in the West, but Greek-speaking churches debated it for a long time. It was widely accepted in the East by the fifth century, and in the Armenian church only around 1200.[9]

What the Old Manuscripts Show

The great Bible manuscripts of the fourth century give us a snapshot. Codex Sinaiticus contains all 27 New Testament books, and also the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. Codex Vaticanus is

damaged at the end.[10] So a fourth-century Bible could contain our 27 books plus a couple of other writings the church later set aside.

How the Church Decided

You might ask, "What made a book belong?" Looking back, Christians usually name a few questions that were asked as the books were weighed: whether the book came from an apostle or someone close to the apostles, whether its teaching agreed with the faith handed down, and whether it was used widely in the churches. Those weren't rules voted on at a meeting. They were the questions Christians naturally asked as they read.

And here's the remarkable part. Churches spread across the Roman world, with no central office and no printing press, came to agree on the same 27 books. To me, that looks a lot less like a committee deciding and a lot more like God's people recognizing His voice.

Questions for Discussion

1. Which part of this history was new to you?
2. Why do you think books like James, Jude and 2 Peter were "disputed" for a time?
3. What do you make of the fact that a fourth-century Bible included books like Barnabas and Hermas?
4. How would you explain to a friend how the New Testament came together, in a few sentences?

Notes

1. Wikipedia, "Marcion of Sinope." Marcion's own writings are lost; he is known through his opponents, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian.
2. "Muratorian Canon," Catholic Encyclopedia (1911), newadvent.org.
3. Catholic Encyclopedia (see note 2).
4. Wikipedia, "Muratorian fragment": Sundberg (1973) and Hahneman (1992) argue for the fourth century; Rothschild (2022) argues it is a later forgery; Metzger, Hill and Ferguson hold the majority second-century view.
5. Eusebius, *Church History* 3.25, newadvent.org.
6. Athanasius, Festal Letter 39 (A.D. 367), newadvent.org.
7. Code of Canons of the African Church, Canon 24 (A.D. 419), newadvent.org.
8. Wikipedia, "Development of the New Testament canon," citing F. F. Bruce.
9. Wikipedia, "Development of the New Testament canon."
10. Wikipedia, "Development of the New Testament canon."

CHAPTER 12

More Books or Fewer? The Apocrypha Question

Picture a Bible study where one person opens a Catholic Bible and starts reading from Tobit. Half the room flips through their own Bibles looking for it. It isn't there. Somebody says, "That's one of the books the Catholics added." Somebody else says, "No, the Protestants took them out." Both people walk away sure they're right.

I've heard both lines more times than I can count. Here's the thing: neither one tells the story the way the old documents tell it. In this chapter I want to walk you through what actually happened, using the church records themselves. I'll tell you where I land at the end, but first I want you to see the evidence the same way I did.

Which Books Are We Talking About?

Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include books that Protestant Bibles don't have in their Old Testament. The core group is Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus), Baruch with the Letter of Jeremiah, and 1 and 2 Maccabees. They also include longer Greek versions of Esther and Daniel. The extra parts of Daniel are the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, the story of Susanna, and the story of Bel and the Dragon.

Orthodox Bibles go a little further. OrthodoxWiki lists 1 Esdras, 3 Maccabees and Psalm 151, with 4 Maccabees and the Prayer of Manasseh placed in an appendix.[1] The Ethiopian church goes further still, and that gets its own chapter.

Two Words for the Same Books

Catholics and Orthodox call these books *deuterocanonical*, which means "second canon." Protestants usually call them the *Apocrypha*, from a Greek word for "hidden." The names themselves carry a point of view, so I try to use both. One fact surprised me: the Catholic Encyclopedia says the terms "protocanonical" and "deuterocanonical" only date from the 16th century.[2] The debate is older than the words.

What the Early Church Did

You might ask, "Didn't the early church just have one list?" No, it didn't. Different leaders in different places handled these books in different ways.

In the year 367, Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, sent his churches the letter we met in the last chapter. His Old Testament leaves out Tobit, Judith, Wisdom and Sirach, and he even puts Esther with them. He says those books are "not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed ... to be read."[3] So he didn't throw them away. He set them apart for reading.

Jerome, the scholar who translated the Latin Vulgate, went further. In 392 he wrote that "whatever is outside of these is to be set apart among the apocrypha," and he named Wisdom, Sirach, Judith and Tobit.[4] The Catholic Encyclopedia says plainly that Jerome "strongly doubted" these books.[5]

Meanwhile, the churches of North Africa went the other way. The councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397, and again in 419) listed Tobit, Judith, two books of Maccabees and "five books of Solomon" among the Scriptures.[6] Those were regional councils, not a ruling for the whole church, but they show these books were being read as Scripture in a big part of the Christian world.

So the honest answer for the first five centuries is: it depended on where you lived and whose teaching you followed.

What the Reformation Did

Here's where the "Protestants removed them" line runs into trouble. When Martin Luther finished his German Bible in 1534, he kept these books. He printed them in their own section between the Old and New Testaments, under a heading that says they are "not considered equal to the Holy Scriptures, but are useful and good to read."[7] That is close to what Athanasius said over eleven hundred years earlier.

The King James Version of 1611 printed them too.[8] The Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles took a middle road. Article VI says the church reads them "for example of life and instruction of manners," but "yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine."[9]

The Reformed churches drew the hardest line. The Westminster Confession says: "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture."[10]

And when did most English Protestant Bibles stop printing them? Later than people think. The British and Foreign Bible Society printed its English Bibles without the Apocrypha from the start, in 1804, and in 1826 it decided to stop printing those books in any of its Bibles.[11]

What the Council of Trent Did

Now the "Catholics added them" line. On 8 April 1546, the Council of Trent issued a decree listing the books of the Old and New Testament, including Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch and the Maccabees. It declared anathema anyone who would not receive them "with all their parts, as contained in the old Latin Vulgate."[12]

So what did Trent do? It didn't invent these books. They had been listed at Carthage more than a thousand years before. What Trent did was settle the question for Catholics and make it binding, after centuries in which faithful Catholics like Jerome had doubts. The Catechism of the Catholic Church today counts 46 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books.[13]

The Council of Florence had already given a complete list in 1442, in its Bull of Union with the Copts, and that list includes Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch and the two books of Maccabees.[14]

The Orthodox Churches

The Orthodox story is different again. OrthodoxWiki notes that a council in 692 (the Council in Trullo) left the question without a binding answer. In 1672 a synod in Jerusalem named Wisdom, Judith, Tobit, Susanna, the Dragon, the Maccabees and Sirach as genuine parts of Scripture.[15] That synod was regional, so even today there isn't one list that every Orthodox church signs.

Why Both Slogans Fall Short

Put it all together and you can see the problem. "Catholics added books" skips the fact that these books were read, and in North Africa listed, more than a thousand years before Trent. "Protestants removed books" skips the fact that Athanasius and Jerome had set them apart long before Luther, and that Luther and the King James translators still printed them.

What really happened is less exciting and more human. Churches in different places weighed these books differently for centuries. Each tradition finally settled the question at a different time, for its own reasons. You can disagree with another church's answer, and I do. But you'll be on firmer ground if you know what that answer actually is.

Where I Stand

I hold to the 66 books of the Protestant Bible. I'll tell you why in plain terms, and you can weigh it for yourself.

First, as we saw in Chapter 9, Paul says the Jewish people were the ones entrusted with the Scriptures (Romans 3:2). The Jewish Scriptures, as Josephus counted them in the first century and as the rabbis counted them after, hold the same content as our 39 Old Testament books. And when Jesus spoke of the Scriptures, He named them by those same three parts (Luke 24:44).

Second, I give real weight to Athanasius and Jerome. They were not Protestants with an axe to grind. They were early church leaders who read these books, valued them, and still set them apart from Scripture.

Third, I take the Anglican advice seriously. I read 1 Maccabees for the history of the years between the Testaments. I read Sirach for its wisdom. I just don't build doctrine on them.

If you are Catholic or Orthodox, I hope you'll read this chapter as a fair account of your own church's history, even where I land somewhere else. And if you're Protestant, I hope you'll stop telling people the Catholics added books. The record doesn't say that.

Questions for Discussion

1. Before reading this chapter, which slogan had you heard? Where did you hear it?
2. Athanasius said these books should be read but are not part of the canon. What is the difference between a book you read and a book you build doctrine on?

3. Why do you think Luther and the King James translators kept printing these books?
4. How would you explain the Council of Trent's decision to a friend in two or three sentences, without using either slogan?
5. Read Romans 3:2 and Luke 24:44 again. What do they tell you about how Jesus and Paul viewed the Jewish Scriptures?

Notes

1. OrthodoxWiki, "Old Testament Canon," orthodoxwiki.org.
2. George J. Reid, "Canon of the Old Testament," Catholic Encyclopedia (1908), newadvent.org.
3. Athanasius, Festal Letter 39 (A.D. 367), newadvent.org.
4. Jerome, Preface to Samuel and Kings (*Prologus Galeatus*), A.D. 392, fourthcentury.com.
5. Catholic Encyclopedia (see note 2).
6. Code of Canons of the African Church, Canon 24 (A.D. 419), newadvent.org.
7. Wikipedia, "Luther's canon" (English rendering of Luther's 1534 heading).
8. Wikipedia, "Apocrypha controversy," citing Ewert.
9. Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Article VI, text at britainexpress.com and victorianweb.org.
10. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1, section 3, ccel.org.
11. Wikipedia, "Apocrypha controversy."
12. Council of Trent, Session IV, Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures (8 April 1546), ewtn.com.
13. Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 120, vatican.va.
14. Catholic Encyclopedia (see note 2); Eugene IV, Cantate Domino, Bull of Union with the Copts (4 February 1442), vatican.va.
15. Confession of Dositheus, Synod of Jerusalem (16 March 1672), crivoice.org; OrthodoxWiki (see note 1).

CHAPTER 13

The Ethiopian Canon: 81 Books, Two Ways

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has kept its own ancient traditions for many centuries. Its Bible is the largest of any church. It counts 81 books.

That number gets repeated a lot, and sometimes stretched. So let's look at what the sources actually say.

The 81 Books

The Ethiopian church itself teaches that its canon has 81 books, compared with 66 in Protestant Bibles and 73 in Catholic Bibles. A 2026 teaching page from Mahibere Kidusan, a Sunday school organization of the Ethiopian church in the United States, says exactly that, and names books like Enoch, Jubilees and three books called Meqabyan.[1]

The best scholarly description I found is a 1974 article by Roger Cowley, a scholar of Ethiopian Christianity. He showed that the 81 is reached in more than one way.[2]

The Narrower Canon

In what Cowley calls the narrower canon, the Old Testament has 54 books and the New Testament has the familiar 27. That's 81.

The 54 Old Testament books are the 39 books of the Protestant Old Testament (counted as 40, because Proverbs is divided into two books) plus these:

- 1 Enoch
- Jubilees
- Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Judith, Tobit and Baruch
- 1 Esdras and the Ezra Apocalypse (also called 4 Ezra)
- The rest of Jeremiah, Susanna, and the rest of Daniel
- Two books Cowley lists as "1 and 2 Maccabees"

Cowley says the narrower canon is not disputed in the church.

The Broader Canon

In what Cowley calls the broader canon, the count shifts. The Old Testament has 46 books, including a book called Pseudo-Josephus (also known as Joseph ben Gorion). The New Testament has 35 books: the 27, plus eight more. Those eight are church-order writings: the Sinodos (four books), the Book of the Covenant (two books), an Ethiopic book of Clement, and the Didascalia. Again, 81.

Cowley says the extra New Testament books in the broader canon may be treated more like commentary or church order than like the Gospels and letters. The Mahibere Kidusan page also speaks of "eight additional texts" in the New Testament.[3]

Where the Sources Disagree

Here's a spot where I have to be honest about a conflict. Cowley lists "1 and 2 Maccabees" in the narrower canon. But he also says the Ethiopian books called Meqabyan are "not the same as any of the 4 LXX books of Maccabees," meaning the Greek books in the Septuagint. Wikipedia's article on the Ethiopian canon says the narrower canon has the three Meqabyan books, not Greek 1 and 2 Maccabees.[4] The Mahibere Kidusan page names the three Meqabyan.

So does the Ethiopian Bible include the same 1 and 2 Maccabees that Catholic and Orthodox Bibles have? I can't confirm it from the sources I read. I've marked it "not verified" in my tables.

No Single Printed Edition

Another point that surprises people: no single printed Ethiopian Bible has been declared the complete official canon. Even the old Ethiopian law code, the Fetha Negest, says the canon has 81 books, but the list it gives adds up to 73.[5] The 81 is a traditional number that the church fills in more than one way.

Enoch and Jubilees

Two books in the Ethiopian Bible get the most attention: 1 Enoch and Jubilees. Both are ancient Jewish writings, and both survive complete only in Ge'ez, the old Ethiopian language. Pieces of both were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which shows they were read by some Jewish groups before and during the time of Jesus.[6] Besides the Ethiopian and Eritrean churches, the Beta Israel, the Jewish community of Ethiopia, also count them as Scripture.

We'll look at Enoch more closely in the next chapter, including the place where the letter of Jude quotes it.

What About "88 Books"?

You may see ads or websites selling an "88-book Ethiopian Bible." I looked for that number in church and scholarly sources and didn't find it. Cowley doesn't give it. Wikipedia doesn't give it. The church's own Mahibere Kidusan page says 81. Until someone shows me a church or scholarly source for 88, I treat it as a commercial claim, a number used to sell a book.

What This Means for You

The Ethiopian canon is a reminder of how old and wide the church is. Christians in Ethiopia have been reading the Scriptures for many centuries, in their own language, with their own traditions. As a Protestant, I don't count Enoch or Jubilees as Scripture. But I respect a church that has guarded these writings for so long, and I want to describe its Bible the way its own people do.

Questions for Discussion

1. What did you know about the Ethiopian church before reading this chapter?
2. Why do you think the 81 is counted in more than one way?
3. How would you respond to someone selling an "88-book Bible"?
4. What can we learn from the way the Ethiopian church has kept its traditions?

Notes

1. "The Ethiopian Orthodox Bible: A Unique Biblical Canon," Mahibere Kidusan USA, 7 January 2026, nextgeneration.eotcmk.org.
2. R. W. Cowley, "The Biblical Canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Today," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 23 (1974): 318-323. I read it through a copy hosted on a third-party website.
3. Mahibere Kidusan (see note 1); Cowley (see note 2).
4. Wikipedia, "Orthodox Tewahedo biblical canon."
5. Wikipedia, "Orthodox Tewahedo biblical canon," citing Mikre-Sellassie (1993); Cowley (see note 2) also notes the list does not add up to 81.
6. Wikipedia, "Book of Enoch" and "Book of Jubilees."

CHAPTER 14

Enoch, Jasher and Other Books Outside the Canon

Every few years a documentary or a bestseller promises to reveal "the lost books of the Bible." The cover usually suggests the church hid them. Let's look at what these books actually are.

None of the books in this chapter is in the Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox Bible. Two of them, 1 Enoch and Jubilees, are in the Ethiopian Bible, as we saw in the last chapter. The rest are outside every major canon. Some were widely read in the early church. Some were written later. Some were rejected early. And one, the Book of Jasher, is three different things that happen to share a name.

A word about sources: for most of these books I relied on Wikipedia articles, which summarize the scholars. That's a reasonable starting point, but treat the dates as scholarly estimates. Most are debated.[1]

1 Enoch

1 Enoch is a collection of writings attributed to Enoch, the man in Genesis 5 who "walked with God." Scholars date its sections from about 300 B.C. to about A.D. 100 (B.C. means "before Christ"; A.D., from the Latin anno Domini, means "in the year of our Lord"), with the section called the Parables (chapters 37 to 71) the latest and the most debated. The complete book survives only in Ge'ez, the ancient Ethiopian language. Aramaic fragments of most of it were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, though not the Parables.

Here's why Christians care: the New Testament letter of Jude quotes it.

> And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, also prophesied about these, saying, "Look, ***the*** Lord came with His holy myriads, to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the ungodly among them concerning all their works of ungodliness which they have done in an ungodly way, and concerning all the harsh ***things*** which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." (Jude 1:14-15)

Jude names Enoch and quotes a prophecy that appears in 1 Enoch 1:9. Some early Christian writers, like the author of the Epistle of Barnabas and Tertullian, valued the book. But by the fifth century it had mostly dropped out of use, except in Ethiopia.

You might ask, "If Jude quotes it, shouldn't it be in the Bible?" Not necessarily. Quoting a book isn't the same as calling it Scripture. Paul quotes Greek poets (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12), and nobody thinks those poems belong in the Bible. Jude quoted a prophecy he considered true. That doesn't make the whole book inspired.

Jubilees

Jubilees is an ancient Jewish retelling of parts of Genesis and Exodus. Scholars date it to about 160-150 B.C. Like Enoch, it survives complete in Ge'ez, and about fifteen Hebrew copies were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It's canonical in the Ethiopian and Eritrean churches.

The Book of Giants

The Book of Giants tells stories about the giants mentioned in Genesis 6. Scholars date it before the second century B.C. About ten Aramaic copies were found at Qumran, and pieces of a later version were found among the writings of the Manichaeans, a religious movement that spread across Asia. Later church leaders opposed it. It isn't in any church's Bible.

The Psalms of Solomon and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

Two more Jewish writings turn up on lists of "lost books." The Psalms of Solomon is a collection of eighteen psalms from the first or second century B.C. Its title appears in the table of contents of Codex Alexandrinus, a fifth-century Bible, though those pages of the manuscript are lost. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs gives farewell speeches for the twelve sons of Jacob. It reached its final form around the second century A.D., and scholars still debate whether it began as a Jewish or a Christian work. An Armenian Bible printed in 1666 included it. Neither book is in any church's Bible today.

Three Different Things Called "Jasher"

This one confuses a lot of people, so let me separate it carefully.

1. The book the Bible names. The Old Testament mentions the Book of Jasher twice, in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18. (The SLB and the BSB both spell it "Jashar.") That ancient book is lost. No copy survives. We know only that it existed and contained at least the poem quoted in those two places.

2. Sefer haYashar, a Hebrew retelling. A Hebrew book called Sefer haYashar was printed in Venice in 1625. The scholar Joseph Dan dated it to early sixteenth-century Naples. It was translated into English in 1840 by Moses Samuel and published in New York. It retells biblical history with many added legends. It is not the ancient book named in Joshua. Some Latter-day Saints value an 1887 edition, though the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not officially endorse it.

3. A forgery from 1750. In November 1750, an Englishman named Jacob Ilive published a "Book of Jasher" that claimed to be the ancient book. The Monthly Review exposed it as a forgery the very next month. It was reprinted in 1829, and in 1934 a Rosicrucian group called it inspired. That's their claim, and the forgery has been known for nearly three centuries.

So when you see "The Book of Jasher" for sale today, it is either the 1625 Hebrew retelling or the 1750 forgery. Neither one is the book Joshua and 2 Samuel name.

Writings From the Early Church

Some books on this list were Christian writings that many churches read and valued, even though they didn't end up in the New Testament.

The Shepherd of Hermas was written in Rome in the first half of the second century. It's included in Codex Sinaiticus, one of the oldest complete Bibles. The Muratorian Fragment said it could be read privately but not in church, and Athanasius listed it among books to be read but not in the canon.

The Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, is a short manual on Christian life and worship from the first century, though some scholars say the second. It was rediscovered in 1873 in a manuscript from 1056 and published in 1883. Eusebius didn't count it as Scripture, and Athanasius listed it among books to be read.

1 Clement is a letter dated about A.D. 96. It was read in churches and appears in ancient Bible manuscripts such as Codex Alexandrinus.

The Epistle of Barnabas dates somewhere between A.D. 70 and 132. It appears in Codex Sinaiticus. Clement of Alexandria and Origen treated it as the work of Paul's companion Barnabas, but Eusebius classed it as spurious.

These books are a window into the early church. Reading them is a lot like reading a good sermon from long ago. They're worth knowing, but the early church itself didn't put them on the same level as the apostles' writings.

The "Other Gospels"

Then there are books that call themselves gospels.

The Gospel of Thomas is a collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus. Most scholars place it in the second century, though estimates run from A.D. 60 to 250. A complete copy in Coptic was found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. Eusebius listed a Gospel of Thomas among heretical books. No church uses it as Scripture.

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas is a different book entirely, with legends about Jesus as a boy. It dates from the mid to late second century.

The Gospel of Peter survives in part in a manuscript found in Egypt in 1886. Around A.D. 200, Bishop Serapion of Antioch judged that it hid a false teaching that denied Jesus' real body.

The Gospel of Judas was published by National Geographic in 2006 from a manuscript carbon-dated to A.D. 220-340. Irenaeus mentioned a book by that name around A.D. 180. Scholars still argue about how to translate it.

The Gospel of Mary dates from the early second century and survives only in pieces, with pages missing.

The Apocalypse of Peter dates from about A.D. 100-150. The Muratorian Fragment accepted it, with a note that some didn't want it read in church, and Clement of Alexandria valued it. Eusebius classed it as spurious.

Were These Books Hidden?

No. Many of them were known, discussed and openly rejected by early church leaders, sometimes by name. Others were simply lost for centuries and found again by archaeologists and scholars, who published them for anyone to read. You can find English translations of nearly all of them today.

The church didn't hide these books. It read them, weighed them, and decided they didn't belong with the books it had received from the apostles and prophets.

Questions for Discussion

1. Had you heard of any of these books before? Where?
2. How would you explain the difference between Jude quoting 1 Enoch and 1 Enoch being Scripture?
3. Why do you think books like the Shepherd of Hermas and the Didache were valued but not included?
4. How would you answer someone who says the church hid the "lost books of the Bible"?

Notes

1. Wikipedia articles: "Book of Enoch," "Book of Jubilees," "Book of Giants," "Book of Jasher," "Sefer haYashar (midrash)," "Pseudo-Jasher," "Psalms of Solomon," "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," "Shepherd of Hermas," "Didache," "First Epistle of Clement," "Epistle of Barnabas," "Gospel of Thomas," "Infancy Gospel of Thomas," "Gospel of Peter," "Gospel of Judas," "Gospel of Mary," "Apocalypse of Peter."

CHAPTER 15

Myths That Won't Die

Some claims about the Bible get repeated so often that people assume they're true. They show up in sermons, in documentaries, in comment sections and in books. In this chapter I want to take on the most common ones and show you what the sources actually say.

Myth 1: "The Council of Nicaea Picked the Books of the Bible"

This might be the most common myth of all. The story goes that in A.D. 325 (anno Domini, "in the year of our Lord"), the Roman emperor Constantine gathered bishops at Nicaea and they voted on which books would go into the Bible.

Here's the problem. The First Council of Nicaea left a record of its decisions in twenty canons, or rulings. They deal with church order and discipline. None of them lists the books of Scripture.[1] Scholars agree the process of recognizing the canon wasn't finished at Nicaea.[2]

I couldn't trace where the Nicaea story first started. But I can tell you the council's own records don't support it.

The bigger truth is this: no single council created the Bible. As we saw in Chapters 11 and 12, the canon took shape over centuries, through the churches' use of the books, the lists of leaders like Athanasius in 367, and regional councils like Hippo and Carthage. Different traditions settled their lists at different times.

Myth 2: "The Council of Jamnia Closed the Old Testament"

We covered this one in Chapter 9. The idea that a Jewish council at Jamnia (Yavneh) fixed the Hebrew canon around A.D. 90 goes back to a theory from 1871. Most scholars have since dropped it, because there's no evidence of a council that fixed the canon.[3] The rabbis at Yavneh discussed some books, but discussing isn't deciding.

Myth 3: "Catholics Added Books" or "Protestants Removed Books"

I gave this a whole chapter, Chapter 12, because it deserves one. Both slogans skip important parts of the record. The extra books were read in many early churches and listed by North African councils in the 390s. They were also set apart by early leaders like Athanasius and Jerome. Luther and the King James translators printed them in their own section. Trent made them binding for Catholics in 1546. Westminster declared them no part of the canon. Each tradition settled the question in its own way and its own time.

If you hear either slogan, you now know enough to say, "It's more complicated than that," and explain why.

Myth 4: "The Church Hid the Lost Books of the Bible"

We looked at many of these books in Chapter 14. The short answer is that most of them weren't hidden. Early church leaders knew about them, discussed them by name, and decided they didn't belong. Others were lost for centuries simply because nobody kept copying them, and when archaeologists found them again, scholars published them for everyone to read.

Be careful with any product that calls itself "the complete Bible" or promises "the books they didn't want you to read." Those are marketing words.

Myth 5: "The Ethiopian Bible Has 88 Books"

The Ethiopian church counts 81 books, and as we saw in Chapter 13, even that number is reached in more than one way. I found the "88 books" claim on sellers' and popular websites, but not in the church's own teaching or in scholarly sources.[4] I treat it as a commercial claim until someone shows me a solid source.

Myth 6: "The Septuagint Had a Fixed List the Early Church Adopted"

We saw in Chapter 10 that the Septuagint was a collection of translations made over time, and the great ancient copies don't contain exactly the same books.[5] There was no single Septuagint canon for the church to adopt.

Myth 7: "Only One English Translation Is the Real Bible"

Some Christians believe that one English translation, usually the King James Version (KJV), is the only trustworthy Bible. I respect the love behind that. The KJV is a great translation, and I still enjoy reading it. But as we saw in Part 1, every English Bible is a translation from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and the KJV most people read today is itself a 1769 revision of the 1611 text. God's Word has been carried faithfully into English by many translators across five centuries.

Myth 8: "More Literal Means More Accurate"

This one's subtler, and I covered it in Chapter 2. A literal translation is a great tool, and it's my own choice for study. But Hebrew and Greek don't line up with English one word at a time, so even the most literal Bible interprets. A more literal Bible shows you more of the original's shape. It isn't automatically closer to the meaning.

How to Spot a Myth

Here are a few simple questions you can ask whenever you hear a big claim about the Bible:

1. Who said it first, and what source do they point to?
2. Is there a document, like a council's records or an old manuscript, I can check?

3. Do scholars from different traditions agree, or is this one group's theory?
4. Is someone selling something?
5. Does the claim make history sound simpler or more dramatic than it probably was?

Real history is usually less exciting than the myth, and more interesting once you dig into it.

Questions for Discussion

1. Which of these myths had you heard before? Where did you hear it?
2. Why do you think the Nicaea myth is so popular?
3. How would you gently correct a friend who repeated one of these myths?
4. Which question in "How to Spot a Myth" do you think is most useful?

Notes

1. First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), the canons, newadvent.org.
2. Wikipedia, "Development of the New Testament canon."
3. Wikipedia, "Council of Jamnia."
4. Cowley (1974); Mahibere Kidusan USA (2026); Wikipedia, "Orthodox Tewahedo biblical canon." See Chapter 13.
5. Wikipedia, "Septuagint."

CHAPTER 16

Holding the Bible You Have

We've covered a lot of ground in this book. We've looked at how the Bible came into English, what "word-for-word" and "thought-for-thought" really mean, where some sixty Bibles sit on the spectrum, and why some churches have more books than others. We've walked through councils, confessions, manuscripts and a few myths.

I want to close with something simpler. All of this history and comparison has one purpose: to help you read the Bible you have with confidence and care.

Confidence

After all the details, here's what I hope you take away. The Bible you hold is trustworthy.

Yes, it's a translation. Yes, translators made choices. Yes, churches drew the edges of the canon a little differently. But the core of the Bible is shared by every Christian tradition, and the good translations agree far more than they differ. God has watched over His Word through scribes and scholars, through councils and translators, across many centuries and many languages.

> Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Paul wrote that to Timothy about the Scriptures Timothy had known from childhood. It's still true of the Bible on your nightstand.

Care

Confidence doesn't mean carelessness. Knowing how the Bible came to us should make us read it more carefully, not less.

Compare translations when a verse puzzles you. Check the footnotes. Look up a hard word. When someone makes a big claim about the Bible, ask for the source. And when another Christian's Bible has more books than yours, ask what their church teaches before you assume you know.

The Bereans are my model here. When Paul preached to them, they didn't just accept what he said, and they didn't reject it either. They went to the Scriptures to check it.

> Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures every day ***to see*** if these things might be so. (Acts 17:11)

Humility

I've told you plainly where I stand. I read and quote the SLB (Steadfast Literal Bible), my own translation, and I hold to the 66 books of the Protestant Bible. But I've tried to describe every tradition the way its own people would, because I believe Christians can disagree about the edges of the canon and still love each other and read the same Gospels.

Open It

Here's my last word. Don't let the questions in this book keep you from the Book itself. The point of knowing about translations is to read one. The point of knowing about the canon is to read the books in it.

So pick up the Bible you have, the one that fits how you'll use it, and open it today. Read a Gospel. Read a psalm. Ask God to speak to you through it. He will.

A Prayer

Lord, thank You for giving us Your Word and for the many hands that carried it to us. Thank You for scribes who copied, scholars who studied, and translators who put it into our language, some at great cost. Help us read it with confidence and with care. Keep us humble with those who see things differently. And above all, through every page, show us Jesus, the One the Scriptures are about. In Jesus' name, amen.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the most important thing you learned from this book?
2. Has anything in this book changed how you read your Bible?
3. How can you show humility toward Christians whose Bibles look different from yours?
4. What Bible will you open this week, and what will you read first?

Key Terms

These are the words in this book that may be new to you, in plain terms. The chapter where each one is explained is in parentheses.

- **Apocrypha:** the Protestant name for the books in Catholic and Orthodox Old Testaments that are not in the Hebrew Bible, such as Tobit and 1 Maccabees. (Chapter 12)
- **Band:** one of the five places on the translation spectrum used in this book, from 1 (interlinear or very literal) to 5 (paraphrase). (Chapter 2)
- **Canon:** the list of books a church accepts as Scripture. The word comes from a Greek word for a measuring rod. (Chapter 8)
- **Codex:** an early book with pages, rather than a scroll. Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Alexandrinus are three great early Greek Bibles. (Chapters 10 and 11)
- **Deuterocanonical:** "second canon," the Catholic and Orthodox name for the books Protestants call the Apocrypha. (Chapter 12)
- **Formal equivalence:** translating word for word, keeping the wording and structure of the original as far as English allows. (Chapter 2)
- **Functional (dynamic) equivalence:** translating thought for thought, putting the meaning of each sentence into natural English. (Chapter 2)
- **Ge'ez:** the ancient language of Ethiopia, still used in the worship of the Ethiopian church. (Chapter 13)
- **Interlinear:** a Bible that prints an English word under each Hebrew or Greek word. (Chapter 2)
- **Median:** the middle value when you line numbers up in order. This book uses the median of the guides' bands to place each Bible. (Chapter 3)
- **Paraphrase:** a free retelling of the text in everyday language, furthest from the original wording. (Chapter 2)
- **Propitiation:** turning away God's wrath by a sacrifice. (Chapter 4)
- **Pseudepigraphal:** written under a false name or with an invented backstory. (Chapter 10)
- **Received Text (Textus Receptus):** the printed Greek New Testament behind the King James Version. The SLB uses Scrivener's 1894 edition. (Chapter 6)
- **Septuagint (LXX):** the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, begun in Alexandria. (Chapter 10)
- **Tanakh:** the Jewish Bible, named from the first letters of its three parts: the Torah (Law), the Prophets and the Writings. (Chapter 9)
- **Vulgate:** Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible, the Bible of the Western church for about a thousand years. (Chapter 1)

- **Westminster Leningrad Codex:** a digital edition of the Leningrad Codex, the oldest complete copy of the Hebrew Bible, from about A.D. 1008. The SLB Old Testament is translated from it. (Chapter 6)

Appendix A: Translation Table

This table lists every translation covered in Part 1, sorted from most literal to most interpretive by the median band of the guides that place it. "Guides" is how many of the five guides place it. "Not placed" means none of the guides I could read rates it. Band 1 is interlinear or very literal, 2 formal, 3 balanced, 4 functional, and 5 paraphrase. A value like 2.5 means the guides split between two bands.

Abbrev.	Translation	Year	Band (median)	Guides	Agreement
ASV	American Standard Version	1901	2	1	Single source
Coverdale	Coverdale Bible	1535	2	1	Single source
Darby	Darby Translation	1890	2	1	Single source
Douay-Rheims	Douay-Rheims Bible (Challoner revision)	NT 1582; OT 1609-1610; Challoner 1749-1752	2	1	Single source
EOB-NT	Eastern/Greek Orthodox Bible New Testament	2011	2	1	Single source
ESV	English Standard Version	2001 (text updates 2007, 2011, 2016)	2	4	Guides agree
Geneva	Geneva Bible	NT 1557; complete 1560; 1599 edition	2	1	Single source
JPS Tanakh	Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures (JPS, 1917 and 1985)	1917; 1985	2	1	Single source
KJV	King James Version (Authorized Version)	1611; standard text 1769 (Blayney)	2	3	Guides agree
LEB	Lexham English Bible	2012 (Logos date)	2	1	Single source
LES	Lexham English Septuagint (1st ed. 2012; 2nd ed. 2020)	2012; 2020	2	1	Single source
LSB	Legacy Standard Bible	2021 (NT February; complete Bible November)	2	1	Single source
MEV	Modern English Version	2014	2	1	Single source
NASB 1995	New American Standard Bible, 1995 update	1995 (first NASB 1971; updated 1977)	2	4	Guides agree
NASB 2020	New American Standard Bible, 2020 update	2020	2	4	Guides agree
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint	2007	2	1	Single source
NKJV	New King James Version	1982	2	2	Guides agree
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version	1989	2	2	Guides agree
NRSVue	New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition	2021 (submitted for approval 2021)	2	1	Single source
RSV	Revised Standard Version	1952 (Apocrypha 1957; NT 2nd ed. 1971)	2	1	Single source
RV	English Revised Version (Revised Version)	NT 1881; complete 1885	2	1	Single source
Tyndale	Tyndale Bible	NT 1526; parts of OT before 1536	2	1	Single source
WEB	World English Bible	1997 (Logos); 2000 (Pastor Daniel)	2	1	Single source
Wuest	The New Testament: An Expanded Translation (Wuest)	1961	2	1	Single source
YLT	Young's Literal Translation	1862; revised 1887, 1898	2	1	Single source

Abbrev.	Translation	Year	Band (median)	Guides	Agreement
AMP	Amplified Bible	1965; 2015 update (Classic Edition AMPC 1987)	2.5	2	Guides disagree
BSB	Berean Standard Bible	2016 first printing; printings 2020, 2022, 2025 (3rd edition copy)	3	1	Single source
CEB	Common English Bible	2011	3	2	Guides agree
CSB	Christian Standard Bible	2017	3	3	Guides agree
EBR	Rotherham's Emphasized Bible	NT 1872; complete 1902 (Logos lists a 1959 edition)	3	1	Single source
EHV	Evangelical Heritage Version	2019	3	1	Single source
ERV	Easy-to-Read Version	1987; 2004/2006; revised 2015	3	1	Single source
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NT 1999; complete 2004; revised 2009/2010	3	1	Single source
ICB	International Children's Bible	1986	3	1	Single source
NAB	New American Bible (1970; revised NT 1986, Psalms 1991)	1970	3	1	Single source
NABRE	New American Bible, Revised Edition	2011	3	2	Guides agree
NET	New English Translation	2005/2006; NET2 2019	3	1	Single source
NIrV	New International Reader's Version	1996/1998	3	1	Single source
NIV	New International Version	1978; 1984; current text 2011	3	4	Guides disagree
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible	1985	3	1	Single source
TBfE	The Bible for Everyone (John Goldingay and N. T. Wright)	2018 (Logos wiki)	3	1	Single source
TLV	Tree of Life Version	2015	3	1	Single source
TNIV	Today's New International Version	2005	3	2	Guides agree
CEV	Contemporary English Version	NT 1991; complete 1995	4	1	Single source
CJB	Complete Jewish Bible	1998 (Jewish New Testament 1989/1997)	4	1	Single source
GNT	Good News Translation (formerly Today's English Version, TEV)	NT 1966; complete 1976; 2nd ed. 1992	4	2	Guides agree
GW	GOD'S WORD Translation	1995	4	1	Single source
ISV	International Standard Version	2011 (copyright 1994-2008 on Bible Hub page)	4	1	Single source
NCV	New Century Version	1987/1991 (not verified); Logos 2005	4	1	Single source
NEB	New English Bible	NT 1961; complete 1970	4	1	Single source
NLT	New Living Translation	1996; 2nd ed. 2004; updates to 2015	4	3	Guides agree
REB	Revised English Bible	1989	4	1	Single source
TPT	The Passion Translation	Portions from 2011; NT 2017; complete Bible projected 2029 (Wikipedia)	4.5	2	Guides disagree
CPG	Cotton Patch Gospel	1992 (Logos date)	5	1	Single source
Harwood	Harwood's Liberal Translation of the New Testament	1768	5	1	Single source
MSG	The Message	2002 complete (Pastor Daniel); Logos lists 2005	5	3	Guides agree
Phillips	J.B. Phillips New Testament in Modern English	1958 (Logos date)	5	1	Single source
TLB	The Living Bible	1971	5	2	Guides agree
Voice	The Voice	2012	5	1	Single source
AB	The Apostles' Bible	2005 (Pastor Daniel date)	Not placed	0	Not placed
ABP	Apostolic Bible Polyglot	2003 (Pastor Daniel date)	Not placed	0	Not placed
BIB	Berean Interlinear Bible	Not verified	Not placed	0	Not placed
Bishops'	Bishops' Bible	1568; revised 1572	Not placed	0	Not placed
BLB	Berean Literal Bible	Not verified	Not placed	0	Not placed

Abbrev.	Translation	Year	Band (median)	Guides	Agreement
CW	The Clear Word	1994 (Pastor Daniel date)	Not placed	0	Not placed
EMTV	English Majority Text Version	2013 (Pastor Daniel date)	Not placed	0	Not placed
Green's Interlinear	Green's Interlinear Bible (Hebrew-Greek-English)	Not verified	Not placed	0	Not placed
KJ3	KJ3 Literal Translation	2006	Not placed	0	Not placed
KJVer	King James Version Easy Read	Not verified	Not placed	0	Not placed
Knox	Knox Bible	NT 1945; OT 1949	Not placed	0	Not placed
LITV	Green's Literal Translation (Literal Translation of the Holy Bible)	1985	Not placed	0	Not placed
LSV	Literal Standard Version	2020	Not placed	0	Not placed
MKJV	Modern King James Version	2014 (Pastor Daniel date)	Not placed	0	Not placed
NLV	New Life Version	Not verified	Not placed	0	Not placed
Readable	The Readable Bible	Not verified	Not placed	0	Not placed
Webster	Webster's Bible (Webster's Revision)	1833	Not placed	0	Not placed
Wycliffe	Wycliffe Bible	c. 1382; revision c. 1388	Not placed	0	Not placed

Appendix B: Canon Comparison

This table shows which books each tradition counts as Scripture. "Yes" means the book is in that canon. "Appendix" means it is printed in an appendix. "Broader canon only" refers to the Ethiopian broader canon described in Chapter 13. "Not verified" means my sources disagree or say nothing. For the Anglican position on the books marked "read, not for doctrine," see Chapter 12.

Book or group	Jewish	Protestant	Catholic	Orthodox	Ethiopian
The 39 Old Testament books of the Protestant Bible	Yes (as 24)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tobit	No	No (Anglican: read, not for doctrine)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Judith	No	No (Anglican: read, not for doctrine)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wisdom of Solomon	No	No (Anglican: read, not for doctrine)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)	No	No (Anglican: read, not for doctrine)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Baruch	No	No (Anglican: read, not for doctrine)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Letter of Jeremiah	No	No	Yes (with Baruch)	Yes	Yes (part of "the rest of Jeremiah")
1 Maccabees	No	No (Anglican: read, not for doctrine)	Yes	Yes	Not verified (sources conflict)
2 Maccabees	No	No (Anglican: read, not for doctrine)	Yes	Yes	Not verified (sources conflict)
3 Maccabees	No	No	No	Yes	No (not listed)
4 Maccabees	No	No	No	Appendix	No (not listed)
1 Esdras (Greek Esdras A)	No	No (Anglican: read as "3 Esdras")	No	Yes	Yes
2 Esdras / 4 Ezra (Ezra Apocalypse)	No	No (Anglican: read as "4 Esdras")	No	No (not listed)	Yes
Prayer of Manasseh	No	No (Anglican: read, not for doctrine)	No	Appendix	Not verified (sources differ)
Psalm 151	No	No	No	Yes (in Psalms)	Not verified
Additions to Esther	No	No (Anglican: read as "the rest of Esther")	Yes (as part of Esther)	Yes	Not verified
Additions to Daniel (Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon)	No	No (Anglican: read, not for doctrine)	Yes (as part of Daniel)	Yes	Yes
1 Enoch	No	No	No	No	Yes
Jubilees	No	No	No	No	Yes
1, 2 and 3 Meqabyan	No	No	No	No	Yes (per Wikipedia and Mahibere Kidusan)
Paralipomena of Jeremiah (4 Baruch)	No	No	No	No	Yes (per Wikipedia)

Book or group	Jewish	Protestant	Catholic	Orthodox	Ethiopian
Pseudo-Josephus (Joseph ben Gorion)	No	No	No	No	Broader canon only
The 27 New Testament books	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sinodos (4 books), Book of the Covenant (2), Ethiopic Clement, Didascalia	No	No	No	No	Broader canon only
Total books	24 (the same content as the Protestant 39)	66 (39 + 27)	73 (46 + 27)	Varies; no single fixed list for all Orthodox churches	81 (narrower: 54 OT + 27 NT; broader: 46 OT + 35 NT)

Appendix C: Canon Timeline

The canon took shape over centuries, in different places, through church use, lists and councils. This timeline shows the main events covered in Part 2, what each one shows, what it does not show, and how solid the claim is. Dates marked "about" are scholarly estimates.

Date	Event	What it does not show	Label
3rd century B.C.	Torah translated into Greek in Alexandria (start of the Septuagint, LXX); the rest in the 2nd-1st centuries B.C.	A fixed Septuagint canon: the great codices differ in contents. The Letter of Aristeas story (72 translators) is widely judged pseudepigraphal.	Scholarly interpretation
About 300 B.C. - A.D. 100	1 Enoch written in stages	That any church outside Ethiopia and Eritrea received it	Scholarly interpretation
About 200 B.C.	Close of the Prophets (Jewish Encyclopedia view)	A recorded decision	Scholarly interpretation
About 160-150 B.C.	Jubilees written		Scholarly interpretation
Late 1st century A.D. (year not verified)	Josephus, Against Apion: 22 books	Which book goes where in his 13 and 4	Verified fact (count)
About A.D. 90-110 (disputed)	"Council of Jamnia" closes the Hebrew canon (theory of Graetz, 1871)	A council that fixed the canon. The theory is largely discredited (Lewis 1964, Leiman 1976, Bruce); Philip Davies points to the Hasmonean period instead.	Disputed claim
144	Marcion excommunicated in Rome; his canon is a shortened Luke plus 10 letters of Paul	That the church had no list before Marcion (Harnack's view is debated)	Verified fact; Scholarly interpretation
About 180-200 (disputed)	Muratorian fragment lists New Testament books	Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 3 John are not mentioned. Some scholars date it to the 4th century (Sundberg, Hahneman) or call it a later forgery (Rothschild 2022).	Disputed claim (date)
About 180	Irenaeus mentions a "Gospel of Judas"	That the 2006 Codex Tchacos text is the same work	Verified fact
About 200	Serapion of Antioch rejects the Gospel of Peter		Verified fact
Early 4th century	Eusebius sorts books into accepted, disputed, spurious and heretical	A final decision	Verified fact
325	First Council of Nicaea	Any list of Scripture. Nicaea did not choose the books of the Bible.	Verified fact
4th century	Codex Sinaiticus (all 27 New Testament books plus Barnabas and Hermas) and Codex Vaticanus	That every church used the same list	Verified fact
About 340	Nag Hammadi Codex II copied (Gospel of Thomas)	Church acceptance	Scholarly interpretation (date)
4th century (year not verified)	Council of Laodicea, canon 60	Most scholars treat canon 60 as a later addition.	Disputed claim
367	Athanasius, Festal Letter 39: 27 New Testament books; Old Testament of 22; other books to be read	Acceptance of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach or Esther as canon	Verified fact
382 (uncertain)	Synod of Rome / Decretum Gelasianum	That Rome issued a list in 382: the Decretum is probably a 6th-century Gallic text (Bruce).	Disputed claim
392	Jerome, Prologus Galeatus	That the Western church followed him	Verified fact

Date	Event	What it does not show	Label
393, 397, 419	Councils of Hippo and Carthage list the books, including Tobit, Judith, Maccabees and the 27 New Testament books	A decision binding on the whole church; these were regional councils	Verified fact; Church position
5th century	Codex Alexandrinus (includes 1 and 2 Clement; Psalms of Solomon in its table of contents); Revelation accepted in the East		Verified fact
692	Council in Trullo	A binding Orthodox list (OrthodoxWiki: no binding conclusion)	Church position (via C source)
About 1200	Revelation accepted in the Armenian church		Verified fact (via C source)
1442	Council of Florence, Bull of Union with the Copts	That the question was settled for Catholics (Trent did that in 1546)	Verified fact
1522 / 1534	Luther's New Testament (1522) and full Bible (1534)	That Luther removed the Apocrypha from his Bible	Verified fact
8 April 1546	Council of Trent, Session IV	That Catholics invented these books in 1546: the same books were listed at Carthage	Church position
1563 (final English text 1571)	Thirty-Nine Articles, Article VI		Church position
1611	King James Version printed with the Apocrypha	That the KJV translators counted them as canon	Verified fact
1625	Sefer haYashar printed in Venice	That it is the book cited in Joshua	Verified fact
1646	Westminster Confession, chapter 1		Church position
1666	Oskan Armenian Bible includes the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs		Verified fact (via C source)
16 March 1672	Synod of Jerusalem (Confession of Dositheus)	A pan-Orthodox list (regional synod)	Church position
1740	Muratori publishes the fragment found in Milan		Verified fact
1750	Jacob Ilive publishes a forged "Book of Jasher"	Any link to the ancient book (exposed as forgery, December 1750)	Verified fact
1804 / 1826	British and Foreign Bible Society prints its English Bibles without the Apocrypha (1804) and decides to stop printing it in any of its Bibles (1826)		Verified fact (via C source)
1873 / 1883	Didache found (1873) and published (1883)		Verified fact
1886 / 1892	Gospel of Peter fragment found at Akhmim and published		Verified fact
1945	Nag Hammadi codices found	Church acceptance of any of these books	Verified fact
1974	Cowley describes the Ethiopian narrower and broader canons		Scholarly interpretation
2006	National Geographic publishes the Gospel of Judas	That the translation is settled (DeConick disputes it)	Verified fact; Disputed claim
7 January 2026	Mahibere Kidusan USA page: Ethiopian Bible has 81 books	A count of 88	Church position

Sources

These are the sources behind this book, with a rating for how strong each one is as evidence. A is an official church document, a primary historical document, a major scholarly work, or a publisher speaking about its own Bible. B is a well-documented reference. C is a comparison chart, ministry article or open encyclopedia. D is a seller's description. The rating judges the source as evidence, not the tradition behind it. All web sources were read in November 2026.

Key	Source	Author or publisher	Rating	Where to find it
LOGOS	Bible Translation Spectrum (Faithlife/Logos), read in three copies: Logos forum thread (community.logos.com/forums/t/182774.aspx), Logos wiki page (wiki.logos.com/Bible_Translation_Spectrum), and a fuller copy of the same table hosted by Central Church NC (Comparing_Bibles.pdf)	Faithlife (Logos) community; table author not named	C	https://community.logos.com/forums/t/182774.aspx ; https://wiki.logos.com/Bible_Translation_Spectrum ; https://www.centralnc.org/Content/External Site/Photos/PDFs/Comparing_Bibles.pdf
CB	Bible Buying Guide	Christianbook.com	D	https://www.christianbook.com/page/bibles/bible-buying-guide?event=Bibles|1000153
BG	Complete Guide to Bible Versions: Comparison, History, and Philosophy of Top Bible Translations [Updated 2025]	Jacob Edson, Bible Gateway, 2025-02-21	B	https://www.biblegateway.com/learn/bible-101/bible-versions-guide/
TY	How to Choose the Right Bible for You	Tyndale House Publishers (author not named)	C	https://www.tyndale.com/stories/how-to-choose-a-bible
OT	Look Inside: Berean Standard Bible	Brad Hoffman, Olive Tree Blog, 2022-07-01	C	https://www.olivetree.com/blog/look-inside-berean-standard-bible/
C3	Bible Translations Comparison Charts	Sharon Lareau, Chapter 3 Ministries (modified 2022-04-14)	C	https://www.chapter3min.org/bible-translations-comparison-charts/
NJAB	Bible Translation Comparison chart, version 12	Brent MacDonald, Lion Tracks Ministries (notjustanotherbook.com)	C	http://www.notjustanotherbook.com/biblecomparison.htm
PD	Bible Translation Comparison and Bible Translation Matrix 2018 (PDF and Excel)	Daniel McFeeters (Pastor Daniel), page 2017, modified 2022	C	https://www.pastordaniel.net/bible-translation-comparison/ ; https://www.pastordaniel.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Bible-Translation-Matrix-2018.pdf
ECPA	Bible Translations Bestsellers, September 2026	ECPA (Evangelical Christian Publishers Association), data from Circana BookScan	B	https://readgoodbooks.com/bestseller/translations.php?id=0926
BGV	Bible Gateway Version Information pages (publisher-supplied descriptions)	Bible Gateway, text supplied by each publisher	A	https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/ (one page per version)
LOCK	NASB 1995 - History, Updates, and Translation Philosophy; NASB page; Permission to Quote	The Lockman Foundation	A	https://www.lockman.org/?p=3338 ; https://www.lockman.org/?p=765 ; https://www.lockman.org/permission-to-quote-copyright-trademark-information/
LSBP	LSB FAQs	Legacy Standard Bible (Lockman / Three Sixteen Publishing)	A	https://lsbible.org/faqs/
ESVP	Translation Philosophy	Crossway (esv.org)	A	https://www.esv.org/translation/philosophy/
CSBP	CSB Translation Philosophy	Lifeway	A	https://www.lifeway.com/shop/bibles/csb/translation-philosophy

Key	Source	Author or publisher	Rating	Where to find it
NIVP	Translation Philosophy of the NIV	The NIV Bible (Biblica / Zondervan)	A	https://www.thenivbible.com/?p=1479
NLTP	NLT Translation Process	Tyndale House Publishers	A	https://sites.tyndale.com/nlt/translation-process/
BSBP	Berean Bible home page; Berean Standard Bible 3rd Edition (Bible Hub 2025 printing) copyright page	Berean Bible Translation Committee / Bible Hub	A	https://berean.bible ; https://biblehub.com/bsb/
LSVP	What Is the Literal Standard Version?	Covenant Press	A	https://www.lsvbible.com/p/what-is-literal-standard-version.html
ISVP	International Standard Version - About	ISV Foundation (hosted by Bible Hub)	A	https://biblehub.com/isv/about.htm
TPTP	The Passion Translation: Dr Brian Simmons responds to his critics	Premier Christianity, 2018-12-13	B	https://www.premierchristianity.com/interviews/the-passion-translation-dr-brian-simmons-responds-to-his-critics/2767.article
CHI	Pre-KJV English translations	David Lyle Jeffrey, Christian History magazine, Issue 100 (2011)	B	https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/pre-kjv-english-translations
ISBE	English Versions (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1915)	J. Hutchison, ed. James Orr; hosted by Bible Study Tools	B	https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/english-versions/
WIKI	Wikipedia articles: Green's Literal Translation; Young's Literal Translation; Webster's Revision; The Living Bible; The Passion Translation; Holman Christian Standard Bible; New English Bible; New Jerusalem Bible; Legacy Standard Bible; Emphasized Bible	Wikipedia contributors	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green%27s_Literal_Translation (and the other article titles above)
SAT	Q68: Literal Translations by Sovereign Grace Publishers	Tony Garland, SpiritAndTruth.org	C	https://www.spiritandtruth.org/questions/68.htm
OTB	What's the Best Bible Translation?	Olive Tree Staff, 2016 (modified 2019)	C	https://www.olivetree.com/blog/?p=34121
SCROLL	scrollmapper bible_databases (public-domain texts: KJV 1769, ASV, YLT, Darby, Webster)	scrollmapper (GitHub)	B	https://github.com/scrollmapper/bible_databases
TRENT	Council of Trent, Session IV, Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures (8 April 1546)	Council of Trent; English text hosted by EWTN	A	https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/decree-concerning-the-canonical-scriptures-1494
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 120 and following (The Canon of Scripture)	Holy See (vatican.va)	A	https://www.vatican.va/content/catechism/en/part_one/section_one/chapter_two/article_3/iv_the_canon_of_scripture.html
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1, sections 2 and 3	Westminster Assembly; text hosted by CCEL (Christian Classics Ethereal Library)	A	https://www.ccel.org/creeds/westminster.htm
ART39	Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Article VI	Church of England; text read on britainexpress.com and checked on victorianweb.org	A	https://www.britainexpress.com/History/tudor/39articles-text.htm ; https://victorianweb.org/religion/39articles.html
DOS	Confession of Dositheus (Synod of Jerusalem, 16 March 1672), Question 3	Synod of Jerusalem; English text hosted by crivoice.org	A	https://www.crivoice.org/creeddositheus.html
OWIKI	Old Testament Canon	OrthodoxWiki contributors	C	https://orthodoxwiki.org/Old_Testament_Canon
JOS	Josephus, Against Apion 1.37-43 (Whiston translation)	Flavius Josephus; hosted by lexundria.com	A	https://lexundria.com/j_ap/1.37-1.43/wst
JE	Bible Canon (Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906)	Emil G. Hirsch, Ludwig Blau, Kaufmann Kohler, Nathaniel Schmidt	B	https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3259-bible-canon
JAMW	Council of Jamnia	Wikipedia contributors	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Jamnia
LXXW	Septuagint	Wikipedia contributors	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint
ATH	Athanasius, Festal Letter 39 (A.D. 367)	Athanasius of Alexandria; New Advent (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers translation)	A	https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2806039.htm
MURCE	Muratorian Canon (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1911)	Catholic Encyclopedia; New Advent	B	https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10642a.htm
MURW	Muratorian fragment	Wikipedia contributors	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muratorian_fragment
CARTH	Code of Canons of the African Church (Carthage, A.D. 419), Canon 24	New Advent (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers translation)	A	https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3816.htm

Key	Source	Author or publisher	Rating	Where to find it
EUS	Eusebius, Church History, Book 3, chapter 25	Eusebius of Caesarea; New Advent	A	https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm
NIC	First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), the canons	New Advent (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers translation)	A	https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3801.htm
JER	Jerome, Preface to Samuel and Kings (Prologus Galeatus), A.D. 392	Jerome; translation hosted by fourthcentury.com (Wisconsin Lutheran College)	A	https://www.fourthcentury.com/jerome-samuel-392
CECAN	Canon of the Old Testament (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1908)	George J. Reid; New Advent	B	https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03267a.htm
MARC	Marcion of Sinope	Wikipedia contributors	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcion_of_Sinope
NTCW	Development of the New Testament canon	Wikipedia contributors	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_New_Testament_canon
LUTH	Luther's canon	Wikipedia contributors	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther%27s_canon
APOCW	Apocrypha controversy	Wikipedia contributors (citing Ewert)	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocrypha_controversy
COWLEY	R. W. Cowley, 'The Biblical Canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Today', Ostkirchliche Studien 23 (1974): 318-323	Roger W. Cowley; copy hosted by islamic-awareness.org	A	https://www.islamic-awareness.org/bible/text/canon/ethiopican
EOTW	Orthodox Tewahedo biblical canon	Wikipedia contributors	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodox_Tewahedo_biblical_canon
EOTCMK	The Ethiopian Orthodox Bible: A Unique Biblical Canon (7 January 2026)	Mahibere Kidusan USA, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Sunday School Department (byline 'Unknown')	B	https://nextgeneration.eotcmk.org/learn-geez/blog/the-ethiopian-orthodox-bible-a-unique-biblical-canon
NCW	Wikipedia articles: Book of Enoch; Book of Jubilees; Book of Giants; Book of Jasher; Sefer haYashar (midrash); Pseudo-Jasher; Psalms of Solomon; Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs; Shepherd of Hermas; Didache; First Epistle of Clement; Epistle of Barnabas; Gospel of Thomas; Infancy Gospel of Thomas; Gospel of Peter; Gospel of Judas; Gospel of Mary; Apocalypse of Peter	Wikipedia contributors	C	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Enoch (and the other article titles above)
BSBTXT	Berean Standard Bible 3rd Edition and NASB 1995 text (verse checks)	Bible Hub (BSB); The Lockman Foundation (NASB 1995)	A	https://biblehub.com/bsb/ ; https://www.lockman.org
SLB	Steadfast Literal Bible: preface and text	Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises	A	https://trinfinityenterprises.com/slb
LBFE	The Bible for Everyone (resource page)	Logos Bible Software	B	https://www.logos.com/resource/LLS$BIBLEFOREVERYONE

A few sources could not be read: the Chapter 3 Ministries and notjustanotherbook.com chart images, the marks on the Pastor Daniel translation matrix, the Olive Tree 2016 chart image, the original Logos forum topic, Melito of Sardis's list (Eusebius, Church History 4.26), Bava Batra 14b on Sefaria, and Britannica's article on the Book of Enoch.

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Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB)	All teaching quotations (5 passages) and the comparison rows in Chapter 4 (8 verses)	The author's own translation; free to quote	Copyright page attribution
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NASB 1995 (The Lockman Foundation)	8 verses, Chapter 4 only; no complete book; far below 50% of this work	Lockman free-quote terms: up to 1,000 verses without written permission	Full Lockman notice on the copyright page
KJV (1769 text), ASV (1901), YLT	Comparison rows in Chapter 4	Public domain in the United States	Named in each table
Church documents and early writers (Trent, Catechism, Westminster, Thirty-Nine Articles, Dositheus, Athanasius, Jerome, Eusebius, Carthage, Josephus)	Short quotations of a phrase or sentence	Public-domain historical texts and translations; the Catechism is quoted briefly with citation	Cited in chapter notes
Reference works (Catholic Encyclopedia, Jewish Encyclopedia, Cowley 1974)	A few short phrases	Public domain (1906-1911 encyclopedias); short scholarly quotation with citation (Cowley)	Cited in chapter notes
Translation guides and publisher statements (Logos, Bible Gateway, Christianbook, Tyndale, Olive Tree, publisher pages)	Short phrases describing a translation method	Short quotation for comment and comparison, with citation	Cited in chapter notes
Wikipedia and OrthodoxWiki	Facts, summarized in my own words	No text reproduced beyond a few words	Cited in chapter notes

About This Book

This book answers two questions people ask me all the time: Which Bible should I read? And why does my friend's Bible have more books than mine?

Part 1 covers translations: how we got an English Bible, word-for-word and thought-for-thought translations, where about sixty English Bibles sit on that scale, the same verses side by side, and how to choose a Bible that fits how you will use it.

Part 2 covers the canon: which books the Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Ethiopian traditions hold, how the 27 New Testament books were recognized, the Apocrypha question, and what Enoch, Jasher, and other books outside the canon really are. Every chapter has discussion questions and source notes, so you can check the facts yourself.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Which Bible should I read? And why does my friend's Bible have more books than mine?

Those two questions come up in almost every church, and the answers online are a mess of strong opinions and weak sources. I went to the sources instead: the published translation guides, the publishers' own statements, the church councils and confessions, and the scholars who study them.

In plain language, this book shows you:

- where about sixty English Bibles sit, from word-for-word to paraphrase
- the same verses side by side, and how to choose a Bible that fits how you will use it
- which books the Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Ethiopian traditions count
- what Enoch, Jasher and other books outside the canon really are, and which popular myths don't hold up

Every chapter has discussion questions and source notes, so you can check the facts for yourself.

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INSIDE THIS BOOK

Part 1 covers translations: how we got an English Bible, how translations differ, and how to choose one. Part 2 covers the canon: how the Old and New Testament books were recognized, the Apocrypha question, the Ethiopian canon, and books like Enoch and Jasher.

"Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures every day to see if these things might be so."

Acts 17:11 (SLB)

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