



Faith Confirmed 2024

The Bible – a powerful book



The Christian faith is not a human invention. There are signs of God's existence and handiwork in creation for anyone to read (Acts 14.15–17). But we believe in the way we do because God has come to seek us out and has made himself known to us. The Bible is a central source of authority for all Christians and reveals many important teachings.

We often turn to the Bible to seek guidance and understand the history of their faith. The Bible is a collection of books. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament.

A stupendous claim

There is little doubt that the Bible teaches about its own inspiration. These words originally written by a variety of human writers over many years is considered by Christians to be God's Word. This doesn't mean it has been dictated or is read literally (interpretation is a complicated matter on which not everyone agrees) but the bible is a faithful record of the Spirit working in countless lives lived in relationship with God. It reflects God's inspiration then, in its time and context, and has meaning for us today also. This is different to the general inspiration expressed in the creative arts and literature. In the bible, often called scripture, grace is given for everyone, that God's image can be recognised in all people, but that only one man, Jesus Christ, displays the divine likeness without distortion.

God as Creator and father has revealed himself through the Bible. God has revealed himself most clearly through the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. God makes himself known personally to each believer through the work of the Holy Spirit, the life-giver.

'Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.'

(Hebrews 1.1–3)

What is the Bible?

The Bible (from Koine Greek τὰ βιβλία, τὰ biblíā, "the books") is a canonical collection of texts written over hundreds of years by many different people who lived in the Middle East, Africa and Southern Europe around the Mediterranean Sea. It tells the story of God, and his relationships with people over several thousand years. Many Christians consider the whole authorised text of the Bible to be divinely inspired. The oldest surviving complete Christian Bibles are Greek manuscripts from the 4th century.

At St James' Church, Weybridge we revere the Bible as the source of our Christian knowledge but believe it is to be interpreted in the light of tradition and reason.

Why is the Bible special?

- ❖ The Bible is the world's number one best-seller each year.
- ❖ The Bible comprises 66 separate "books" covering a range of genres including history, law, poetry, worship, prophecy and letters. It has been translated into more languages than any other work in history.
- ❖ Millions of Christians the world over come to the Bible each week or each day in church services, in small groups and on their own study.
- ❖ The Bible's teachings about God and humanity lie at the root of our entire civilization and form the basis of many laws in western culture.

- ❖ Christians believe that, through the bible, God has spoken to us in a unique way, and, through this book, he still speaks to us today.
- ❖ Christians often refer to texts from the bible as 'scripture' or 'God's Word.'

What does the Bible say about itself?

'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.' (2 Timothy 3.16)

'Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law, they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.' (Psalm 1.1-3)

'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' (Psalm 119.105)

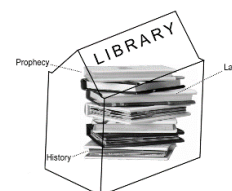
'Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' (Ephesians 6.17)



Testament, Covenant and Relationship

For Christians the Bible is very significant because it tells us the truth about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe that God caused the Bible to be written for our learning, although it was not always written down. For many hundreds of years, stories, like those of creation, would have been passed on orally from one generation to the next, as part of the heritage of that group. Over time those accounts were engraved upon stone tablets and later scrolls made from skin. It was a very long time before the books of the Bible were arranged as we have them today – which included a process of redaction and editing. During Hebrew history some Old Testament books were compiled, bringing together different traditions. We see this is evident in the book of Genesis, where different writing traditions refer to God in different ways, such as God, The Lord (God) and Yahweh.

The collections of books that make up the Bible reflect the lives of different people at different periods in their developing history and culture. They are arranged into two distinct sections. The Old Testament has 39 books, (The Apocrypha – an additional collection of 10 books – this is found in the NRSV we use) and the New Testament. The words Testament and Covenant mean the same thing, they are all about relationship. The old 'relationship' with God as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures was originally the story of the Jewish people and their nation. But the new relationship, the New Testament is for all people, when God became human, born among us, named Jesus or 'Emmanuel' – God is with us. The Bible is a faith Library.



Reading the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a library of books written and collected, with origins well over 2,000 years which is more than twice as long as a church building has been in Weybridge, or more than twice the amount of time since the Norman Conquest in 1066!

Many of the books were collected and added to gradually over this period. The Old Testament is written in Hebrew (with a little Aramaic). It tells the story of the nation of Israel and God's relationship the people, which is not always easy! The different sorts of books in the library need to be read in different ways. Context matters for each text because of the different cultures and circumstances of the times. You will find the following forms of writing are contained in the Old Testament library including **Law**, **History**, **Prophecy**, **Poetry/Songs**, **Wisdom**.

Reading the New Testament

The New Testament is a library, like the Old Testament – but with not as many sorts of books. It was written in Greek and was composed within 60 – 120 years of Jesus' death and resurrection. The New Testament was written by Jesus' disciples and by the first generation of Christians who followed. The New Testament tells the story of Jesus and the early Church. The books in the New Testament library are:



- ❖ Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John)
- ❖ Acts (by the same author as Luke's Gospel)
- ❖ Epistles/Letters to the early Churches by Paul, Peter and others
- ❖ Revelation.

How to read the Bible

Read the Bible in a form you can understand and try to use a modern version, e.g., the NRSV, or if you are very familiar with the text, it can be refreshing to try a paraphrase like the Message. Don't try to read from start to finish, Genesis to Revelation, for that can be too much to take in or comprehend in one go and would take a very long time! But likewise, try and avoid using the Bible like a lucky dip, when again it is easy to read a passage or a verse out of context. Try to listen to what God is saying to you as you read the Bible.

Different ways of reading the Bible

Often Christians use Bible reading notes which offer a reflection on the meaning of the verses you read, a few questions to ponder and a prayer. Collections of reading notes for the season are available from Christian bookshops or online. Alternatively, read a book of the Bible at a time and use a concordance or other text to help you understand the meaning for background. (Tom Wright 'For Everyone' has produced an excellent series of Bible commentaries that are worth working through as he unpacks the texts of scripture). As the different books of the bible were written for different purposes, it's worth remembering that as a starting point and for how you approach the text. For example, Mark can be read in one go, and only takes about two hours. This can be very impactful and give you an overall sense of the whole narrative of the gospel. Afterwards you might want to break it down into chunks for deeper reflection. The epistles can often be read in this way too.

Another different approach to reading the bible is 'Lectio Divina'. This method uses prayerful imagination and encounter with the text. Start by selecting a passage, usually from the gospels, and read it through slowly. As you do so, use your imagination and think yourself into a passage. Where are you in the story? Are you one of the characters, or watching from the sides? Are you close to the action, or wondering whether to join in? How do you feel? This style of reading encourages you to use all your senses: visual, auditory, smell, taste and touch. Emerge yourself in the very moment. Re-read the passage three or four times, slowly, with a pause between readings. Towards the end as you come to prayer, in the story imagine Christ now addressing you. As you open yourself in prayer, what does he say? How does he say it? How do you feel? How do you respond? Don't rush and allow the Spirit to guide you.

Alternatively, scripture can be used meditatively. You may like to meditate on a single verse, phrase, or short passage. Avoid taking each verse out of the context of the wider narrative, so be conscious of where it comes from. As you gently repeat the phrase, or re-read the short passage, allow yourself to be emerged in the heart of those particular words.

Everyday Faith & reading the bible at home

<https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-life/everyday-faith>

Everyday Faith is about where and how we encounter God as we go about our lives. We begin by asking, where is God during our daily lives? How do we find God in the fullness of everyday life? As Christians with a living faith, it is important to make time for prayer and bible study as we seek to learn from God's Word to us.

Faith is about us connecting with the God who holds all things together, as well as being connected to others. So, faith is found in our joys and cares, in our challenges and conflicts as we lean into God's presence and guidance. The bible is the right place to start in learning anew just how much God loves each one of us, all the time. Faith informs our thinking and our actions as we discern how God might be using us in his work, how God has gifted us, and how Jesus calls us to live out our faith in our daily living. Faith is an ongoing encounter with God. Faith is our everyday existence with the God who holds all things together. In the bible we find many examples of people walking alongside God, through all sorts of challenges. Finding and following God during our daily life can be both challenging and a great opportunity. The bible helps us with this journey.

The Bible in Worship at St James' Church, Weybridge

The Revised Common Lectionary is a way of ordering scripture readings for use in Christian worship, making provision for the liturgical year with its pattern of observances of festivals and seasons. The text is taken from the modern Anglicised New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) which is accepted as a sound interpretation.

The Lectionary runs in a three-year cycle with the gospel readings in the first year (Year A) largely taken from the Gospel of Matthew, those in the second year (or Year B) from the Gospel of Mark, and in the third year (or Year C) they come from the Gospel of Luke. Portions of the Gospel of John are read throughout Eastertide and are also used for other festivals and liturgical seasons including Advent, Christmastide, and Lent where appropriate. We are presently in Year B.

- ❖ Year C begins on the first Sunday of Advent
- ❖ Year A begins on the first Sunday of Advent in 2025
- ❖ Year B begins on the first Sunday of Advent in 2026
- ❖ Year C begins on the first Sunday of Advent in 2027, etc.

The major principle behind the Lectionary is that on a Sunday members of the congregation should be able to hear the voice of each Gospel writer week by week, rather than readings simply selected according to a theme. Thus, in any given year the writer of one of the first three (synoptic) gospels will be heard from beginning to end. Likewise, the rest of the New Testament is heard, in some cases, in total, in others in large part.

Then based on the themes found in the Gospel, either an Old or New Testament reading (sometimes a psalm) is chosen to amplify the themes found in the latter. Therefore, some themes do occur, for special occasions such as Harvest Festival or Good Shepherd Sunday. The same is true for Saint's Days and major church festivals.

At a Sunday Eucharist there is usually 1 bible reading followed a Gospel reading. At St James' these are prepared, with the prayers for the week (Collect & Post Communion) and handed out in printed form, as well as being sent out in advance via email and available on our website and Facebook page, so from home, people can join in as we study God's Word together.

For reflection

Thank God for Scripture! Include a short Bible reading in your daily prayer time.