

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

How well do you know the Bible? Probably hardly at all, just a few stories from childhood and the scattered bits you get in church. But all the books of the Bible were written as literature, to be read in good chunks. And a lot of it is good fun as well. It is just a matter of knowing where to start...



Star ratings for a good read in bed



Read it – but skip bits!



Read it, but don't let your parents catch you!

THE OLD TESTAMENT (HEBREW BIBLE)

THE TORAH (LAW)	
Genesis 	<i>Legends and early traditions, until Jews get to Egypt</i>
Exodus 	<i>The story of their escape from Egypt and receiving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.</i>
Leviticus	<i>Various laws and traditions</i>
Numbers	<i>Various laws and traditions</i>
Deuteronomy	<i>Various laws and traditions</i>

HISTORY BOOKS	
Joshua	<i>Stories of the Jews arriving in Canaan (Palestine)</i>
Judges	<i>Early years in Canaan, and local heroes called 'Judges', meaning rulers</i>
Ruth	<i>The story of Ruth, who lived at the time of the Judges; a foreigner welcomed by Jews and who becomes an ancestor of King David.</i>
1 Samuel	<i>Story of Samuel the prophet and of the first king, Saul, and the rise of David</i>
2 Samuel	<i>David becomes king, captures Jerusalem, his life.</i>
1 Kings	<i>David dies, his son Solomon, and later history</i>
2 Kings	<i>Carries on the story until Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians in 587BC and leaders go into Exile.</i>

1 and 2 Chronicles	<i>Another history covering the period from David until the Exile</i>
Ezra	<i>The return from Exile: rebuilding the Temple</i>
Nehemiah	<i>The return from Exile: rebuilding the city of Jerusalem</i>
Esther	<i>A story (really an historical novel) of the Exile</i>

PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY	
Job	<i>“Why do the good suffer?”</i>
Psalms ✂	<i>Poetry and hymns, many of them from Temple worship</i>
Proverbs ✂	<i>High philosophy and popular wisdom</i>
Ecclesiastes ✂	<i>“The cynic looks at life”</i>
Song of Solomon ✂	<i>“The lover looks at God”</i>

THE PROPHETS	<i>There were many people who proclaimed God’s will for Israel through its history. The writings of the following were preserved because it was felt they were still useful for later generations.</i>
<i>The Major (Greater) Prophets</i>	
Isaiah ✂	<i>Actually three writers are preserved in this book: Chapters 1-39: 1st Isaiah from the time of the Kings Chapters 40-55: 2nd Isaiah from the time of the Exile Chapters 56-66: 3rd Isaiah from just after the Exile.</i>
Jeremiah	<i>Foretells the Exile unless Israel turn to God (they don’t)</i>
Lamentations	<i>A poem lamenting the fall of Jerusalem, said to have been written by Jeremiah</i>
Ezekiel	<i>A prophet during the Exile, foretells the return</i>
Daniel 📖 📖	<i>Actually a story about a prophet, written about 200 years before Jesus to encourage Jews facing persecution</i>

<i>The Minor (Lesser) Prophets</i>	
Hosea ✂	<i>Probably the first person to speak of God's love as like a passionate relationship – but the people of Israel are unfaithful to God!</i>
Joel	<i>Dunno</i>
Amos ✂	<i>A prophet who emphasises the justice of God – and humanity's injustice</i>
Obadiah	<i>Who?</i>
Jonah 📖 📖	<i>A story about a prophet, who learns the love of God the hard way</i>
Micah	<i>I read bits of him once</i>
Nahum	<i>Hmmm...</i>
Habakkuk	<i>Not sure who he was</i>
Zephaniah	<i>?</i>
Haggai	<i>Errr...</i>
Zechariah	<i>Well, I'm not sure about this one</i>
Malachi	<i>Shall we move on the New Testament?</i>

THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE FOUR GOSPELS 📖 📖 📖 📖 📖	
Matthew	<i>Written for Jewish Christians</i>
Mark	<i>The earliest – and shortest – of the Gospels, and used by Matthew and Luke (cheats!). Mark is writing for Gentile Christians, probably in Rome</i>
Luke	<i>Writing a cultured account for Gentile Christians</i>
John ✂	<i>A very different portrait of Jesus, bringing out the mystery</i>

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 📖 📖 📖 📖	
<i>Early history of the Church, written by Luke and following on from his gospel. He concentrates on the story of Peter and then of Paul.</i>	

LETTERS OF PAUL TO CHRISTIAN CHURCHES	
Romans ✂	<i>Written to introduce himself and his theology to Roman Christians. Heavy!</i>
1 Corinthians ✂	<i>Written to sort out the squabbles of Christians in Corinth, in Greece</i>

2 Corinthians	<i>Ditto. But do they listen?</i>
Galatians	<i>More squabbles to sort out, this time in what is now the middle of Turkey</i>
Ephesians	<i>A very formal letter, with long sentences I can never quite work out.</i>
Philippians ✂	<i>At last a nice friendly letter (mostly). The Christians of Philippi (northern Greece) have been supporting Paul in prison in Rome, and he writes to say thank you.</i>
Colossians	<i>See Ephesians</i>
1 Thessalonians	<i>More problems</i>
2 Thessalonians	<i>Yet more problems. You can see why Paul got ratty on occasions.</i>
1 Timothy	<i>Advice for a junior colleague</i>
2 Timothy	<i>More advice for a junior colleague</i>
Titus	<i>More advice for another junior colleague</i>
Philemon	<i>The only personal letter – to persuade a friend to forgive a runaway slave</i>

LETTERS WRITTEN BY OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS	
Hebrews	<i>Actually ‘to the Hebrews’ – author unknown</i>
James ✂	<i>A letter impatient with those who talk Christianity but don’t do it.</i>
1 Peter ✂	<i>A letter of encouragement to those being persecuted</i>
2 Peter	<i>Not sure what this one is about really</i>
1 John	<i>Reads like a sermon</i>
2 John	<i>So does this one</i>
3 John	<i>No change here</i>
Jude	<i>Title of a Beatles song</i>

APOCALYPTIC: a style of writing in which the triumph of good over evil is portrayed in symbols and Technicolor.	
Revelation ✂	<i>The author is said to be a certain John, but is different from the writer of the gospel and letters</i>