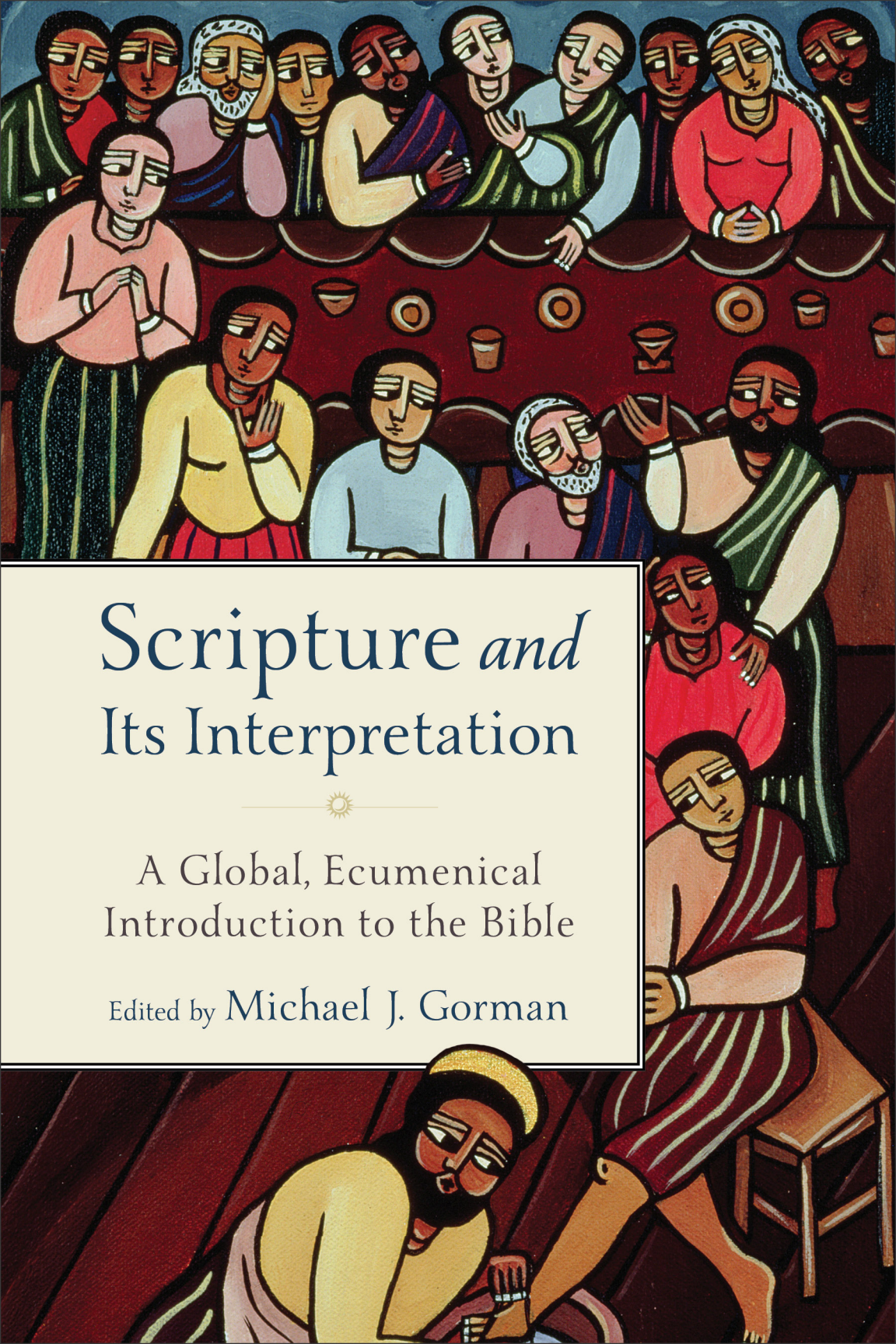

Scripture *and* Its Interpretation

A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible

Edited by Michael J. Gorman

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Introduction

Michael J. Gorman

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

—from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer

This book is a global, ecumenical introduction to the Christian Bible and its interpretation across time and throughout various cultures. It has been prepared by a group of outstanding contributors from the four major streams of Christianity in the world: Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Pentecostal. These contributors represent numerous countries and cultures: Britain, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, Guatemala, and the United States. The book is written in English, though that is not the mother tongue of some of the contributors. Although more than half currently live in the United States, several of these scholars have taught in other countries, and many have lectured internationally—sometimes in other languages, including Chinese, French, and Spanish.

Despite this broad range of contributors and their vast experience, it would be impossible for any book to be a truly *comprehensive* global and ecumenical text on Scripture and its interpretation because there are so many tributaries

within the various Christian streams and so many subcultures within the various cultures Christians inhabit. This reality means that there are very different approaches to the Bible within those streams and their tributaries, and within those cultures and their subcultures. For instance, when I asked a fellow biblical scholar in India to recommend some books on Indian or South Asian interpretation of the Bible (hermeneutics), he replied, "There is *dalit* ["oppressed," "untouchables"] hermeneutics, tribal hermeneutics, eco-hermeneutics, feminist hermeneutics, and postcolonial hermeneutics from the Indian point of view. And there is North India hermeneutics, South India, etc."

While acknowledging these sorts of unavoidable limitations, we think this book is a unique and significant approach to Scripture and its interpretation, a critically important way to begin the study of Scripture in our contemporary global context. It is particularly significant for Western readers (and perhaps especially for Americans) to realize how the Bible is read elsewhere—and how it is read in many different ways in the multicultural contexts of their own countries. We encourage readers to look at the chapters on scriptural interpretation within various traditions and cultures as significant but also as *representative* rather than comprehensive.

The first part of the book deals with the Bible itself, including its character as both library and single book, its historical and geographical contexts, surveys of both Testaments, the formation of the canon, associated books that did not make it into the Bible, and the history of Bible translations. The second part of the book considers the reception and interpretation of Scripture in various traditions. After a chapter introducing the topic of the Bible's reception, there are chapters devoted to biblical interpretation from premodern to postmodern times and also to the recent return to theological interpretation. There follow chapters on Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Pentecostal interpretation, as well as chapters on African, African American, Latino/Latina, and Asian and Asian American interpretation. The chapters in the third part of the book look at the relationship between Scripture and spirituality, Christian ethics, politics, Christian community, and Christian mission.

I am privileged to count many of the contributors to this book as good friends. More importantly, however, they are all first-rate scholars who have a shared passion for responsible, informed, contextualized reading of the Bible as Scripture—as a word of divine address. As the editor, I hope that readers will benefit immensely from this unique global and ecumenical collaborative effort.

This volume is the sequel to an earlier book I edited, which was called *Scripture: An Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation*. The chapters of that book were all written by current or former members of the faculty of St. Mary's Ecumenical Institute, an academic division of St. Mary's Seminary & University in Baltimore, Maryland. Established in 1791, St. Mary's is the oldest Roman Catholic seminary in the United States and, as far as we know, the only one in the world with an ecumenical division. It was founded by, and is still owned by, what is now called the Society of Priests of St. Sulpice, based in Paris. The Sulpicians are dedicated to theological education around the world, so it makes complete sense that the current book follows one that emerged from a context of global and ecumenical commitments. All contributors were chosen because of their own global and ecumenical concerns.

Some of the chapters in this book appeared also in the earlier volume. Those essays have all been revised and updated, with special attention to developments in their particular areas of study, especially new publications.

As we will see in the first chapter, one way to think of the Bible is as a library. Libraries are so vast and specialized that we would be foolish to think we could navigate one easily. That is why we often need the assistance of a librarian to locate quickly the information we are seeking. The contributors to this book are, in part, like librarians who have some significant familiarity with what you can discover in the Bible and in its varied interpretations over the centuries and across cultures. (For there is also a library of books—literal and figurative—*about* the Bible.) We do so, not as disinterested, neutral parties, but as committed interpreters of Scripture ourselves. Our goal is to help you find your own way, and to show you how others have found their way, through and in the pages of Scripture.

You may have many questions as you begin your study of the Bible, and we will provide answers to some of them. But, like spending time in any library, reading Scripture carefully will also raise questions you have not yet formulated. And like a good library, in fact like any good book, Scripture also invites all of us into a world that we could not imagine on our own. In addition, there are approaches to reading and interpreting the Bible that you have probably never heard of or considered. We hope to point you in the direction of some of these interesting questions, answers, and perspectives.

When all is said and done, we aim to help you discover the breadth and depth of Sacred Scripture by taking the time to read through its many books carefully and reflectively in the company of others—people from familiar surroundings as well as those from other centuries and locations.

A Note to the Reader

Boldfaced terms are words or phrases included in the glossary. Such terms are generally boldfaced the first time they appear in the book, and sometimes in later chapters as well. Students are advised to consult the glossary as necessary while they read.

Full publication information for works cited parenthetically or in footnotes is found in the bibliography at the end of each chapter.

PART 1

The Bible

In part 1 of this book, we orient you to the Bible as a whole, its geographical and historical contexts, and the contents of the two Testaments. We also introduce you to some important nonbiblical writings, the formation of the Bible (the canon of Scripture), and the transmission and translation of the Bible over the centuries.

In addition to this book, a good study Bible prepared by a team of scholars is a helpful resource. Some options for readers of English include the following:

Attridge, Harold W., ed. *The Harper Collins Study Bible*. Rev. ed. New York: HarperOne, 2006. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Berlin, Adele, and Mark Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. New Jewish Publication Society translation (NJPS) of the Hebrew Bible (Christian Old Testament).

Carson, D. A., ed. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. New International Version (NIV).

Green, Joel B., ed. *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2013. Common English Bible translation (CEB).

Harrelson, Walter, ed. *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Levine, Amy-Jill, and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Senior, Donald, John Collins, and Mary Ann Getty, eds. *The Catholic Study Bible*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. New American Bible translation (NAB).

Each chapter in this book concludes with a list of recommended reading for further study. Other general recommended resources for serious biblical study include the following.

One-Volume Resources

Freedman, David Noel, ed. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. A one-volume Bible dictionary with almost 5,000 contributions from more than 600 scholars.

Muddiman, John, and John Barton, eds. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. A one-volume collection of commentaries on all the biblical books.

Patte, Daniel, ed. *Global Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004. A one-volume commentary on both Testaments, with contributions from scholars around the world.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J., ed. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. Biblical, theological, and interpretive articles.

Multivolume Resources

Keck, Leander E., ed. *The New Interpreter's Bible*. 12 vols. plus an index volume. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004. General articles on various aspects of the Bible precede extensive commentaries for each biblical book that include theological reflection on every passage.

Sakenfeld, Katherine Doob, ed. *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009. In-depth articles on everything related to the Bible and biblical study.

Electronic Resources

Among the most sophisticated programs for biblical studies, the following generally come in various packages: Accordance, BibleWorks, Gramcord, and Logos.

1

The Bible: A Book, a Library, a Story, an Invitation

Paul P. Zilonka and Michael J. Gorman

The title of this book contains within it two ways of referring to its subject matter: **Scripture** and the **Bible**. The first, Scripture, sometimes used in the plural (the Scriptures), comes from the Latin for "writings" (*scriptura*); this in turn corresponds to a common way of referring to sacred writings in **Greek**: *hai graphai* (the writings). The second, Bible, comes from the Greek word for "book," *biblion*. What we are about to explore, then, is a book, or collection, of sacred writings. For this reason, people of faith sometimes call this book the Sacred Scriptures or the Holy Bible.

Although many people use the terms "Bible" and "Scripture" interchangeably, as we will here, the two terms can suggest different nuances of meaning. For instance, many religious traditions have sacred texts, or scriptures, but only Judaism and Christianity refer to their scriptures as "the Bible." Ironically, however, some people feel that the term "Bible" is more religiously neutral, and perhaps more academic, than the term "Scripture," with its connotation of holiness or divine inspiration. In fact, this situation is now so commonplace that some biblical scholars, including many contributors to this book, insist

Paul Zilonka wrote the original version of this chapter and, when faced with an illness that would soon take his life, asked the book's editor to update and expand it.

that when we interpret the Bible from the perspective of faith, even from an academic point of view, we are treating it as Scripture, as sacred text—not merely as ancient literature.

In this and the following chapters, we will attempt to look at the Bible, or Scripture, from both an academic perspective and a faith perspective. That is to say, we want to understand it, simultaneously, as both human book and sacred text.

Our investigation begins with a consideration of the Bible as both book and library, and then, more briefly, as both story and invitation.

The Bible as Book

As we have just explained, the English word "Bible" originated from the Greek term for book (*biblion*), which is derived in turn from the Greek words for the **papyrus** plant (*byblos*) and its inner bark (*biblos*). Egyptian craftsmen produced an ancient version of paper by matting together strips of this marshland plant. The dried sheets of papyrus were then glued together in rolls to become a **scroll**. Jeremiah, especially in its ancient Greek version (the **Septuagint**, abbreviated **LXX**), gives a colorful example of how the invention of these materials contributed greatly to the development of the Bible:

> In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Take a scroll [Greek *chartion bibliou*] and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today. (Jer. 36:1–2 [43:1–2 LXX])[1]

Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, refers to the process: "He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink on the scroll [Greek *en bibliō*]" (v. 18). Even though the angry king burned the document "until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire" (v. 23), Jeremiah dictated another with "all the words of the scroll that King Jehoiakim of Judah had burned in the fire, and many similar words were added to them" (v. 32). From this biblical passage, it is relatively easy to understand the transition from writing on *papyrus* (Greek *biblos*) to naming the finished product, a scroll or a *book* (Greek *biblion*).

1. Two notes for the reader: (1) When the word "**Lord**" appears in most translations of the **Old Testament** (**OT**) in small caps (LORD), it translates God's personal name, **YHWH**. (2) For a variety of reasons, the division of the OT into chapters and verses sometimes varies from the original Hebrew to the LXX.

Ordinarily, only one side of a papyrus scroll contained writing. (The heavenly visions in Ezekiel and Revelation specifically mention writing on both sides of the papyrus as a sign of an extraordinary, supernatural message: Ezek. 2:10; Rev. 5:1.) Scrolls were the ordinary instrument for preserving and reading the sacred texts in synagogues; locating a particular passage required some dexterity with large scrolls. The Gospel of Luke describes the scene in the Nazareth synagogue when "the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to [Jesus]. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .'" (4:16–17).

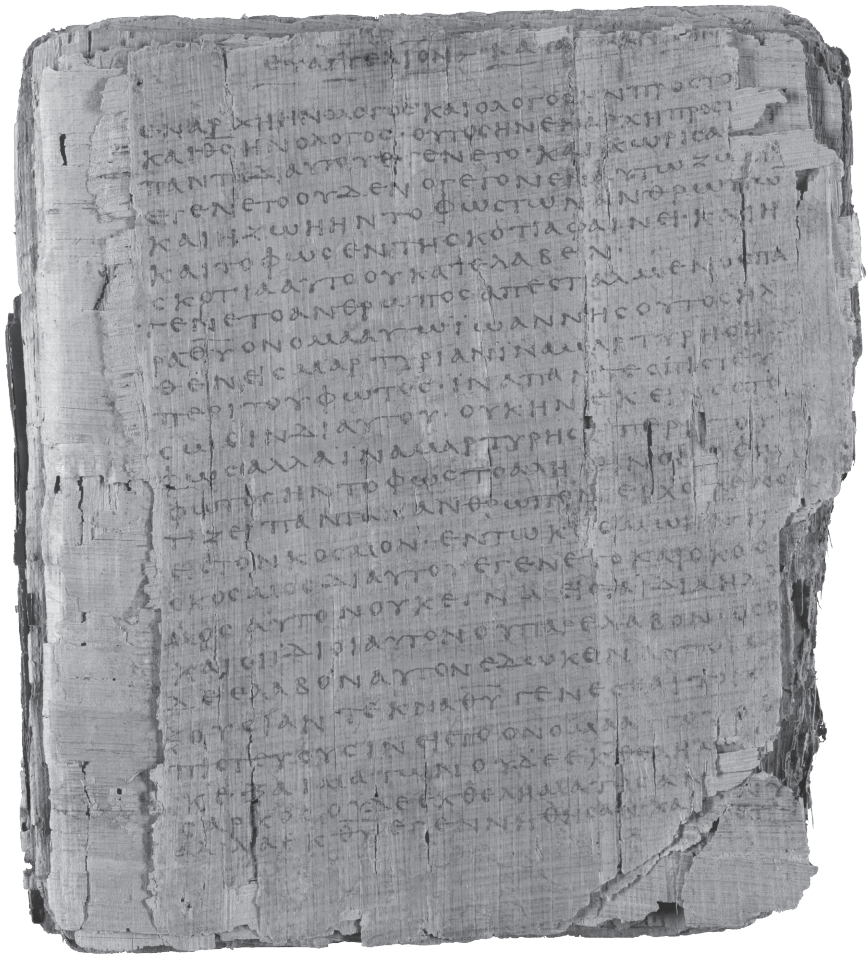
Papyrus was not the only material on which ancient writers inscribed texts. After animal skins were thoroughly cleaned, stretched, dried, and stitched together, they served the same purpose as the more costly papyrus, which grew only in certain lowland regions (e.g., Egypt, Galilee) and thus often had to be imported. The abundance of sheep and goats in Palestine provided a steady source of durable scrolls called **parchment** (Greek *membrana*). Scribes who produced the collection of Jewish manuscripts (from around the time of Jesus) that scholars today call the **Dead Sea Scrolls** (**DSS**) used these animal skins, which were durable enough to survive after more than 1,900 years in clay jars.

In Roman times, writing tablets with wax surfaces were framed and hinged together along one edge. Since the frames were made of wood (Latin *caudex*), the set of writing tablets was called a **codex**. This arrangement allowed for writing on both sides. Soon sheets of papyrus or parchment were sewn together at the spine. The result was the precursor of the modern book. By the second century **CE**,[2] the emerging books of the Christian **canon** (a collection of authoritative sacred texts) were inscribed in this kind of codex, while the Jewish community generally retained the scroll format. The practicality and economy of a portable document with writing on both sides were eminently suited to the rugged missionary lifestyle of Christian evangelists, and the codex helped Christians to think of their various sacred texts as constituting one book.

The Bible as One Book

Most people come to the reading of the Scriptures with some preconceptions about what they are. Since they are often described by one, singular title—"the Bible"—and since, like most other books, the Bible has a front and a back cover, it is understandable that so many people think of the Bible simply as

2. CE, the abbreviation for "**Common Era**" (i.e., the shared Christian and Jewish era), is an alternative to AD.



Martin Bodmer Foundation in Cologny (Geneva)

Figure 1.1. The first page of the Gospel of John from P^{66} (Papyrus Bodmer II), the earliest relatively complete manuscript of that Gospel, dating from ca. 200 CE.

one book. A quick glance at the titles in a Bible's table of contents might give the impression that it is one book with many chapters. Likewise, believers confidently speak of the whole Bible as the "Word of God." This familiar heartfelt expression of faith significantly reinforces the idea that God is the one author of everything contained in its unified pages. And to be sure, the Bible does tell one grand story of God's love for humankind, which theologians have tried to summarize in such biblical words as grace, salvation, the kingdom of God, or **covenant**. (We shall return to this story toward the end of the chapter.)

However, even after spending only a little time paging through the dozens of individual sections of the Bible, we discover great diversity in writing style and content, suggesting many different human authors and objectives. In addition, the dates implied in these texts range from the beginning of the world to what seems like its end in the not-too-distant future. This variety of historical epochs suggests long periods of use and reinterpretation of earlier documents.

Honestly recognizing the complexity of the Bible as a diverse collection prepares us to experience both why it is a treasure of great spiritual value and why it also requires careful study. In fact, the Bible attests to its own diversity.

The Bible as Many Books

The Bible clearly indicates that it contains other books within itself. Frequently, the Bible refers to the "book of the law of Moses" (2 Kings 14:6) or the "book of Moses" (Mark 12:26). Mention is also made of other specific documents, such as the "book of the words of the prophet Isaiah" (Luke 3:4; cf. 4:17), the "book of the prophets" (Acts 7:42), the book of "Hosea" (Rom. 9:25), and the "book of Psalms" (Acts 1:20).[3]

The Gospel of John also refers to itself as a "book" (John 20:30; Greek *biblion*). Likewise, the author of the Acts of the Apostles tightly knits that document to the story about Jesus that the same person had presented "in the first book" (or "account"; Greek *logon*)—namely, the Gospel according to Luke (Acts 1:1; cf. Luke 1:1–4).

This little journey of discovery alerts us to the truth that the Bible is not really just one book. In fact, we can speak quite appropriately of it as a library of books.

The Bible as Library

In a library, individual books are usually organized according to particular topics. There are sections for science, philosophy, religion, history, art, music,

3. The Bible also refers to other books that, though not included in the Bible itself, were apparently used as sources for the composition of some biblical texts. This phenomenon is mostly associated with descriptions of the deeds of the Israelite monarchy. For example, there is the "Book of the Acts of Solomon" (1 Kings 11:41), the "Books of the Annals of the Kings of Israel" (1 Kings 14:19), and the "Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah" (1 Kings 14:29). There is a similar phenomenon in the **New Testament** (**NT**). Luke 1:1–4 mentions more than one previous narrative of what Luke also intends to write as an "orderly account" (v. 3).

biography, fiction, and so on. An educated person has certain expectations about what information would be contained in the books grouped in these various sections of the library. Since library books are not generally organized by the dates they were written, two books by two authors who lived twenty centuries apart can stand side by side. For example, we might find a philosophical work by Plato (430–347 BCE) on the same shelf as a commentary on that work by a modern philosopher and published just last year. Despite the vast difference in time, both books focus on the same literature of Plato. We benefit greatly when we read both works together, even though they were written more than two millennia apart.

In the Bible, individual books containing material spanning many decades (in the case of the **New Testament**, abbreviated **NT**) or even many centuries (in the case of the **Old Testament**, abbreviated **OT**) are joined together in collections. For example, the first five books in the Jewish collection (the Christian Old Testament) are usually associated with Moses, whose story links four of them (all but Genesis) together, yet the books were not written at the same time. Other books from different periods are grouped together because of their association with the ministry of individual Hebrew prophets. A smaller group of writings from various centuries concerns itself with provocative topics of a general nature, such as the challenge of belief in a God of love and justice while believers live in a world where innocent people suffer and their oppressors prosper. The book of Psalms gathers together 150 hymns written over many centuries. **Gospels** attributed to four different Christian authors stand side by side, even though many factors, including date of composition, distinguish them from one another. The same is true of letters by various Christian missionaries. The profound religious relationship among all of these writings from various time periods is not always immediately evident.

The diversity in the Bible with respect not only to date but also to literary **genre** (type) is thus quite remarkable. As the previous paragraph suggests, the Bible contains historical works, prophetic books, quasi-philosophical writings, hymns, biographies (the Gospels),[4] and letters. There are also legal documents, short stories, collections of proverbs, sermons, records of visions, and other kinds of literature. Within each of these kinds of books, we find numerous additional literary forms, such as the well-known parables.

Having all the books of the Bible gathered together between two covers of one book makes them all available to us at the same time. Even though they have much in common with one another, we should never forget that

4. In some respects the Gospels may be understood as ancient, though not modern, biographies. See further discussion in ch. 4.

each book has its own history of development and its own unique perspective. Despite some strong literary ties among them, most of the books in the Bible are quite independent of one another, just like the books in any other kind of library.

In Search of a Name

What's in a name? We are all sensitive to people who misspell or mispronounce our personal names. Thus, people of Jewish and Christian faith who cherish these collections of religious books are justifiably sensitive to the names other people use to designate their sacred writings. For example, **Jews** organize their twenty-four books (thirty-nine as counted in the Christian Bible) into three collections that they call **Torah** (tradition/instruction/law), **Nevi'im** (prophets), and **Ketuvim** (writings). Together, this library of Jewish sacred texts is often called TaNaK, or **Tanak**, which is an acronym formed from the initial **Hebrew** letter of each collection—the equivalent of the English letters T, N, and K.[5] Jews may also call this collection simply "the Bible" or "the Scriptures." Christians usually refer to it as "the Old Testament" or "the Christian Old Testament" (see further discussion below). Some Christians and biblical scholars who prefer a more neutral or nuanced term than "Old Testament" designate these same documents as the Scriptures of Israel or the **Hebrew Bible** (abbreviated **HB**), since most of the collection was originally written in Hebrew, though there are several portions in **Aramaic**, the **lingua franca** of the Persian Empire and the language that gradually replaced spoken Hebrew after the **Babylonian exile** (586–539 **BCE**).[6]

The cessation of Hebrew as a spoken language and the rise of the empire under Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE)—which spread Greek culture, religion, and language—threatened the religious and cultural heritage of Jews scattered around the Mediterranean and further East.[7] Under these circumstances, Jews had to find a way to preserve their sacred texts for a new cultural and linguistic reality.

5. Alternate transliterations for the second and third divisions are Nebi'im and Ketubim, Kethuvim, or Kethubim; for the whole, Tanakh.

6. Dan. 2:4b–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; Jer. 10:11. BCE means "before the Common Era," a scholarly alternative to "BC," meaning "before Christ," and used in conjunction with CE.

7. While we today take for granted that the Bible should be translated into every language of the earth so that its message might be accessible to all, this was a new idea two millennia ago. Indeed, even today the Qur'an in its original Arabic is the sole norm for Muslim worship and scriptural study, no matter what the nationality or ethnic background of those who embrace Islam. Only recently has the Roman Catholic Church authorized its worship in vernacular languages after Latin prevailed generally for 1,500 years in the Latin Rite churches.

The Septuagint

About 250 BCE, Greek-speaking Jewish inhabitants of Alexandria in Egypt took the bold step of translating their Hebrew scriptures into Greek. The Letter of Aristeas (written around 120 BCE)[8] offers a defense for the evolution of the Greek translation that came to be known as the Septuagint (a Latin expression for "seventy"). This name and its customary abbreviation, LXX (the Roman numerals for 70), stem from the sacred legend, recorded in the Letter of Aristeas, that seventy Jewish scholars produced the translation independently of one another under the inspiration of God and without any error or confusion. Although scholars today provide a more nuanced theory for the growth of the Septuagint as a long-term process, the existence of this Greek translation facilitated the popular acceptance of other inspirational Jewish books written in Greek rather than in Hebrew. These include the Wisdom of Solomon, Judith, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, 1–2 Maccabees, and some short Greek additions to Esther and Daniel. (Today these books are included in some Christian Bibles, but not in the Jewish Bible; see the tables in figs. 1.2–5 below and the discussion in chs. 3 and 6.) In addition to what we call the Septuagint, other translations of the OT into Greek were made.

Jesus read from the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue of Nazareth, but soon after his death and resurrection disciples like Paul of Tarsus evangelized Jews, converts to Judaism (proselytes), and non-Jews in many Greek-speaking cities of the Mediterranean world. The Christian church was born with a Bible in its cradle—namely, the Greek Septuagint. The twenty-seven Christian documents that came out of that period of growth of the early church are treasured today as the New Testament. They were originally written in Greek, and when those documents quote from the Jewish Scriptures, they clearly demonstrate a preference for the LXX version, the wording of which sometimes differs from the original Hebrew text.

Old Testament, New Testament

The Christian Bible has two divisions, or **Testaments**. As noted above, Christian tradition designates the books of the Tanak with the term "Old Testament" in light of the customary name of its own collection of twenty-seven documents: the "New Testament," from a Latin word, *testamentum*, that can mean "covenant."[9] The literary and theological relationship between

8. This second-century BCE Jewish document is considered to be one of the OT **Pseudepigrapha** (see ch. 5).

9. Henceforth in this book, Old Testament and New Testament are often abbreviated OT and NT.

the Jewish and Christian collections—the two parts of the Christian Bible—explains both the origin and the significance of these related titles.

"Covenant" (Hebrew *berît*; Greek *diathēkē*) is one of the most significant concepts in the experience of Jewish and Christian faith. This important term links together the salvation stories associated with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. Indeed, the collections of Jewish and Christian writings arose over centuries as the respective communities described, commented upon, and propagated the realities of successive covenants. When Jeremiah 31:31 speaks of God establishing a "new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah," the foundation was laid in the minds of later generations for some new revelation that would add to what was not yet present in the former experiences of covenant. Thus, the Christian writings characteristically refer to the "Scripture(s)" (Tanak) as being "fulfilled"—that is, brought to completion in some new way by Jesus or by a person or event in Christian experience (e.g., John 19:24, 36; cf. Luke 24:27, 44–45).

As if to echo the words of Jeremiah, in the Gospel tradition Jesus explicitly refers to the "new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; cf. 1 Cor. 11:25). Paul speaks of old and new covenants (2 Cor. 3:6, 14). Even more explicitly alluding to Jeremiah 31:31, the Letter to the Hebrews contrasts the former covenant with Israel with the Christian experience of Jesus as mediator of a "better" (7:22; 8:6), and "new" (9:15) covenant.

So as to address a perceived disparaging tone in the comparison of "old" and "new" covenants, various scholars, as well as some lay Christians concerned about Jewish-Christian relations, have suggested more neutral terms such as Two Testaments, though this still involves speaking of the **First Testament** and the **Second Testament**. In reality, the Christian Bible shares the Tanak (the first of the two Christian Testaments) with the continuing religious community of Judaism today. For Christians, then, the Scriptures of Israel are also Christian Scripture. (It is therefore erroneous, factually and theologically, to refer to the NT alone as "the Christian Scriptures.") Even Augustine's assertion, centuries ago, that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old is made manifest in the New, supports this shared understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures. One Christian scholar, Philip Cunningham, suggests rewording Augustine's formula in this way: "In the Shared Testament, the **rabbinic** texts and the Christian Testament find their perpetual foundations; in the Christian Testament, the Shared Testament is intensely read anew in Christ" (*Sharing the Scriptures*, 18).

Perhaps sensitivity is best exercised by taking into account the religious context of discussion. Differing Jewish and Christian titles such as Tanak, Old Testament, and New Testament make eminent sense within their respective faith communities. These terms do have a biblical basis for their origin and

usage. The use of these tradition-specific terms, even in scholarly discussion, acknowledges how the diverse faith groups have traditionally thought of their own documents. In this book we will use terms such as "New Testament" and "the writings of the New Covenant" interchangeably, as we will also do with terms such as "the Old Testament," "the Hebrew Bible," and "the Scriptures of Israel."

Canons

A collection of sacred texts forms a standard or norm for a particular religious community. The Jewish and Christian communities use the term "canon" (Greek *kanōn*) for their respective official lists of individual books they consider inspired and sacred. The root meaning of this term is "measuring stick"; hence, the canon is the standard, or norm, that guides a tradition's belief and behavior. (Though a *canon* of biblical books is quite different from a cannon used in military combat, biblical canons have led to a lot of heated debate over the centuries.) Chapter 6 of this book considers the formation of the biblical canons.

Figure 1.2. The Jewish Scriptures / Tanak (24 Books)

Torah (Instruction)	**Nevi'im (Prophets)**	**Ketuvim (Writings)**
Genesis	**Former**	Psalms
Exodus	Joshua	Proverbs
Leviticus	Judges	Job
Numbers	Samuel	Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)
Deuteronomy	Kings	Ruth
	Latter	Lamentations
	Isaiah	Ecclesiastes
	Jeremiah	Esther
	Ezekiel	Daniel
	The Book of the Twelve*	Ezra–Nehemiah
	Hosea	Chronicles
	Joel	
	Amos	
	Obadiah	
	Jonah	
	Micah	
	Nahum	
	Habakkuk	
	Zephaniah	
	Haggai	
	Zechariah	
	Malachi	

* The Book of the Twelve is considered one book.

Figure 1.3. The Protestant Old Testament (= the Jewish Bible counted as 39 books)

Pentateuch	Historical and Poetic Books	Prophetic Books
Genesis	Joshua	Isaiah
Exodus	Judges	Jeremiah
Leviticus	Ruth	Lamentations
Numbers	1–2 Samuel	Ezekiel
Deuteronomy	1–2 Kings	Daniel
	1–2 Chronicles	Hosea
	Ezra	Joel
	Nehemiah	Amos
	Esther	Obadiah
	Job	Jonah
	Psalms	Micah
	Proverbs	Nahum
	Ecclesiastes	Habakkuk
	Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)	Zephaniah
		Haggai
		Zechariah
		Malachi

Since at least the rabbinic era, Jewish practice includes twenty-four books in the Tanak, while Christian practice since the late fourth century includes twenty-seven books in the NT.[10] But Christian Bibles contain different numbers of books in their OTs. Students who come to the Bible for the first time often ask why the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Bibles do not agree on the number of books in the OT. A glance at the various canons in the lists provided in the tables in figures 1.2–5 clarifies the matter. While the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church follow the (longer) Septuagint list as the basis for their OT, churches that follow the Protestant reformations of the sixteenth century have opted to use the (shorter) Hebrew canon as the basis for their translations. They designate the additional Septuagint books written in Greek as the **Apocrypha**, from the Greek word for "concealed" or "hidden." Catholics acknowledge the inspired status of these books but designate them as **deuterocanonical** (secondarily canonized) books because they were not originally included in Jerome's Latin **Vulgate** translation of OT books that had been the official Bible of the church from the fourth to the sixteenth centuries. Many **ecumenical** editions of the Christian Bible contain the apocryphal/deuterocanonical books in recognition of their canonical status for Catholic and Orthodox Christians, and in order that others may consult

10. There are minor exceptions. A small part of the Syrian Orthodox tradition (the Nestorian Church) has never accepted the books of 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude, and Revelation, and the Ethiopic Church's broader NT canon has 35 books (compared to the narrower 27-book canon).

Figure 1.4. The Roman Catholic Old Testament (the Jewish Bible [plus minor additions] + 7 deuterocanonical books [in italics] = 46 books)

Pentateuch	Historical and Wisdom Books	Prophetic Books
Genesis	Joshua	Isaiah
Exodus	Judges	Jeremiah
Leviticus	Ruth	Lamentations
Numbers	1–2 Samuel	*Baruch* (incl. *Letter of Jeremiah*)
Deuteronomy	1–2 Kings	Ezekiel
	1–2 Chronicles	Daniel*
	Ezra	Hosea
	Nehemiah	Joel
	Tobit	Amos
	Judith	Obadiah
	Esther (incl. the six additions)	Jonah
	1–2 Maccabees	Micah
	Job	Nahum
	Psalms	Habakkuk
	Proverbs	Zephaniah
	Ecclesiastes	Haggai
	Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)	Zechariah
	Wisdom of Solomon	Malachi
	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)	

* Including the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon.

and study them. Figures 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5 exhibit the various canons of the Jewish Scriptures / Tanak / Christian OT.

Names and Contents of Books

While most traditional names or titles of biblical books may offer some limited information about the contents of the book, many do not. The names arose in various ways.

Sometimes the titles of individual books of the Bible come from the first word of the book. For instance, the name of the first book in the Tanak is *Bereshit*, from the first word in Hebrew (meaning "In the beginning" or "When [God] began"). Christians usually refer to this same book with the Septuagint title "Genesis," which is not a translation of *Bereshit* but a reference to the initial story of the "*generations* of the heavens and earth when they were created" (Gen. 2:4, emphasis added). The last book in the NT begins with the Greek word *apokalypsis*, giving rise to the naming of the book as **Apocalypse** when transliterated, or as "Revelation" when translated into English.

Figure 1.5. The Orthodox Old Testament
(= the Jewish Bible in the LXX + ca. 10 additional LXX books [in italics])

Historical Books	Poetic and Didactic Books	Prophetic Books
Genesis	Psalms (incl. Ps. 151)	Hosea
Exodus	Job	Amos
Leviticus	Proverbs	Micah
Numbers	Ecclesiastes	Joel
Deuteronomy	Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)	Obadiah
Joshua	*Wisdom of Solomon*	Jonah
Judges	*(Wisdom of) Sirach*	Nahum
Ruth		Habakkuk
1–2 Kingdoms (1–2 Samuel)		Zephaniah
		Haggai
3–4 Kingdoms (1–2 Kings)		Zechariah
		Malachi
1–2 Chronicles		Isaiah
1 Esdras		Jeremiah
2 Esdras (Ezra, sometimes also Nehemiah)		*Baruch*
		Lamentations
Nehemiah		*Letter of Jeremiah*
Tobit		Ezekiel
Judith		Daniel*
Esther (with the six additions)		
1–3 Maccabees		Also:
		4 Maccabees, in an appendix
		Prayer of Manasseh, in an appendix
		3 Esdras in Slavonic Bibles of Russian Orthodox Church, in an appendix

* Including the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon.

At other times, the title of a biblical book designates a collection of similar items, such as the book titled Psalms, which contains 150 examples of the same basic type of literature. While there is a variety of psalms (e.g., praise, lament, thanksgiving), they all follow the general format of a hymn written in poetic **parallelism**, or "thought rhyme."

Often the name of a biblical book bears relation to the principal character in the book, such as Hosea or Amos, or to the traditional author of the work, such as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. However, a name does not immediately settle the question of authorship or of content. Names can be misleading in a number of ways. For instance, the Acts of the Apostles is not really about the twelve apostles. Rather, it focuses principally on Peter, one of the original Twelve, and Paul, the apostle to the **gentiles**, who was not part of the original group of Twelve with Jesus.

The content of individual books ranges from the words and ministry of individual prophets, such as Jeremiah, to the grand panorama of Israelite history

sketched in 1–2 Kings. The apostolic letters attributed to Paul, James, Peter, and John give insight into the early decades of the Christian community. On the other hand, Ecclesiastes deals with issues of good and evil that transcend any particular century of human history and even the limited boundaries of specific religious groups.

It is obvious that a book's title is not always the key to understanding the full scope of what may lie between its covers. For instance, the Song of Songs does not discuss music, nor is it a hymn (though it may have been composed from the lyrics of some local wedding songs). Rather, the repetition of the word "song" in the title expresses the superlative degree in Hebrew. A more accurate translation of the title would be "The Greatest Song."

The titles of groups of biblical books may also be somewhat misleading. For example, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible are grouped under the Hebrew term *torah*, which may be best translated as "tradition" or "instruction." In Christian writings, under the influence of the LXX translation of *torah* into Greek as *nomos* (law), this same group of books is referred to as "law" or "the Law." We would expect a modern library with a section devoted to "law" to be stocked with materials on legal matters for the sake of lawyers, judges, and other interested persons. While at least four of the five books of the Torah do contain some laws, much more is present there, making it inaccurate to think of those books as if they were simply legal codes. Rather, the Torah begins by reflecting on the origins of the earth and the human family before extolling the family traditions of Israel's ancestors, all bearing witness to the main character, God.

Finally, a word about the section subheadings that appear in many Bibles within the text itself. Apart from the brief letter that Paul the apostle wrote to Philemon, and some of the other letters in the NT, most books in the Bible today cover many pages in length. We are accustomed to using the editorial headings that divide each book into smaller, more manageable portions to help us follow the development of the story, or to call our attention to significant topics, such as "The Ten Commandments" or "The Baptism of Jesus." However, these headings are not part of the biblical text, and it is important to realize that these good efforts to help readers may reflect modern concerns or the perceptions of translators and editors more than the intentions of the original authors.

Chapters and Verses

When we write a letter to a friend, we do not usually group the paragraphs into chapters. Nor do we number the sentences as verses. If we did so, people

might think us a bit pretentious or odd. But that is precisely what we find when we open our Bible to read Paul's letters to the Romans or Galatians. Paul would most certainly have considered that behavior as unusual as we do today. He wrote in a straightforward fashion with passion and powerful rhetorical skill. But hundreds of years later, practically every sentence of his letters, and the rest of the Bible, had become so important in church debates that it became convenient to number them in order to keep straight which verse the debaters were talking about.

Historical Development

Divisions in biblical manuscripts had a rich history even before the rise of the current system that has held sway for the past five hundred years. Early Jewish and Christian religious leaders and scholars divided the books of the Bible into sections according to various methods. Our modern system of chapter divisions dates back to the Middle Ages with Stephen Langton (d. 1228), a lecturer at the University of Paris working with the Latin Bible, or Vulgate. His system was diffused more widely through a **concordance** (alphabetical index) to the Latin Vulgate that was produced by Cardinal Hugo of St. Cher (d. 1263). Gradually the same system was used with Bibles in other languages.

But it would be another two hundred years before the further subdivision of the text into verses started appearing in various ways. In 1440, Rabbi Isaac Nathan numbered verses in the Hebrew Bible for his Hebrew concordance. However, Robert Stephanus (Estienne) was the first person to issue the whole Bible (including the Apocrypha) with the current system of verses in his edition of the Latin Vulgate at Geneva in 1555. (In scholarly usage, verses may be further subdivided by the use of lowercase letters, such as Rom. 5:1a and 5:1b, the first and the second part of Rom. 5:1, respectively.)

The use of punctuation to separate chapters and verses in biblical references has varied over time and still varies around the world. The standard form in the United States (used in this book) is to divide chapter and verse by means of a colon (e.g., Gen. 1:1, referring to the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis [Gen. 1]), though occasionally a period is used (e.g., Gen. 1.1). The period, rather than the colon, is standard in British English, in European usage, and thus in most of the rest of the world. It is a universal practice to indicate a continuous passage (set of verses) with a hyphen or dash (e.g., Gen. 1:1–3, referring to the first three verses of Gen. 1). It is customary to separate a list of noncontinuous verses with commas (e.g., Gen. 1:1, 3, 5, referring to verses 1, 3, and 5 of Gen. 1), while lists of verses from different

chapters of the same biblical book are generally separated by semicolons (e.g., Gen. 1:1; 2:1; 3:1).[11]

Modern Uses and Cautions

Some people familiar with the Bible can quote chapter and verse. This is an advantage for locating a familiar or beloved text quickly, such as Psalm 23, which begins, "The Lord is my shepherd." In the case of a psalm, dividing a short section of Scripture into verses is not a great problem because a psalm is generally a short unit unto itself with a clear beginning and ending. The parallelism, or "thought rhyme," characteristic of Hebrew poetry often quite naturally divides the thoughts from one another. But when a letter of Paul with a complicated theological discussion (such as Rom. 9–11 or 1 Cor. 12–14) is chopped into chapters and verses, the modern divisions often do not respect Paul's original line of thought. (See, for example, 1 Cor. 11:1, which is actually the conclusion to chs. 8–10!) Such inappropriate divisions of the text may significantly interfere with our correct comprehension and interpretation of a biblical text.

The medieval chapter divisions occasionally correspond appropriately to movement within the biblical text, such as Matthew 5:1, when Jesus goes up the mountain to teach. But the subsequent division of this "Sermon on the Mount" into chapters two more times (as Matt. 6 and 7) makes it clear that the traditional system is primarily of utilitarian value and should not dissuade us from searching out the more intrinsic points of division within each biblical document in the course of our study.

Modern attention to the narrative and rhetorical quality of biblical documents enhances our appreciation of the literary skill of the original authors. The study of the narrative character of biblical documents gives attention to the natural progression of the story line in the document and may clearly indicate divisions in the text that do not coincide with traditional chapter and verse divisions. Modern commentators emphasize literary elements within the text, such as movement from place to place, repetition of the same idea at a later time, and shifts in content and tone. Consequently, outlines in modern commentaries (and even in study Bibles) regularly disagree with traditional chapter and verse divisions.[12]

11. There is also a variety of abbreviations for the biblical books; one set of scholarly standards is provided in the front of this book.

12. Readers who can access an electronic version of the Bible (such as via BibleGateway.com) may test their own ability in analyzing the structure of biblical texts. They can print out a few chapters of Exodus or Romans or Matthew, deleting the customary chapter and verse numbers, then try to discover the inner dynamic of the biblical passages without the distraction of later

The Bible as Story

We have already noted that although the Bible consists of many books that constitute a library, there is still a grand narrative to the Bible as a single book. Some have described the Bible's dramatic narrative in terms of "acts," as in a play. One popular version of this, building on the suggestion of N. T. Wright (*Scripture and the Authority of God* and elsewhere), is to see the drama's acts in terms of creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, church, and consummation (new creation). While there is a natural appeal and validity to this construal of the Bible's story from a Christian perspective, it has a potential weakness: it may cause us to underestimate the importance of Israel's story—something Wright himself vigorously decries. That story occupies about three-fourths of the biblical text, and it includes major events such as the exodus, kingship, **exile**, and restoration (see ch. 3) that should not be neglected. Furthermore, a grand-narrative perspective may cause us to overlook the twists and turns in the biblical accounts. Richard Bauckham therefore urges us to see the Bible as a "plurality of *narratives*," all of which together constitute a "single coherent *story*," but none of which tells the whole story ("Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," 6; emphasis added).

The scriptural story, as Bauckham also points out, has a variety of significant and sometimes surprising themes—such as God's repeated choice of the powerless. Perhaps one motif that is especially significant to notice is indicated by the Bible's "bookends" of Genesis and Revelation: the story of creation (Gen. 1–3) to new creation (Rev. 21–22). Theologically speaking, this grand story from the first to the last pages of the Bible is sometimes referred to as testimony to the "mission of God," or, using the Latin phrase, the ***missio Dei***. Certain prophets and apostles bore witness to this hope of a new creation (e.g., Isa. 65:17–25; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; 2 Pet. 3:13). Although the phrase "from creation to new creation" does not tell the entire biblical story, it does say something significant about the movement of the biblical drama as a whole, and about the hope of salvation for humanity—and for the entire cosmos—to which Scripture bears testimony for both Jews and Christians.

At the end of the day, however, even naming the important theme of creation and new creation does not tell the whole of the biblical story. Why? Because the words "creation" and "new creation" assume a creator—a creative person—and a *re*-creator, a redeemer. Indeed, the Bible is first of all, and last of all, a book about God (see, e.g., Feldmeier and Spieckermann, *God of the*

editorial divisions. This experiment often gives new insight into familiar passages, as well as others that are less widely known.

Living; Goldingay, *Biblical Theology*). Surprisingly, perhaps, it is sometimes easy for people to forget that truth as they study the Bible.

The Bible as Invitation

As we have hinted in this chapter and will see in more depth in later chapters, the Bible is a varied and complex library/book, and its interpretation has been, and remains, equally and appropriately varied and complex. At the same time, the contributors to this volume also find the Bible to be an *inviting* book, even though it is at times strange (which can actually be a good thing) and sometimes confusing. In fact, we might picture the Bible as an invitation into a journey with others and—from the perspective of faith—with the God to whom the biblical texts bear witness. According to Scripture itself and both the Jewish and Christian traditions, this journey is also a journey with, and even into, the Reality—the Person—to whom it testifies. "Give me life, O Lord, according to your Word," writes the psalmist (Ps. 119:107), and "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope" (Ps. 130:5). In the words of Jesus according to the Gospel of John, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). These affirmations of relationship and assistance are ultimately grounded, theologically, in the conviction that God has spoken in, and continues to speak through, this library/book: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). This conviction does not rule out the need for careful, diligent study, but such effort may be exercised in confidence that there is help to be found in the community of fellow interpreters and, ultimately, in God.[13]

Because of this divine inspiration and assistance in interpretation, we might even think of the Bible more specifically as an invitation to a surprise party—a party at which *we* are the ones surprised: surprised by what we find in its pages, surprised by what others have found and how they have understood those findings, and even surprised at what happens to us as we read the Bible in the company of others, whether living or dead, whether like us or very different from us. We suspect (and, frankly, hope) that many readers of this book will be transformed in very interesting ways as they read both it and the Bible itself.

13. The technical term for careful historical, literary, and theological engagement with Scripture is **exegesis**; the technical term for interpretation more generally is **hermeneutics**.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What were some of the new facts about, and perspectives on, the Bible that you encountered in this chapter?
2. Do you think it is important to be aware of the various biblical canons and of the issues involved in the name(s) we give to the Bible and its two main divisions? Why or why not?
3. Do you think it is important to think of the Bible as both a single book with a grand story and a library that includes various types of literature and diverse contents? Why or why not?
4. What, in your mind, is the relationship between a faith perspective and serious academic study of Scripture?

FOR FURTHER READING AND STUDY

Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*. Nottingham, Eng.: Inter-Varsity, 2008. An account of the Bible's story of creation to new creation, beginning with Revelation.

Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. A biblical scholar and a missiologist recount the biblical drama in six acts, focusing on the theme of God's kingship.

Bauckham, Richard. "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story." In *The Bible in the Contemporary World: Hermeneutical Ventures*, 1–16. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. How the plurality of biblical narratives yields a single coherent story.

Brown, Michael Joseph. *What They Don't Tell You: A Survivor's Guide to Biblical Studies*. 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015. Popular introduction to the academic approach to Scripture and to the integration of that approach with the Christian faith by means of twenty-nine rules of thumb.

Brown, William P., ed. *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007. Biblical scholars from various religious traditions and ethnicities reflect on the significance of the Bible for them.

Childs, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*. 1992. Reprint, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. Classic canonical study of the discrete witness of each Testament and the major theological themes of the Bible as a whole.

Cunningham, Philip. *Sharing the Scriptures*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003. A booklet on the role of the Bible in Jewish-Catholic relations.

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NT scholar and an OT scholar collaborate to represent the character and activity of God throughout the Bible.

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Metzger, Bruce, and Michael Coogan, eds. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Useful, encyclopedia-like, one-volume reference work with articles on such topics as books and bookmaking in antiquity, chapter and verse divisions, the canon, covenant, and much more.

Rogerson, J. [John] W. *An Introduction to the Bible*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2014. Survey of the history and composition of the OT and NT books, including contemporary issues of the Bible's relationship to matters such as science, the life of Jesus, and fundamentalism.

———, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Beautifully crafted history of the composition and interpretation of the Bible.

Sumney, Jerry L. *The Bible: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. Basic text, nicely illustrated, about how we received the Bible and about the form and contents of the various books.

Wright, N. T. *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011. A guide to reading the Bible as Scripture, including its dramatic character divisible into acts, by a leading biblical scholar.