

What Is the Bible?

Study Notes

Introduction

The Bible is in itself a small library of books, all of which emerged from the history of the people of ancient Israel. It is the most influential book in the history of Western and much of Eastern civilization. People have a lot of opinions regarding what it means, but let's just start with what it is.

Old Testament

TaNaK

TORAH "LAW"	NEVI'IM "PROPHETS"	KETUVIM "WRITINGS"
GENESIS EXODUS LEVITICUS NUMBERS DEUTERONOMY	JOSHUA SAMUEL KINGS ISAIAH JEREMIAH ETC.	PSALMS PROVERBS JOB RUTH CHRONICLES ETC.

Written in ancient Hebrew and Aramaic over the span of more than 1000 years, the TaNaK contains 24 books (39 in the Christian count*). The books emerge from the history of ancient Israel. They tell of their birth as a nation, their history in the land (called Israel-Palestine today), exile from it, return, and their eventual rebuilding around the city of Jerusalem. Furthermore, it is the story of Israel's origin as Abraham's family, how God promised to bless all nations through him via a messianic king—who one day would come.

* "TaNaK" and "The Old Testament" are identical texts. The difference is in their ordering as well as some of the books being broken into separate volumes. (e.g. 1st & 2nd Chronicles).

New Testament

27 books emerged out of the movement started by Jesus of Nazareth. All of them were written in Greek by Jewish authors who had become Jesus' disciples.

GOSPELS

MATTHEW
MARK
LUKE
JOHN

Four tell the story of his life, death, and resurrection.

EPISTLES

PAUL	13 Letters
PETER	2 Letters
JOHN	3 Letters
JAMES/JACOB	1 Letter
JUDE	1 Letter
ANONYMOUS	Hebrews

Twenty-one early letters are from the team of leaders Jesus appointed (apostles). They were addressed to communities all over the ancient Roman world, guiding them in their discipleship to Jesus.

ACTS

One recounts the first couple decades of the movement he started.

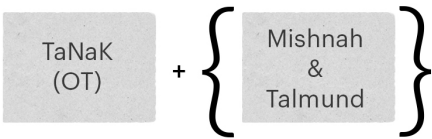
REVELATION

One is an apocalypse addressed to 7 churches.

Canon Variations

The previous pages list books included in the “standard” Bible or Protestant Bible containing 39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament books. Whereas the Hebrew Bible is centered solely on the TaNaK alone, Orthodox and Catholic Bibles include second temple period writings in addition to the Old and New Testaments.

HEBREW BIBLE



Orthodox Jews acknowledge the Oral Torah which resulted in additional bodies of authoritative literature.



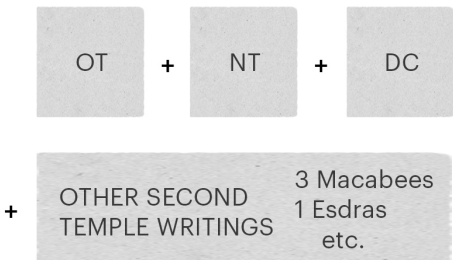
CATHOLIC BIBLE



DEUTERO-CANONICAL or APOCRYPHAL BOOKS: These are 7 separate Jewish texts from the second temple period and editorial additions made to two other biblical books (Esther and Daniel). They were widely read by Jews during that period and later by Christians as well. In 393 they were recognized as part of the “larger collection” of holy scriptures at the Council of Carthage and later ratified in the 1546 Council of Trent.

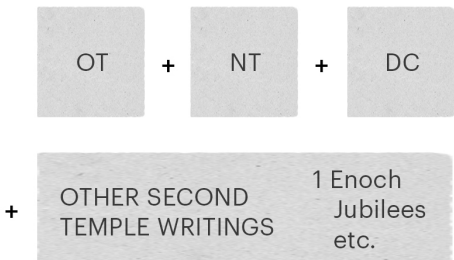


ORTHODOX BIBLE (Greek)



Additional second temple period texts existing in Greek.

ORTHODOX BIBLE (Ethiopian)



The Ethiopian “broader” canon includes even more second temple period Jewish texts.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did God choose to reveal God's self through the history, struggles, and meditations of one particular people situated in one particular corner of the earth?
2. How do the diverse genres of poetry, letters, law texts, and wisdom writings complement the narrative texts and thus contribute to our overall understanding of the overarching story? Why the diversity of genres?
3. What is the value in God revealing God's self through texts spread out over 1000 years and written by different authors?
4. What are the advantages or pitfalls to different Christian traditions including different lists of writings into the Bible?
5. Does this story continue on in Christian believers today? If so, how? If not, what is fundamentally different between the story of the Bible and the story of the Church as lived out today?