

good
NEWSBIBLE

Good News Bible Catholic

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Welcome to the Good News Bible

The Good News Bible is a clear, easy-to-read translation of the Bible. It uses simple, everyday language so that as many people as possible can read and understand it. This has made it a very popular translation, selling over 150 million copies worldwide.

What is the Bible?

The Bible isn't one book but a collection of books. These books were written at different times by different people. They include many types of writing: laws, stories, history, poetry, short sayings and proverbs, letters, visions, hymns and prayers, to name but a few.

One of the most important things to do when you start reading a different part of the Bible is to ask yourself what kind of writing you think it is. This will help you to understand what you are reading.

How are the books ordered?

It is also important to remember that the Bible is not organised according to when the books were written or when the events in them are set. The order of the books in the Bible is affected by what type of book they are. So all the books that contain laws are grouped together; all the books that tell the history of Israel are in one place; the Gospels are found next to each other, and so are the letters.

This can be confusing because when you read through the Bible, the time jumps around. It is worth remembering that this is because they are ordered by subject, not by historical date.

Why does the Bible have two sections?

The Bible has two main sections, known as 'Testaments'. This word means 'covenant' or 'promise' and refers to the promises God made to his people.

The first section, called by Christians the Old Testament, contains the story of God's

relationship with his people, now known as the Jews. This part of the Bible is seen as holy by Jews as well as by Christians and is known by a variety of names, including the Hebrew Scriptures.

The second section, the New Testament, tells the good news of Jesus Christ and what happened to Jesus' first followers. It is called the New Testament to emphasise that it is a continuation of the story in the Old Testament.

Finding your way around the Bible

When the different books of the Bible were first written, it was very hard to find your way around them. There were no chapters, no verses and, in the Greek New Testament, not even any spaces between words.

Over the years, people have developed ways of finding your way around the Bible more easily.

1. First you need to know whether a book is in the Old or the New Testament, and which page number it starts on. For this, turn to the Table of Contents and find its page number.

To make things easier, in this Bible we have produced two Tables of Contents, one showing the order in which the books appear in the Bible and the other in alphabetical order so that you can find the book title more easily.

2. Next you need to look at the reference for the verse you need. References are always given in this order: book title, chapter number and verse number. (The chapter and verse numbers are separated by a full stop.)

For example, Genesis 12.2 means the twelfth chapter of the book of Genesis and the second verse of that chapter.

In this version, the book title and chapter numbers are repeated at the top of each page so that you can find them more easily.

3. Once you have found the book and the chapter number, you can find the verse number that you need within that chapter.

section of the Bible you are reading (see pages vi–vii)

name of the book you are reading, plus the chapters that appear on that page

page number

* at the end of a word tells you there is more information in the notes at the bottom of the column

* at the start of a word shows that there is a cross reference at the bottom of the column

chapter number

numbers in bold, e.g. 27.13, point to the chapter and verse

footnotes give information on the meaning of the text, notes on the translation, or different interpretations of what the original text meant

Major Prophets

ISAIAH 26–28

841

their ghosts will not rise, for you have punished them and destroyed them.

No one remembers them any more.

15 LORD, you have made our nation grow, enlarging its territory on every side, and this has brought you honour.

16 You punished your people, LORD, and in anguish they prayed to you.

17 You, LORD, have made us cry out, as a woman in labour cries out in pain.

18 We were in pain and agony, but we gave birth to nothing. We have won no victory for our land; we have accomplished nothing.*

19 Those of our people who have died will live again! Their bodies will come back to life. All those sleeping in their graves will wake up and sing for joy. As the sparkling dew refreshes the earth, so the LORD will revive those who have long been dead.

Judgement and Restoration

20 Go into your houses, my people, and shut the door behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until God's anger is over.

21 The LORD is coming from his heavenly dwelling place to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The murders that were secretly committed on the earth will be revealed, and the ground will no longer hide those who have been killed.

27 ¹On that day the LORD will use his powerful and deadly sword to punish Leviathan, that wriggling, twisting dragon, and to kill the monster* that lives in the sea.

²On that day the LORD will say of his pleasant vineyard, ³"I watch over it and water it continually. I guard it night and day so that no one will harm it. ⁴I am no longer angry with the vineyard. If only there were thorns and briars to fight against, then

26.16 Verse 16 in Hebrew is unclear.

26.18 We have won... nothing; Hebrew unclear.


27.1 Leviathan... monster: Legendary monsters which were symbols of the nations oppressing Israel.

See also: **26.19:** Dan 12.2 **27.1:** Job 41.1; Ps 74.14, 104.26

I would burn them up completely. ⁵But if the enemies of my people want my protection, let them make peace with me. Yes, let them make peace with me."

6 In days to come the people of Israel, the descendants of Jacob, will take root like a tree, and they will blossom and bud. The earth will be covered with the fruit they produce.

7 Israel has not been punished by the LORD as severely as its enemies, nor lost as many people. **8** The LORD punished his people by sending them into exile. He took them away with a cruel wind from the east. ⁹But Israel's sins will be forgiven only when the stones of pagan altars are ground up like chalk, and no more incense altars or



The fortified city lies in ruins (27.10)

symbols of the goddess Asherah are left.

10 The fortified city lies in ruins. It is deserted like an empty wilderness. It has become a pasture for cattle, where they can rest and graze. **11** The branches of the trees are withered and broken, and women gather them for firewood. Because the people have understood nothing, God their Creator will not pity them or show them any mercy.

12 On that day, from the Euphrates to the Egyptian border, the LORD will gather his people one by one, like someone separating the wheat from the chaff.

13 When that day comes, a trumpet will be blown to call back from Assyria and Egypt all the Israelites who are in exile there. They will come and worship the LORD in Jerusalem, on his sacred hill.*

A Warning to the Northern Kingdom

28 ¹The kingdom of Israel is doomed! Its glory is fading like the crowns of flowers on the heads of its drunken leaders. Their proud heads are well perfumed,

28.8 Verse 8 in Hebrew is unclear.

See also: **27.13** sacred hill: See 2.3.

29

Isaiah

Jerem. Lamen. Baruch Ezekiel Daniel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habak. Zephani. Haggai Zechar. Malachi Matt. Mark Luke

sidebar navigation:

book number, in order of books of the Bible

name of the book you are reading

either the books that come next or, on the opposite page, those that come before the book you are reading

cross references show you other Bible passages that deal with the same or similar ideas

Where do I begin?

When you start to read the Bible it can be hard to know where to begin, and once begun, it can be hard to know where to go next.

The choice of where to start depends entirely on you. You may like to read whole books at a time. You may like to read to understand the big picture of the message of the Bible. You may like to read some of the most famous stories, story by story. Or you may like to explore themes. Whatever you choose, there are some ideas below to help you get started.

Reading a whole book at a time

If you want to read a whole book at a time, it is good to start with the books that are easier to read and move on to the more challenging ones later. In other words, don't start with Leviticus, which is a list of instructions that many people struggle to read; start with a story that is much easier to understand.

1. Start with a Gospel.

- Mark's Gospel is the shortest and is very easy to read (p. 1131).
- You could try Luke's Gospel first (p. 1158) and then, straight away, read Acts (p. 1230). Acts was also written by Luke and goes on to tell the story of how the good news of Jesus spread from Jerusalem to Rome.

2. Next, try a book with a good story from the Old Testament.

- Ruth (p. 249) and Jonah (p. 1055) are both great stories and fun to read.
- 1 Samuel (p. 254) also has some interesting stories in it.
- Genesis (p. 3) has some of the best-known stories in the whole Bible.

3. Then you might like to look at one of the letters in the New Testament.

- Philippians (p. 1323), Ephesians (p. 1317) and Colossians (p. 1328)

are all good places to start with Paul's letters. Romans (p. 1268) is the longest and most complicated of them all, so you may like to leave that until you have read some of his other letters.

- Don't just read Paul's letters. Try 1 Peter (p. 1370) or James (p. 1363), which were written by other early Christians.

4. It is also good to read some of the prophecy and poetry in the Old Testament.

- The Psalms (p. 619) have been used in Jewish and Christian worship for over 2,500 years. Read some of the Psalms: some of the most popular are 1, 23, 37, 40, 46, 62, 84, 117, 121 and 139.
- The book of Isaiah (p. 820) has some inspiring passages. Have a look at 9.2–7; 35.1–10; 40.1–31; 52.13–53.12 and 61.1–11

You may notice that the laws (e.g. Leviticus) and the visions (e.g. Revelation) aren't on this list. This is because they are the hardest books in the Bible to read. Do read them, but get used to reading some of the other books first, and then, when you are ready, turn your attention to the more complicated parts of the Bible.

Reading to understand the big picture

Running through the Bible is the message of God's love for the world that he created. The story of the Bible is the story of how God tried to draw people back to him and mend their broken relationship. It can be helpful to trace this story through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

You can read the whole of this story through the 40 passages below. (If you don't have time to read them all, just read numbers 1, 2, 7, 15, 20, 24, 27, 29, 30 and 33.)

The Old Testament

1. *The world was created by God and it was good: **Genesis 1—2***
In the beginning, God created the world and all living creatures, including human beings.
2. *But it went wrong: **Genesis 3***
Adam and Eve disobeyed God and could no longer stay in the garden of Eden.
3. *So God decided to start again: **Genesis 6.5—22 and 8.1—9.17***
God decided to flood the world and start again, but he saved Noah and Noah's family and gave a rainbow as a sign that he would never flood the world again.
4. *God chose a family – the family of Abraham – to be his people: **Genesis 12.1—8***
God called Abraham to leave his home and follow him, and God promised that he would bless Abraham.
5. *God promised that Abraham's family would become a great nation: **Genesis 17.15—18.15***
God promised the elderly Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son together.
6. *But his family became slaves in Egypt: **Exodus 1***
Abraham's grandson, Jacob, moved to Egypt with his twelve sons (one of whom was Joseph), but as time went by, their descendants became slaves of Pharaoh.
7. *So God called Moses to free his people from slavery: **Exodus 3.1—4.13***
God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and called him to set his people free.
8. *And Moses led them out of Egypt: **Exodus 14—15***
Moses led the people out of slavery in Egypt. After crossing the Red Sea, they wandered in the wilderness.
9. *In the wilderness, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments: **Deuteronomy 5.1—22***
God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on the top of Mount Sinai.
10. *After 40 years, a new leader brought God's people to the Promised Land: **Joshua 3.1—4.7***
Joshua entered the Promised Land with God's people, and the twelve tribes settled there.
11. *In the Promised Land, they faced many enemies: **Judges 6—7***
God raised up a number of different leaders to face the people's enemies; one of these was Gideon, who led an army against the Midianites.
12. *And so the people asked for a king to lead them in battle: **1 Samuel 8.1—10.1***
Despite the prophet Samuel's uncertainty, God asked him to anoint Saul as king.
13. *God then chose David to be king: **1 Samuel 16***
Saul could not live up to the calling to be king, so God chose David to be king instead of him.

What to bear in mind as you read

Throughout Christian history, people have found the Bible to be inspiring but not always easy to read. There are a few things to keep in mind, which may help you as you read the Bible.

1. Recognise that the Bible was written a long time ago.

Even the newest parts of the Bible are about 2,000 years old. Remember this as you read it, and try to imagine what it might have been like to live when the books were first written.

2. Don't read passages entirely on their own; look at what comes before and after them.

It's easy to take verses, or sometimes whole stories, out of context, by reading them by themselves. Try to work out where they fit in the bigger story or argument of the book. You'll get a much better sense of what's going on and what it all means.

3. Ask yourself what type of book you are reading.

We read different types of books differently. You would never read a list of phone numbers in the same way as you read a novel, so work out if the passage you are reading is poetry or prose, law or history, wise sayings or a vision, and then read with that in mind. It will make a big difference.

4. Read what's actually there, not what you think might be there.

It is all too easy to assume that we know what a Bible story says. This is particularly true for famous stories; we can think we know what it is about and not actually read it. So slow down and chew the story over. You'll often find that you understand it in a new way.

5. Read the Bible with other people.

We all bring our own experiences and thoughts to the Bible. It can help, therefore,

to ask how other people see it and read it. You'll gain a sense of what other people think the Bible says.

6. Don't read the Bible from start to finish, as you would a novel.

The Bible is not one book; it is a library of books. The books are not always printed in time order; instead, they often jump around from time period to time period. As a result, reading them in the order they are printed can be confusing and unhelpful.

7. Ask questions.

Use your brain while you read. Ask questions. Explore ideas. If you really can't understand something, make a note of it and come back later. Sometimes, returning to a difficult question can help.

8. Keep a notebook of your questions.

Make notes as you read. What inspires you? What confuses you? Which are your favourite verses? Jot them down. If you return to your notes later, they will remind you of what you enjoyed before. Sometimes, when you look back at what confused you, it is less troubling than it was before.

9. Don't worry about it.

Many people find parts of the Bible difficult to understand. It was written a long time ago. It comes from a different culture. If you find something difficult, move on. Focus on the parts you do understand and not the parts you don't.

10. Do keep going.

Above all, keep going. The more you read, the easier it gets. The ten commandments (Deuteronomy 5)

The main collections of books in the Bible

Old Testament

Law

These books set out God's commandments for his people alongside the stories about their relationship with God.

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

Historical books

These books lay out the history of God's people as they settled in the Promised Land, began to look for a king, went into exile in Babylon and then returned home.

- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- 1 Samuel
- 2 Samuel
- 1 Kings
- 2 Kings
- 1 Chronicles
- 2 Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Tobit
- Judith
- Esther
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees

Poetic books

These books contain a range of poems, prayers and wise advice.

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Songs
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
- Lamentations

Major Prophets

These books contain prophecies from four of Israel's prophets. They are called the Major Prophets because of the length of their books, not necessarily the importance of the prophets.

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Baruch
- Ezekiel
- Daniel

Minor Prophets

These books contain prophecies from twelve of Israel's prophets. They are called the Minor Prophets because of the length of their books, not necessarily the importance of the prophets.

- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah

- Micah
 - Nahum
 - Habakkuk
 - Zephaniah
 - Haggai
 - Zechariah
 - Malachi
- 1 Peter
 - 2 Peter
 - 1 John
 - 2 John
 - 3 John
 - Jude

New Testament

Gospels

Four different accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- John

Prophecy

A vision of heaven seen by John

- Revelation

The good news spreads

The story of how the good news about Jesus spread from Jerusalem all the way to Rome.

- Acts

Letters

A number of letters from various key leaders of the earliest Christians, especially the apostle Paul, addressing issues of life, God and faith.

- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- James

Timeline

This chart indicates when the events each book describes may have been set. All dates given are very approximate. Books with ? after them are hard to place and could be set either earlier or later.

Rough date	Event	Books set in this period
Earliest times	Creation and flood	Genesis
1800 BC	The call of Abraham	Genesis
1250 BC	The exodus from Egypt and wilderness wandering	Exodus; Numbers; Leviticus; Deuteronomy
1300 BC	Entry into the Promised Land	Joshua
1300–1030 BC	The time of the Judges	Judges
1030–1010 BC	Saul is king	1 Samuel
1010–970 BC	David is king	1 Samuel; 2 Samuel; 1 Chronicles; Psalms
970–931 BC	Solomon is king	1 Kings; 2 Chronicles; Proverbs; Song of Songs; Ecclesiastes ? ; Job ?
930 BC	Israel splits in two and becomes Israel and Judah	1 and 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles; Hosea; Amos; Micah
722 BC	Israel (the northern kingdom) is destroyed by Assyria	2 Kings; 2 Chronicles; Isaiah; Joel; Obadiah; Jonah; Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah; Tobit; Judith
597–586 BC	Judah is defeated by Babylon and the exile in Babylon begins	2 Kings; 2 Chronicles; Jeremiah; Lamentations; Ezekiel; Daniel
538 BC	The return from exile begins	Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi
333 BC	Alexander the Great conquers the Persian empire, including Judea	
c. 167–163 BC	A revolt led by the Maccabees brings independence to Judea.	1 and 2 Maccabees
63 BC	The Romans conquer the region.	
6 BC – AD 27	Jesus is born, lives, dies and rises again	Matthew; Mark; Luke; John
AD 27	The disciples begin to spread the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth	Acts
AD 40	Paul begins his missionary journeys	Acts; Romans; 1 and 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 and 2 Thesalonians; 1 and 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon; Hebrews; James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2 and 3 John; Jude
The future	Jesus is recognised to be king over everything	Revelation

The foreigner in the family tree

What's it about? Set in the dangerous time of the judges, this is the story of Ruth, a foreigner who followed her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Israel. She risked her life to save herself and Naomi.

Who wrote it? The author is unknown, but the book was probably written after David became king.

Why read it? The book is full of kindness and redemption. It mirrors the story of God's desire to redeem his people.

What's it to me? Ruth was a foreigner, but she became part of Jesus' family tree. Outsiders aren't excluded from God's salvation.

Elimelech and his Family Move to Moab

1 ¹⁻² Long ago, in the days before Israel had a king, there was a famine in the land. So a man named Elimelech, who belonged to the clan of Ephrath and who lived in Bethlehem in Judah, went with his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion to live for a while in the country of Moab. While they were living there, ³ Elimelech died, and Naomi was left alone with her two sons, ⁴ who married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. About ten years later ⁵ Mahlon and Chilion also died, and Naomi was left all alone, without husband or sons.

Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem

⁶ Some time later Naomi heard that the LORD had blessed his people by giving them a good harvest; so she got ready to leave Moab with her daughters-in-law. ⁷ They started out together to go back to Judah, but on the way ⁸ she said to them, "Go back home and stay with your mothers. May the LORD be as good to you as you have been to me and to those who have died. ⁹ And may the LORD make it possible for each of you to marry again and have a home."

So Naomi kissed them goodbye. But they started crying ¹⁰ and said to her, "No! We will go with you to your people."

¹¹ "You must go back, my daughters," Naomi answered. "Why do you want to come with me? Do you think I could have sons again for you to marry? ¹² Go back home, for I am too old to get married again. Even if I thought there was still hope, and so got married tonight and had sons, ¹³ would you wait until they had grown up? Would this keep you from marrying someone else? No, my daughters, you know that's impossible. The LORD has turned against me, and I feel very sorry for you."^{*}

¹⁴ Again they started crying. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and went back home,^{*} but Ruth held on to her. ¹⁵ So Naomi said to her, "Ruth, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her god.^{*} Go back home with her."

¹⁶ But Ruth answered, "Don't ask me to leave you! Let me go with you. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and

1.13 *sorry for you; or bitter about what has happened to you.*

1.14 *One ancient translation and went back home; Hebrew does not have these words.*

1.15 *god; or gods.*

your God will be my God. **17** Wherever you die, I will die, and that is where I will be buried. May the LORD's worst punishment come upon me if I let anything but death* separate me from you!"

18 When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

19 They went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived, the whole town got excited, and the women there exclaimed, "Is this really Naomi?"

20 "Don't call me Naomi," she answered; "call me Marah,* because Almighty God has made my life bitter. **21** When I left here, I had plenty, but the LORD has brought me back without a thing. Why call me Naomi when the LORD Almighty has condemned me and sent me trouble?"

22 This, then, was how Naomi came back from Moab with Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law. The barley harvest was just beginning when they arrived in Bethlehem.

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Num.
Deuter.
Joshua
Judges

Ruth Works in the Field of Boaz

Ruth

8

2 Naomi had a relative named Boaz, a rich and influential man who belonged to the family of her husband Elimelech. **2*** One day Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields to gather the corn that the harvest workers leave. I am sure to find someone who will let me work with him."

Naomi answered, "Go ahead, my daughter."



They went on until they came to Bethlehem (1.19)

1.17 anything but death; or even death.

1.20 Naomi... Marah: In Hebrew Naomi means "pleasant" and Marah means "bitter".

See also: 2.2: Lev 19.9–10; Deut 24.19

3 So Ruth went out to the fields and walked behind the workers, picking up the corn which they left. It so happened that she was in a field that belonged to Boaz.



Ruth went out... picking up the corn (2.3)

4 Some time later Boaz himself arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the workers. "The LORD be with you!" he said.

"The LORD bless you!" they answered.

5 Boaz asked the man in charge, "Who is that young woman?"

6 The man answered, "She is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi. **7** She asked me to let her follow the workers and pick up the corn. She has been working since early morning and has just now stopped to rest for a while under the shelter."

8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Let me give you some advice. Don't pick up corn anywhere except in this field. Work with the women here; **9** watch them to see where they are reaping and stay with them. I have ordered my men not to molest you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and drink from the water jars that they have filled."

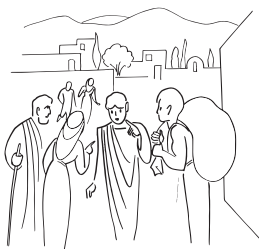
10 Ruth bowed down with her face touching the ground, and said to Boaz, "Why should you be so concerned about me? Why should you be so kind to a foreigner?"

11 Boaz answered, "I have heard about everything that you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband died. I know how you left your father and mother and your own country and how you came to live among a people you had

THE BOOK OF TOBIT

A love story guided by an angel

What's it about? A devout man called Tobit is suddenly blinded. His son Tobias, guided by the disguised angel Raphael, sets out to help his father and marries Sarah. Tobias drives away a demon from Sarah, which has killed her seven previous husbands on the wedding night. Tobit regains his sight and dies a rich and happy man.



Who wrote it? The author is unknown but the book was probably written in Palestine about 200 BC, in Aramaic. The writer seems to be familiar with Genesis, Deuteronomy, Job and some of the prophets.

Why read it? God's will is to save his people from their enemies and to restore the ruins of Jerusalem. The book models trust in God even in exile, with prayer, fasting and almsgiving. There is a strong belief in angels who do God's work: the angel here is Raphael, whose name means 'God has healed'. God does not abandon his people, no matter how bad life may appear.

What's it to me? Tobit shows us ordinary men and women trying to live ordinary lives in faithfulness to God. There is plenty of humour and far more dialogue than in most of the books of the Bible.

1 I am Tobit and this is the story of my life. My father was Tobiel, my grandfather was Ananiel, and my great-grandfather was Aduel. Aduel's father was Gabael; his grandfather was Raphael; and his great-grandfather was Raguel, who belonged to the clan of Asiel, a part of the tribe of Naphtali. **2** *During the time that Shalmaneser was emperor of Assyria, I was taken captive in my home town of Thisbe, located in northern Galilee, south of Kadesh in Naphtali, north-west of Hazor, and north of Phogor.

Tobit's Early Life

3 All my life I have been honest and have tried to do what was right. I have often given money to help needy relatives and fellow-Jews who were deported with me to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

4 When I was young, I lived in northern Israel. All the tribes in Israel were supposed to offer sacrifices in Jerusalem. It was the one city that God had chosen from among all the Israelite cities as the place where his Temple was to be built for his holy and eternal home. But my entire tribe of Naphtali rejected the city of Jerusalem and the kings descended from David. **5** *Like

everyone else in this tribe, my own family used to go to the city of Dan in the mountains of northern Galilee to offer sacrifices to the gold bull-calf which King Jeroboam of Israel had set up there.

Tobit's Faithfulness to His Religion

Genesis 6 *I was the only one in my family who
Exodus regularly went to Jerusalem to celebrate
Leviticus the religious festivals, as the Law of Moses
Num. commands everyone to do. I would hurry
Deuter. off to Jerusalem with the first part of
Joshua my harvest, the firstborn of my animals,
Judges a tenth of my cattle, and the freshly clipped
Ruth wool from my sheep. Then I would stand
1 Sam. before the altar in the Temple, and give
2 Sam. these offerings to the priests, the descend-
1 Kings ants of Aaron. 7 I would give a tenth of my
2 Kings grain, wine, olive-oil, pomegranates, figs
1 Chron. and other fruits to the Levites who served
2 Chron. God in Jerusalem. Every year, except the
Ezra seventh year when the land was at rest,*
Nehem. I would sell a second tenth of my posses-
sions and spend the money in Jerusalem
on the festival meal.

Tobit 8 But every third year, I would give a third
tithe* to widows and orphans and to for-
eigners living among my people, and we
would eat the festival meal together. I did
this in keeping with the Law of Moses,
which Deborah, the mother of my grand-
father Ananiel, had taught me to obey.
(I had been left an orphan when my father
died.)

Tobit's Faithfulness in Exile

9 When I grew up, I married Anna, a member of my own tribe. We had a son and named him Tobias. 10 Later, I was taken captive and deported to Assyria, and that is how I came to live in Nineveh.

While we lived in Nineveh, all my relatives and fellow-Jews used to eat the same kind of food as the other people who lived there, 11 but I refused to do so. 12 Since I took seriously the commands of the Most High God, 13 he made Emperor Shalmaneser respect me, and I was placed in charge of purchasing all the emperor's supplies.

1.7 the land was at rest: See Lev 25.1–7.

1.8 a third tithe; some manuscripts have the money.

See also: 1.6: Deut 16.16

14 Before the emperor died, I made regular visits to the land of Media to buy things for him there. Once, when I was in the city of Rages in Media, I left some bags of money there with Gabael, Gabrias' brother, and asked him to keep them for me. There were more than 300 kilogrammes of silver coins in those bags. 15 When Shalmaneser died, his son Sennacherib succeeded him as emperor. It soon became so dangerous to travel on the roads in Media that I could no longer go there.

Tobit Buries the Dead

16 While Shalmaneser was still emperor, I took good care of my fellow-Jews whenever they were in need. 17 *If they were hungry, I shared my food with them; if they needed clothes, I gave them some of my own. Whenever I saw that the dead body of one of my people had been thrown outside the city wall, I gave it a decent burial.

18 One day Sennacherib cursed God, the King of Heaven; God punished him, and Sennacherib had to retreat from Judah. On his way back to Media he was so furious that he killed many Israelites. But I secretly removed the bodies and buried them; and when Sennacherib later searched for the bodies, he could not find them.

19 Then someone from Nineveh told the emperor that I was the one who had been burying his victims. As soon as I realized that the emperor knew all about me and that my life was in danger, I became frightened. So I ran away and hid. 20 Everything I owned was seized and put in the royal treasury. My wife Anna and my son Tobias were all I had left.

Tobit's Nephew Rescues Him

21 About six weeks later, two of Sennacherib's sons assassinated him and then escaped to the mountains of Ararat. Another son, Esarhaddon, became emperor and put Ahikar, my brother Anael's son, in charge of all the financial affairs of the empire. 22 This was actually the second time Ahikar was appointed to this position, for when Sennacherib was emperor of Assyria, Ahikar had been wine

See also: 1.17: Job 31.16–20

steward, treasurer, and accountant, and had been in charge of the official seal. Since Ahikar was my nephew, he put in a good word for me with the emperor, and I was allowed to return to Nineveh.

A Family Celebration

2 ¹When I returned home I was reunited with my wife Anna and my son Tobias. At the Harvest Festival, which is also called the Festival of Weeks, I sat down to a delicious meal. ²When I saw how much food there was on the table, I said to Tobias, “My son, go out and find some fellow-Jew who is living in poverty here in exile, someone who takes God’s commands seriously. Bring him back with you, so that he can share this festival meal with us. I won’t start eating until you come back.”

A Murder in Nineveh

³So Tobias went out to look for such a person. But he quickly returned, shouting, “Father! Father!”

“Yes, what is it?” I asked.

“One of our people has just been murdered! Someone strangled him and threw his body into the market-place.”

⁴I jumped up and left the table without even touching my food. I removed the body from the street and carried it to a little shed, where I left it until sunset, when I could bury it. ⁵*Then I returned home and washed, so as to purify myself. In deep sorrow I ate my dinner. ⁶*I was reminded of what the prophet Amos had said to the people of Bethel:

“Your festivals will be turned into funerals,
and your glad songs will become cries of grief.”

I began to weep.

⁷After sunset I went out, dug a grave, and buried the man. ⁸My neighbours thought I was mad. “Haven’t you learnt anything?” they asked. “You have already been in danger once for burying the dead, and you would have been killed if you had not run away. But here you are doing the same thing all over again.”



You have already been in danger once for burying the dead (2.8)

Tobit Is Blinded

⁹That night I washed, so as to purify myself, and went out into my courtyard to sleep by the wall. It was a hot night, and I did not pull the cover up over my head. ¹⁰Sparrows were on the wall right above me, but I did not know it. Their warm droppings fell into my eyes, causing a white film to form on them. I went to one doctor after another, but the more they treated me with their medicines, the worse my eyes became, until finally I was completely blind.

17

For four years I could see nothing. My relatives were deeply concerned about my condition, and Ahikar supported me for two years before he went to the land of Elam.

Tobit

- Judith
- Esther
- 1 Macc.
- 2 Macc.
- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Eccles.
- Songs
- Wisdom
- Sirach
- Isaiah
- Jerem.
- Lamen.
- Baruch
- Ezekiel
- Daniel
- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos

A Family Quarrel

¹¹After Ahikar left, my wife Anna had to go to work, so she took up weaving, like many other women. ¹²The people she worked for would pay her when she delivered the cloth. One spring day, she cut a finished piece of cloth from the loom and

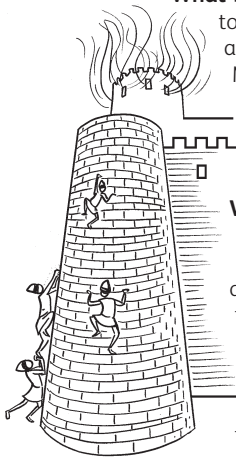


“Take it straight back to its owners.” (2.13)

.....
See also: 2.1: Ex 23.16 2.5: Num 19.11–13
 2.6: Amos 8.10

THE SECOND BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

Commitment to God's covenant



What's it about? The book is similar to 1 Maccabees but told from a different perspective. It gives detailed accounts of the Maccabean revolt led by Judas Maccabeus, as well as the martyrdoms of Eleazar and seven brothers.

Who wrote it? Jason of Cyrene wrote 2 Maccabees in Greek around 100 bc.

Why read it? It promotes commitment to God's covenant as the path to prosperity, and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Hope for life beyond death enabled the people of God to commit their lives fully to the God who had called them, even when this seemed of no benefit from a worldly perspective.

What's it to me? Faith in God, in life and death, brings far more benefits than anything else in this temporary life.

A Letter to the Jews in Egypt

1 ¹“From the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea to those in Egypt, warm greetings.

²“May God be good to you and keep the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, his faithful servants. ³ May he fill each of you with the desire to worship him and to do his will eagerly with all your heart and soul. ⁴ May he enable you to understand his Law and his commands. May he give you peace, ⁵ answer your prayers, forgive your sins, and never abandon you in times of trouble. ⁶ Here in Judea we are now praying for you.

⁷“In the year 169,* when Demetrius the Second was king of Syria, we wrote to tell you about the persecution and the hard times that came upon us in the years after Jason revolted against authority in the Holy Land. ⁸ Jason and his men set fire to the Temple gates and slaughtered

innocent people. Then we prayed to the Lord and he answered our prayers. So we sacrificed animals, gave offerings of grain, lit the lamps in the Temple, and set out the sacred loaves. ⁹ This is why we urge you to celebrate in the month of Kislev a festival similar to the Festival of Shelters. Written in the year 188.**

A letter to Aristobulus

The Death of King Antiochus

¹⁰“From the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea, the Jewish Senate, and Judas, to Aristobulus, a descendant of priests and the teacher of King Ptolemy, and to the Jews in Egypt, greetings and good health.

¹¹“We thank God because he saved us from great danger. We were like men ready to fight against a king, ¹² but God drove the enemy from our holy city. ¹³ *When King Antiochus arrived in Persia, his army

^{1.9} the year 188: This corresponds to 124 bc.

^{1.7} the year 169: This corresponds to 143 bc.

See also: **1.13–16:** 1 Macc 6.1–4; 2 Macc 9.1–10

seemed impossible to defeat, but they were cut to pieces in the temple of the goddess Nanea by an act of treachery on the part of her priests. **14** King Antiochus had gone to the temple with some of his most trusted advisers, so that he might marry the goddess and then take away most of the temple treasures as a wedding gift. **15** After the priests had laid out the treasure, he and a few of his men went into the temple to collect it. But the priests closed the doors behind him **16** and stoned him and his men from trapdoors hidden in the ceiling. Then they cut up the bodies and threw the heads to the people outside. **17** Praise God for punishing those evil men! Praise him for everything!



Everyone looked on in amazement (1.22)

Fire Consumes Nehemiah's Sacrifice

18 "On the 25th day of the month of Kislev we will celebrate the Festival of Rededication just as we celebrate the Festival of Shelters. We thought it important to remind you of this, so that you too may celebrate this festival. In this way you will remember how fire appeared when Nehemiah offered sacrifices after he had rebuilt the Temple and the altar. **19** At the time when our ancestors were being taken to exile in Persia, a few devout priests took some fire from the altar and secretly hid it in the bottom of a dry cistern. They hid the fire so well that no one ever discovered it. **20** Years later, when it pleased God, the Persian emperor sent Nehemiah back to Jerusalem, and Nehemiah told the descendants of those priests to find the fire. They reported to us that they had found no fire but only some oily liquid. Nehemiah then told them to scoop some up and bring it to him. **21** When everything for the sacrifice had been placed on the altar, he told the priests to pour the liquid over both the wood and the sacrifice. **22** After this was done and some time had passed, the sun appeared from behind the clouds, and suddenly everything on the altar burst into flames. Everyone looked on in amazement. **23** Then, while the fire was consuming the sacrifice, Jonathan the High Priest led the people in prayer, and Nehemiah and all the people responded.

Nehemiah's Prayer

24 "Nehemiah's prayer went something like this: 'Lord God, Creator of all things, you

are awesome and strong, yet merciful and just. You alone are king. No one but you is kind; **25** no one but you is gracious and just. You are almighty and eternal, for ever ready to rescue Israel from trouble. You chose our ancestors to be your own special people. **26** Accept this sacrifice which we offer on behalf of all Israel; protect your chosen people and make us holy. **27** Free those who are slaves in foreign lands and gather together our scattered people. Have mercy on our people, who are ill-treated and despised, so that all other nations will know that you are our God. **28** Punish the brutal and arrogant people who have oppressed us, **29** and then establish your people in your holy land, as Moses said you would.'

21

2 Macc.

.....

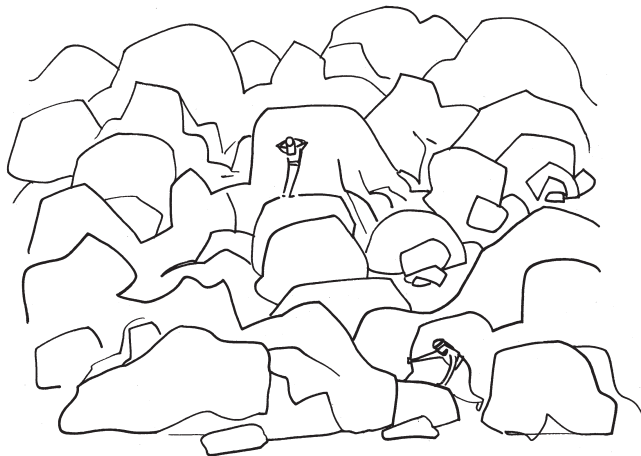
Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Eccles.
Songs
Wisdom
Sirach
Isaiah
Jerem.
Lamen.
Baruch
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum

The Persian Emperor Hears about the Fire

30 "Then the priests sang hymns. **31** After the sacrifices had been consumed, Nehemiah gave orders for the rest of the liquid to be poured over some large stones. **32** Immediately a fire blazed up, but it was extinguished by a flame from the fire on the altar.

33 "News of what had happened spread everywhere. The Persian emperor heard that a liquid had been found in the place where the priests had hidden the altar fire, just before they were taken into exile. He also heard that Nehemiah and his friends had used this liquid to burn the sacrifice on the altar. **34** When the emperor investigated the matter and found out that this was true, he had the area fenced off and made into a shrine. **35** It became a substantial

Exodus
Leviticus
Num.
Deuter.
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 Sam.
2 Sam.
1 Kings
2 Kings
1 Chron.
2 Chron.
Ezra
Nehem.
Tobit
Judith
Esther
1 Macc.



... but they could not find the cave (2.6)

⋮⋮⋮

2 Macc. source of income for him, and he used the money for gifts to anyone who was in his good favour. ³⁶ Nehemiah and his friends called the liquid *nephthar*, which means 'purification,' but most people call it 'naphtha.'

21

Jeremiah Hides the Tent of the Lord's Presence

2 ¹ "We know from the records that Jeremiah the prophet instructed the people who were being taken into exile to hide some of the fire from the altar, as we have just mentioned. ² We also know that he taught them God's Law and warned them not to be deceived by the ornamented gold and silver idols which they would see in the land of their exile. ³ And then he urged them never to abandon the Law.

⁴ "These same records also tell us that Jeremiah, acting under divine guidance, commanded the Tent of the Lord's Presence and the Covenant Box to follow him to the mountain where Moses had looked down on the land which God had promised our people. ⁵ When Jeremiah got to the mountain, he found a huge cave and there he hid the Tent of the Lord's Presence, the Covenant Box, and the altar of incense. Then he sealed up the entrance.

⁶ "Some of Jeremiah's friends tried to follow him and mark the way, but they could not find the cave. ⁷ When Jeremiah learnt what they had done, he reprimanded them, saying, 'No one must know about this place until God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy. ⁸ *At that time he will reveal where these things are hidden, and the dazzling light of his presence will be seen in the cloud, as it was in the time of Moses and on the occasion when Solomon prayed that the Temple might be dedicated in holy splendour.'

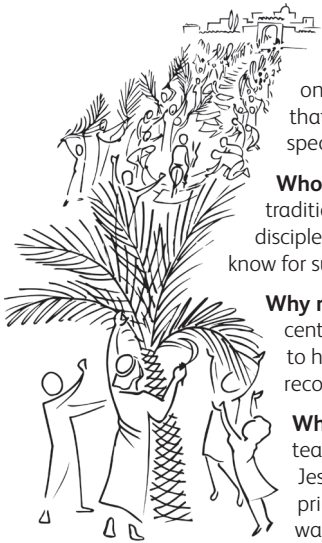
How Solomon Celebrated the Festival

⁹ "We are also told how the wise King Solomon offered a sacrifice of dedication at the completion of the Temple, ¹⁰ and that when he prayed, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, just as it had done earlier when Moses prayed. ¹¹ Moses had explained that the sin offering was consumed by fire because it was not eaten. ¹² Solomon celebrated the festival for eight days.

.....
See also: 2.8: Ex 16.10; 24.16; 1 Kgs 8.10-11

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

The story of Jesus, promised by God



What's it about? Matthew tells his version of the story of Jesus, from birth to death and resurrection. He concentrates on Jesus' work and teachings, highlighting that Jesus is the promised Messiah – God's special saviour.

Who wrote it? Earliest known Christian traditions say that Matthew, also called Levi, a disciple of Jesus, wrote this Gospel. We do not know for sure.

Why read it? Matthew puts Jesus right at the centre of history. The Old Testament pointed to him, and he changed history beyond recognition.

What's it to me? Matthew records Jesus' teaching alongside Jesus' actions. We see Jesus practising what he preaches, giving us a prime example of what it means to live God's way. But Jesus is much more than a good man

who lived long ago. According to Matthew, he is the saviour promised by God and he will be with us until the end of the world (28.20).

The Ancestors of Jesus Christ

(Lk 3.23–38)

1 This is the list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, who was a descendant of Abraham.

2-6a From Abraham to King David, the following ancestors are listed: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and his brothers; then Perez and Zerah (their mother was Tamar), Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz (his mother was Rahab), Obed (his mother was Ruth), Jesse, and King David.

6b-11 *From David to the time when the people of Israel were taken into exile in Babylon, the following ancestors are listed:

David, Solomon (his mother was the woman who had been Uriah's wife), Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Uziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, and Jehoiachin and his brothers.

12-16 From the time after the exile in Babylon to the birth of Jesus, the following ancestors are listed: Jehoiachin, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, Jacob, and Joseph, who married Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was called the Messiah.

17 So then, there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, and fourteen from David to the exile in Babylon, and fourteen from then to the birth of the Messiah.

The Birth of Jesus Christ

(Lk 2.1–7)

18 *This was how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately. 20 While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. 21 *She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus — because he will save his people from their sins."

22 Now all this happened in order to make what the Lord had said through the prophet come true, 23 *"A virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called Immanuel" (which means, "God is with us").

24 So when Joseph woke up, he married Mary, as the angel of the Lord had told him to do. 25 *But he had no sexual relations with her before she gave birth to her son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

47

Visitors from the East

2 1 Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterwards, some men who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. 4 He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

5 "In the town of Bethlehem in Judea," they answered. "For this is what the prophet wrote:

6 *"Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah; for from you will come a leader who will guide my people Israel."

.....
 See also: 1.18: Lk 1.27 1.21: Lk 1.31
 1.23: Is 7.14 (LXX) 1.25: Lk 2.21 2.6: Mic 5.2



The same star... went ahead of them (2.9–10)

7 So Herod called the visitors from the east to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: "Go and make a careful search for the child, and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him."

9-10 And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the east. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 11 They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

12 Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

The Escape to Egypt

13 After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him. So get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you to leave."

14 Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left during the night for Egypt, 15 *where he stayed until Herod died. This was done to make what the Lord had said through the prophet come true, "I called my Son out of Egypt."

The Killing of the Children

16 When Herod realized that the visitors from the east had tricked him, he was

.....
 See also: 2.15: Hos 11.1

furious. He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood who were two years old and younger — this was done in accordance with what he had learned from the visitors about the time when the star had appeared.

17 In this way what the prophet Jeremiah had said came true:

18 *A sound is heard in Ramah,
the sound of bitter weeping.
Rachel is crying for her children;
she refuses to be comforted,
for they are dead.*

The Return from Egypt

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt **20** and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go back to the land of Israel, because those who tried to kill the child are dead.” **21** So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went back to Israel.

22 But when Joseph heard that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judea, he was afraid to go there. He was given more instructions in a dream, so he went to the province of Galilee **23** *and made his home in a town named Nazareth. And so what the prophets had said came true: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

The Preaching of John the Baptist

(Mk 1.1–8; Lk 3.1–18; Jn 1.19–28)

3 **1** At that time John the Baptist came to the desert of Judea and started preaching. **2** * “Turn away from your sins,” he said, “because the Kingdom of heaven is near!” **3** * John was the man the prophet Isaiah was talking about when he said: “Someone is shouting in the desert, ‘Prepare a road for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel!’”

4 * John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair; he wore a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **5** People came to him from Jerusalem, from the whole province of Judea, and from all the country near the River Jordan. **6** They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan.

7 * When John saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to him to be baptized, he said to them, “You snakes — who told you that you could escape from the punishment God is about to send?” **8** Do those things that will show that you have turned from your sins. **9** * And don’t think you can escape punishment by saying that Abraham is your ancestor. I tell you that God can take these stones and make descendants for Abraham! **10** * The axe is ready to cut down the trees at the roots; every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire. **11** I baptize you with water to show that you have repented, but the one who will come after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He is much greater than I am; and I am not good enough even to carry his sandals. **12** He has his winnowing shovel with him to thresh out all the grain. He will gather his wheat into his barn, but he will burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out.”

The Baptism of Jesus

(Mk 1.9–11; Lk 3.21–22)

13 At that time Jesus arrived from Galilee and came to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. **14** But John tried to make him change his mind. “I ought to be baptized by you,” John said, “and yet you have come to me!”

15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so for now. For in this way we shall do all that God requires.” So John agreed.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and alighting on him. **17** * Then a voice said from heaven, “This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased.”

The Temptation of Jesus

(Mk 1.12–13; Lk 4.1–13)

4 **1** * Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the Devil. **2** After spending forty days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry. **3** Then the Devil came to him and said, “If you are God’s Son, order these stones to turn into bread.”

47

Matt.

Mark
Luke
John
Acts
Romans
1 Corin.
2 Corin.
Galat.
Ephes.
Philipp.
Coloss.
1 Thess.
2 Thess.
1 Tim.
2 Tim.
Titus
Philem.
Heb.
James
1 Peter

See also: **2.18:** Jer 31.15 **2.23:** Mk 1.24; Lk 2.39;
Jn 1.45 **3.2:** Mt 4.17; Mk 1.15 **3.3:** Is 40.3 (LXX)
3.4: 2 Kgs 1.8

See also: **3.7:** Mt 12.34; 23.33 **3.9:** Jn 8.33
3.10: Mt 7.19 **3.17:** Gen 22.2; Ps 2.7; Is 42.1;
Mt 12.18; 17.5; Mk 1.11; Lk 9.35 **4.1:** Heb 2.18; 4.15

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

The letter of transformation

What's it about? This is one of the few letters with an individual story behind it. The slave Onesimus had run away from his master, Philemon.

Who wrote it? Paul and Timothy are the writers.

Why read it? This is a great testimonial about a man's character and faith. We see the gospel of Jesus at work before our very eyes.

What's it to me? Whether we're like Paul or Onesimus, this letter tells us about repentance, God's grace and standing up for others.

¹From Paul, a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy —

To our friend and fellow-worker Philemon, ²*and the church that meets in your house, and our sister Apphia, and our fellow-soldier Archippus:

³May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Philemon's Love and Faith

⁴Brother Philemon, every time I pray, I mention you and give thanks to my God. ⁵For I hear of your love for all God's people and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus. ⁶My prayer is that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in our life in union with Christ. ⁷Your love, dear brother, has brought me great joy and much encouragement! You have cheered the hearts of all God's people.

A Request for Onesimus

⁸For this reason I could be bold enough, as your brother in Christ, to order you to do what should be done. ⁹But because I love you, I make a request instead. I do this even though I am Paul, the ambassador of Christ Jesus, and at present also a prisoner

for his sake. ¹⁰*So I make a request to you on behalf of Onesimus, who is my own son in Christ; for while in prison I have become his spiritual father. ¹¹At one time he was of no use to you, but now he is useful* both to you and to me.

¹²I am sending him back to you now, and with him goes my heart. ¹³I would like to keep him here with me, while I am in prison for the gospel's sake, so that he could help me in your place. ¹⁴However, I do not want to force you to help me; rather, I would like you to do it of your own free will. So I will not do anything unless you agree.

¹⁵It may be that Onesimus was away from you for a short time so that you might have him back for all time. ¹⁶And now he is not just a slave, but much more than a slave: he is a dear brother in Christ. How much he means to me! And how much more he will mean to you, both as a slave and as a brother in the Lord!

¹⁷So, if you think of me as your partner, welcome him back just as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to my account. ¹⁹Here, I will write this with my own

v.9 the ambassador of Christ Jesus, and at present also a prisoner for his sake; or an old man, and at present a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.

v.11 The Greek name Onesimus means "useful".



Welcome him back (v.17)

hand: *I, Paul, will pay you back.* (I should not have to remind you, of course, that you owe your very self to me.) ²⁰ So, my brother, please do me this favour for the Lord's sake; as a brother in Christ, cheer me up!

²¹ I am sure, as I write this, that you will do what I ask — in fact I know that you will do even more. ²² At the same time, get a room ready for me, because I hope that God will answer the prayers of all of you and give me back to you.

Final Greetings

²³ *Epaphras, who is in prison with me for the sake of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings, ²⁴ *and so do my fellow-workers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke.

²⁵ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

.....

See also: **v.23:** Col 1.7, 4.12 **v.24:** Acts 12.12, 25, 13.13, 15.37–39, 19.29, 27.2; Col 4.10, 14; 2 Tim 4.10, 11

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Philem.

.....

Heb.
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude
Revel.

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

The letter about Jesus

What's it about? The letter to the Hebrews focuses on Jesus – Jesus as God and man, as high priest, as the sacrifice for our sin.



Who wrote it? The writer of this letter is unknown. The title has led to the belief that it was written to a group of Jewish believers.

Why read it? The writer of the letter helps his readers to understand more about the nature of Jesus, particularly in supernatural terms. This is a cosmic picture of what God has done to bring his people back to him, and who Jesus is.



What's it to me? The list of faithful people in Hebrews 11 reminds us of the history of the

people of God, inspires us and places us at the end of that list.

God's Word through his Son

1 ¹In the past, God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son. He is the one through whom God created the universe, the one whom God has chosen to possess all things at the end. ³He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word. After achieving forgiveness for human sins, he sat down in heaven at the right-hand side of God, the Supreme Power.

The Greatness of God's Son

⁴The Son was made greater than the angels, just as the name that God gave him is greater than theirs. ⁵*For God never said to any of his angels:

"You are my Son;
today I have become your Father."
Nor did God say about any angel,
"I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son."

⁶*But when God was about to send his firstborn Son into the world, he said:

"All God's angels must worship him."

⁷*But about the angels God said,
"God makes his angels winds,
and his servants flames of fire."

⁸*About the Son, however, God said:
"Your kingdom, O God, will last* for
ever and ever!

You rule over your* people with
justice.

1.8 *Your kingdom, O God, will last; or God is your kingdom.*

1.8 *your; some manuscripts have his.*

See also: **1.6:** Deut 32.43 (LXX) **1.7:** Ps 104.4 (LXX)
1.8–9: Ps 45.6–7

See also: **1.5:** Ps 2.7; 2 Sam 7.14; 1 Chr 17.13

- 9 You love what is right and hate what is wrong.
That is why God, your God, has chosen you
and has given you the joy of an honour far greater
than he gave to your companions.”
- 10 *He also said:
“You, Lord, in the beginning created the earth,
and with your own hands you made the heavens.
- 11 They will disappear, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like clothes.
- 12 You will fold them up like a coat,
and they will be changed like clothes.
But you are always the same,
and your life never ends.”
- 13 *God never said to any of his angels:
“Sit here on my right
until I put your enemies
as a footstool under your feet.”
- 14 What are the angels, then? They are spirits who serve God and are sent by him to help those who are to receive salvation.

The Great Salvation

2 **1** That is why we must hold on all the more firmly to the truths we have heard, so that we will not be carried away.
2 The message given to our ancestors by the angels was shown to be true, and all who did not follow it or obey it received the punishment they deserved. 3 How, then, shall we escape if we pay no attention to such a great salvation? The Lord himself first announced this salvation, and those who heard him proved to us that it is true. 4 At the same time God added his witness to theirs by performing all kinds of miracles and wonders and by distributing the gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his will.

The One who Leads us to Salvation

5 God has not placed the angels as rulers over the new world to come — the world of which we speak. 6 *Instead, as it is said somewhere in the Scriptures:

- “What are human beings, O God,
that you should think of them;
mere human beings, that you
should care for them?”
- 7 You made them for a little while
lower than the angels;
you crowned them with glory and
honour,*
- 8 and made them rulers over all
things.”

It says that God made them “rulers over all things”; this clearly includes everything. We do not, however, see human beings ruling over all things now. 9 But we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, so that through God’s grace he should die for everyone. We see him now crowned with glory and honour because of the death he suffered. 10 It was only right that God, who creates and preserves all things, should make Jesus perfect through suffering, in order to bring many children to share his glory. For Jesus is the one who leads them to salvation.

11 He purifies people from their sins, and both he and those who are made pure all have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his family. 12 *He says to God:

“I will tell my people what you have done;
I will praise you in their meeting.”

13 *He also says, “I will put my trust in God.” And he also says, “Here I am with the children that God has given me.”

14 Since the children, as he calls them, are people of flesh and blood, Jesus himself became like them and shared their human nature. He did this so that through his death he might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death, 15 and in this way set free those who were slaves all their lives because of their fear of death. 16 *For it is clear that it is not the angels that he helps. Instead, he helps the descendants of Abraham. 17 This means that he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order to be their faithful and merciful High Priest in his service to God,

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Heb.

James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude
Revel.

2.7 Many manuscripts add: *You made them rulers over everything you made* (see Ps 8.6).

See also: 1.10–12: Ps 102.25–27 (LXX)
1.13: Ps 110.1 2.6–8: Ps 8.4–6 (LXX)

See also: 2.12: Ps 22.22 2.13: Is 8.17, 18
2.16: Is 41.8–9

Palestine in the time of the Maccabees



Palestine in the Time of Jesus



Paul's Second Journey

This journey took Paul overland to Greece, returning by sea via Ephesus (Acts 15.36–18.22)



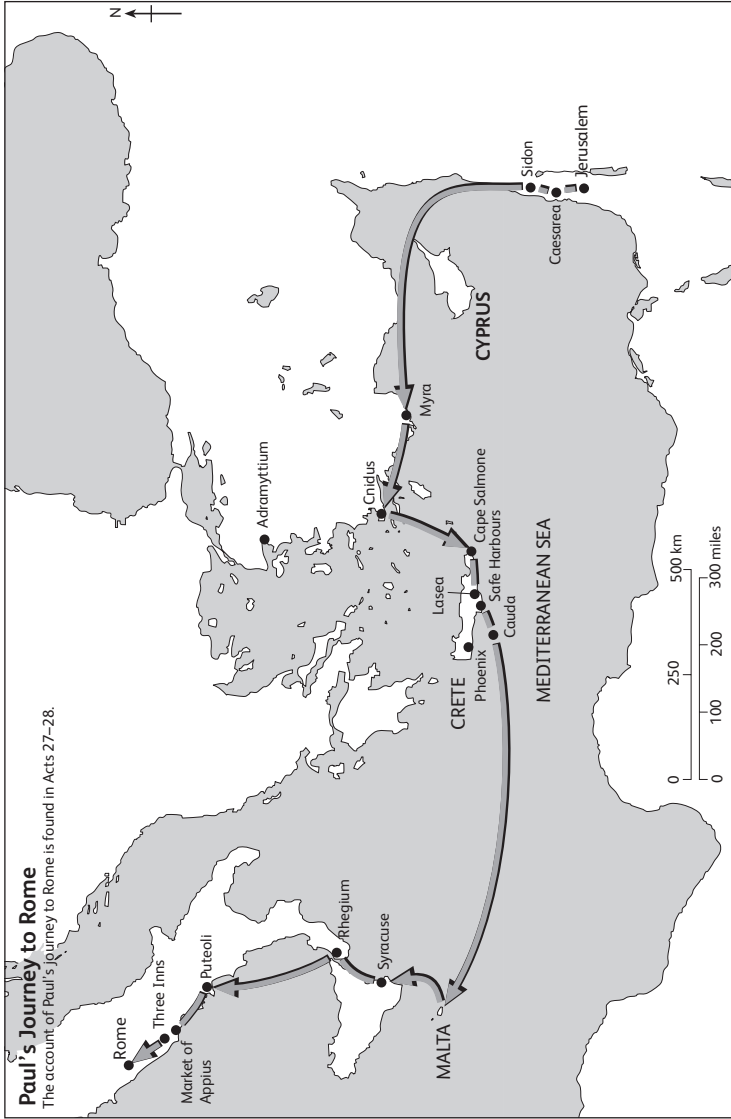
Paul's Third Journey

Ephesus was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia, now western Turkey (Acts 18.23–21.16)



Paul's Journey to Rome

The account of Paul's journey to Rome is found in Acts 27-28.



Word list

This Word List identifies many objects or cultural features whose meaning may not be known to all readers. Words shown in *italic type* have their own entry in this list.

Abib The first month of the Hebrew calendar. It runs from about mid-March to about mid-April. This month is also called *Nisan*.

Abys The place in the depths of the earth where, according to ancient Jewish teaching, the *demons* were imprisoned until their final punishment.

Acacia A flowering tree with hard and durable wood.

Adar The twelfth month of the Hebrew calendar. It runs from about mid-February to about mid-March.

Agate A semi-precious stone of different colours, but usually white and brown.

Alabaster A soft stone, usually of a light creamy colour, from which vases and jars were made.

Aloes A sweet-smelling liquid produced from a plant. It was used as medicine and as a perfume.

Amen A Hebrew word which means "it is so" or "may it be so". It can also be translated "certainly", "truly", or "surely". In Revelation 3.14 it is used as a name for *Christ*.

Amethyst A semi-precious stone, usually purple or violet in colour.

Angel A spiritual being who acts as a messenger of God. Angels sometimes meet people in the Bible in ordinary human form, but often as brightly shining creatures of alarming appearance.

Anoint To pour or rub olive oil on someone in order to honour him or to appoint him to some special work. The Israelite kings were anointed when they took office, and so the king could be called "the anointed one". "*Christ*", the Greek word for "The Anointed One", is the title of the one whom God chose and appointed as Saviour and Lord.

Apostle Usually one of the group of twelve men whom Jesus chose to be his special followers and helpers. It is also used in the New Testament to refer to Paul and other Christian workers. The word means "messenger".

Areopagus A hill in Athens where the city council used to meet. For this reason the council itself was called Areopagus, even after it no longer met on the hill.

Artemis The Greek name of an ancient goddess of fertility, worshipped especially in Asia Minor.

Asherah A goddess of fertility worshipped by the Canaanites; her male counterpart was *Baal*. After the Hebrews invaded Canaan, many of them began worshipping these two gods.

Astarte A goddess of fertility and war who was widely worshipped in the ancient Near East.

Atonement, Day of The most important of Israel's holy days, when the *High Priest* would offer sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel (Leviticus 16). It

was held on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar (about 1 October). The Jewish name for this day is Yom Kippur.

Baal The god of fertility worshipped by the Canaanites; his female counterpart was *Asherah*. After the Hebrews invaded Canaan, many of them began worshipping these two gods.

Baal-of-the-Covenant A name by which the god *Baal* was known by the people of Shechem.

Balsam A tree from which sweet-smelling resin was obtained; the resin was used for perfume and medicine.

Baptise A word meaning to be submerged in water. Baptism is a ritual that symbolises beginning a new life.

Beelzebul A New Testament name given to the Devil as the chief of the evil spirits.

Behemoth A large legendary creature. Some scholars say it was the hippopotamus.

Beryl A semi-precious stone, usually green or bluish green in colour.

Bul The eighth month of the Hebrew calendar. It runs from about mid-October to about mid-November.

Burnt offering A kind of sacrifice in which all the parts of the animal were completely burnt on the altar; in other sacrifices only certain parts of the animal were burnt.

Calamus A sweet-smelling plant, like a reed.

Capital The top part of a pillar holding up a roof.

Caravan A large group of people and animals travelling across a desert.

Carnelian A semi-precious stone, usually red in colour.

Cassia A spice made from the bark of a tree; it is very like cinnamon.

Chalcedony A semi-precious stone, usually milky or grey in colour.

Christ At first it was a title, the Greek word for the Hebrew "*Messiah*". It means "The Anointed One". Jesus was called "The Christ" because he was the one whom God chose and sent as Saviour and Lord.

Circumcise To cut off the foreskin of the penis. As a sign of God's covenant with his people Israelite boys were circumcised eight days after they were born (Genesis 17.9–14).

Concubine A servant woman who, although not a wife, had sexual relations with her master. She had important legal rights and her master was referred to as her husband.

Coral A brightly-coloured stony substance found in the sea; it was used as jewellery.

Council The highest religious court of the Jews. It was made up of seventy leaders of the Jewish people. Its president was the *High Priest*.

Covenant An agreement, either between people or between God and a person or a group of people. In the Old Testament the term usually refers to the covenant made between God and the people of *Israel* at the time of Moses. In the New Testament, it refers to the agreement between God and humanity, guaranteed by the body and blood of Jesus (see *Lord's Supper*).

Covenant Box A wooden chest covered with gold. The two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them were kept in it. It is often called "the Ark of the Covenant".

Cumin A small plant whose seeds are crushed and used for seasoning foods.

David's City The part of Jerusalem which was captured from the Jebusites by King David.

David's town A name for Bethlehem, King David's boyhood home and the town where Jesus was born.

Dedication, Festival of A Jewish festival in which people remembered how Judas Maccabeus re-dedicated the altar in the Temple in 165 BC. The festival began on the 25th day of the month Kislev (about 10 December) and lasted eight days. The Jewish name for this festival is Hanukkah.

Defile To make a person unfit to worship God. Some foods and actions were forbidden by the *Law* of Moses. If people broke these laws they were not allowed into the place where they worshipped God. Such people could not take part in worship until they had gone through certain rituals.

Demon An evil spirit with the power to harm people; it was regarded as a messenger and servant of the Devil.

Dill A small plant whose stems, leaves and seeds are used for seasoning food.

Disciple A person who follows and learns from someone else. In the New Testament the word is used of the followers of John the Baptist and especially of the followers of Jesus, particularly the twelve *apostles*.

Divination The attempt to discover a message from God or the gods by examining such things as marked stones or the liver of a sacrificed animal.

Dragon A beast in old legends, thought to be like a huge lizard. It is also called a *serpent* and appears as a picture of the Devil (Revelation 12.3—13.4; 20.2–3).

Elders In the Old Testament this is a name given to certain respected leaders of a tribe, nation, or city. In the New Testament three different groups are called elders: (1) in the Gospels the elders are important Jewish religious leaders, some of whom were members of their highest *Council*; (2) in Acts 11–21 and the Letters, the elders are Christian church officers who were responsible for the work of the church; (3)

in Revelation the 24 elders are part of God's court in heaven, perhaps as representatives of God's people.

Elul The sixth month of the Hebrew calendar. It runs from about mid-August to about mid-September.

Ephod A Hebrew word. Its meaning is not clear in a number of places. It usually refers to the piece of cloth worn over the shoulders by the *High Priest* which had the *Urim and Thummim* attached to it. In some places, however, it refers to something the people worshipped. In some other passages it seems to refer to an object used to foretell future events.

Epicureans Those who followed the teaching of Epicurus (died 270 BC), a Greek philosopher who taught that happiness is the highest good in life.

Epileptic A person who suffers from a nervous disease which causes fits and fainting.

Ethanim The seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. It runs from about mid-September to about mid-October; it was later called Tishri.

Ethiopia The ancient name of the extensive territory south of the First Cataract of the River Nile was Cush. This region was called Ethiopia in Graeco-Roman times, and included within its borders most of modern Sudan and some of present-day Ethiopia (Abyssinia).

Eunuch A man who has had an operation which prevents him from having normal sexual relations. Eunuchs were often important officials in the courts of ancient kings, and the word may have come to be used of such officials, even if they had not had the operation.

Fast To go without food as a religious duty.

Feldspar A colourful, rather hard rock, often glassy in appearance.

Fellowship offerings A sacrifice offered to restore or keep a right relationship with God. Only a part of the animal was burnt on the altar; the rest was eaten by the worshippers or the priests.

Flax A small cultivated plant; the fibres of its stem are spun into thread used in making linen cloth.

Frankincense A valuable substance made from the sap of a certain tree, probably brought from Arabia. It was burnt to give a pleasant smell.

Garnet A semi-precious stone, usually red in colour.

Gazelle A kind of deer, known for its beauty and gracefulness.

Gentile A person who is not a Jew.

Gospel A word meaning 'good news'; it sums up the whole message of God's activity to rescue humanity.

Hades The Greek name used in the New Testament to refer to the world of the dead.

Harrow A metal frame used to break up the ground and level it after it has been ploughed.

Harvest Festival The Israelite festival celebrating the wheat harvest, held in the latter part of May, 50 days after Passover. The Jewish name for this festival is Shavuoth (the Feast of Weeks). It has also been called *Pentecost*.

Hermes The name of a Greek god who served as messenger of the gods.

About the Good News Bible

In September 1966 the American Bible Society published *The New Testament in Today's English Version*, the first publication of a new Bible translation intended for people everywhere for whom English is either their mother tongue or an acquired language. Shortly thereafter the United Bible Societies (UBS) requested the American Bible Society (ABS) to undertake on its behalf a translation of the Old Testament following the same principles. Accordingly the American Bible Society appointed a group of translators to prepare the translation. The translation of the Old Testament, which was completed in 1976, was joined to the fourth edition New Testament, thus completing the first edition of the translation which came to be known as the Good News Bible.

The text used for this translation

The basic Hebrew (and Aramaic) text for the Old Testament is the Masoretic Text made available through printed editions, published by the UBS, and since 1977 under the title of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. In some instances the words of the printed consonantal text have been divided differently or have been read with a different set of vowels; at times a variant reading in the margin of the Hebrew text (*qere*) has been followed instead of the reading in the text (*kethiv*); and in other instances a variant reading supported by one or more Hebrew manuscripts has been adopted. Where no Hebrew source yields a satisfactory meaning in the context, the translation has either followed one or more of the ancient versions (e.g. Greek, Syriac, Latin) or has adopted a reconstructed text (technically referred to as a conjectural emendation) based on scholarly consensus; such departures from the Hebrew are indicated in footnotes.

The basic text for the translation of the New Testament is *The Greek New Testament*

published by the UBS (3rd edition, 1975), but in a few instances the translation is based on a variant reading supported by one or more Greek manuscripts.

The translation process

The primary concern of the translators was to provide a faithful translation of the meaning of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. Their first task was to understand correctly the meaning of the original. All aids available were used in this task, including the ancient versions (e.g., the Septuagint Greek text of the Old Testament, the Vulgate of Jerome and Old Latin texts as available) and the modern translations in English and other languages.

After ascertaining as accurately as possible the meaning of the original, the translators' next task was to express that meaning in a manner and form easily understood by the readers. Since this translation is intended for all who use English as a means of communication, the translators have tried to avoid words and forms not in current or widespread use; but no artificial limit has been set to the range of the vocabulary employed. Every effort has been made to use language that is natural, clear, simple, and unambiguous.

Faithfulness in translation also includes a faithful representation of the cultural and historical features of the original. Certain features, however, such as the hours of the day and the measures of weight, capacity, distance, and area, are given their modern equivalents, since the information in those terms conveys more meaning to the reader than the biblical form of those terms.

Following an ancient tradition, the distinctive Hebrew name for God (usually transliterated *Yahweh*, and earlier *Jehovah*) is in this translation represented by "LORD." When *Adonai*, normally translated "Lord," is followed by *Yahweh*, the combination is rendered by the phrase "Sovereign LORD."

Two ways to present the deuterocanonical books

The translation of the books of the Deuterocanon and others classed as Apocrypha was completed in 1978, and the first edition of the Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals and Apocrypha was published in 1979, with the Imprimatur of the Most Reverend John F. Whealon, Archbishop of Hartford, Connecticut. The 1979 publication was an interconfessional edition in which these books were grouped in a separate section between the Old and the New Testaments.

In this present edition the deuterocanonical books are arranged in the order most familiar to Roman Catholics. Most of these books were written or have their settings in the last several centuries BC. The book of Baruch is positioned after Lamentations, as part of the Jeremiah grouping. The Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach, being wisdom books, are located among the other Old Testament Wisdom books, immediately following Song of Songs. The three additions to the book of Daniel, which are presented as separate books in the interconfessional edition of the Good News Bible, are presented here in the way most familiar to Roman Catholics. Susanna and Bel and the Dragon are traditionally treated as chapters 13 and 14 of Daniel. The third addition has its location between verses 23 and 24 of chapter 3 in the Hebrew text because this is the position it holds in the Septuagint. Known as the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, this addition to Daniel provides the text of the prayer offered by Azariah and of the song he and his companions sang while in the midst of the flames in the fiery furnace. The result is an Old Testament with 46 books, several of which contain significant additions. These books formed part of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was in circulation at the time of Christ.

Prior to Jerome's great Latin translation, which came to be known as the Vulgata (the common language), there were numerous Latin translations in circulation, all of which had been done from the Greek Septuagint. The great significance of Jerome's work, at least for the Old Testament (AD 389–405), is that he broke from that tradition and based his translation on the received

consonantal Hebrew text. His knowledge of Hebrew was excellent, and he had recourse to Jewish text scholars wherever he had questions. For the sections of Esther and Daniel not in the Hebrew canon, Jerome worked from the ancient Greek text. For Tobit and Judith his base texts were (no longer extant) Aramaic editions of these books. Already before taking on the Old Testament books, Jerome had prepared a revised edition of the Gospels (revising the Old Latin text in light of the best Greek manuscripts available to him). The rest of the Vulgate New Testament text is also attributed to Jerome. The influence of the Vulgate in western Christendom remained unsurpassed from his time until the era of the Reformation and the proliferation of vernacular Bible translations, well over one thousand years later.

The revision of the Good News Bible

In December 1986, acting in response to a mounting perception of a need for text revisions, the ABS Board of Managers approved the undertaking of a revision of the Good News translation. The revision was restricted to two main areas of concern that had been raised and discussed over the years since the first appearance of the translation: (1) passages in which the English style had been unnecessarily exclusive and inattentive to gender concerns, and (2) passages in which the translation had been seen as problematic from either a stylistic or an exegetical viewpoint.

In the decade and a half since the initial publication of the Good News Bible, many Bible readers had become sensitive to the negative effects of exclusive language; that is, to the ways in which the built-in linguistic biases of the ancient languages and the English language toward the masculine gender has led some Bible readers to feel excluded from being addressed by the scriptural Word. This concern led to the revision of most major English translations during the 1980s, and, increasingly, readers of the Good News translation wrote to request that the Bible Society take this concern into consideration in preparing any revision. In practical terms what this means is that, where references in particular passages are to both men and women, the revision aims at language that

is not exclusively masculine-oriented. At the same time, however, great care was taken not to distort the historical reality of the ancient patriarchal culture of Bible times.

Helps for the reader

In order to make the text easier to understand, various kinds of readers' helps are supplied. The text itself has been divided into sections, and headings are provided which indicate the contents of the section. Where there are parallel accounts elsewhere in the Bible, a reference to such a passage appears within parentheses below the heading. There are, in addition, several kinds of notes which appear at the bottom of the page. (1) *Cultural or Historical Notes*. These provide information required to enable readers to understand the meaning of the text in terms of its original setting (e.g. the explanation of *Rahab* in Psalm 89.10, and of *Day of Atonement* in Acts 27.9). (2) *Textual Notes*. In the Old Testament these indicate primarily those passages where the Hebrew word or words may be unclear in meaning, or where one or more of the ancient translations (e.g., the Septuagint, Vulgate, or Syriac) appears to preserve the original wording better than the received Hebrew text. Where one or more of the ancient versions were followed, the note

indicates this by *One ancient translation* (e.g. Genesis 1.26) or *Some ancient translations* (e.g. Genesis 4.8); where a conjectural emendation was adopted, the note reads *Probable text* (e.g. Genesis 10.14). Where the Greek is the primary text, such as in the New Testament, there are textual notes indicating some of the places where there are significant differences among the ancient manuscripts. These differences may consist of additions to the text (e.g. Matthew 21.43), deletions (e.g. Matthew 24.36), or substitutions (e.g. Mark 1.41). (3) *Alternative Renderings*. In many places the precise meaning of the original text is in dispute, and there are two or more different ways in which the text may be understood. In some of the more important of such instances an alternative rendering is given (e.g. Genesis 2.9; Matthew 6.11). (4) *References to Other Passages*. In addition, many editions of the Good News Bible include references (by book, chapter, and verse) to other places in the Bible where identical or similar matters or ideas are dealt with.

A *Word List* identifies many objects or cultural features whose meaning may not be known to all readers. The *Maps* are designed to help the reader to visualise the geographical setting of countries and localities mentioned in the Bible at different points in their history.