

Questions and Answers About *The Books of The Bible*
Website Version

“First is the content of God’s revelation of himself and of his plan of redemption in all the Scriptures, made so clear by the translator that Tyndale’s plowboy may read and comprehend. Then comes the form, or style, by which the inexhaustible beauty of the Lord and his works may, even if only dimly in this life, be shown and made to be part of what we know.”

—Calvin Linton

The Books of The Bible is a groundbreaking presentation of the Scriptures designed to accurately reflect the biblical authors’ intentions. The result is a more readable, enjoyable and beautiful Bible. *The Books of The Bible* removes distorting features, which were added later to the text, recovering the freshness and clear simplicity of the original literary forms of the Scriptures.

What’s unique about *The Books of The Bible*?

The Books of The Bible differs from the most common current formats of the Bible in several significant ways:

- chapter and verse numbers are removed from the text and a chapter-and-verse range is given at the bottom of each page;
- individual books are presented with the literary divisions that the biblical authors have indicated;
- footnotes, section headings and any other nonoriginal material have been removed from the text (translators’ notes are placed at the end of each book);
- single books that later translations or tradition divided into two or more books are made whole again;

- the books of the Bible have been placed in an order that provides more help in understanding their literary genre, historical circumstance and theological tradition;
- a single-column setting is used to clearly and naturally present the books, making the text more readable and the literary form more recognizable;

Why did you choose the title “*The Books of The Bible*”?

The simplicity of *The Books of The Bible* communicates that the Bible really is a library—a book of books. This title also reinforces our intended goal: encouraging the reading of whole books of the Bible. Finally, we wanted to avoid the impression that the project represents a niche or specialty Bible. This is a Bible that is intended for everyone.

Why do most Bibles today look the way they do?

The form of most Bibles today is a result of a series of historical adaptations of the sacred text. Sometime around 200 BC, a Greek translation of the First Testament separated whole books into smaller sections in order to fit them onto single scrolls. This translation, called the Septuagint, also changed the book order. (The order of books within the Bible has varied throughout its history.) The chapter divisions we know today were added in the thirteenth century AD, and numbered verse divisions were added in the sixteenth century AD. The advent of the printing press tended to solidify and perpetuate these changes.

Printing the text in multiple columns on a single page is a space and cost-saving measure favored by publishers. Throughout history, copyists and commentators have added their own notes and commentary. Today, most Bibles are printed with section headings (typically written by the translators) inserted into the text. Presenting the words of Christ in red ink became popular in the twentieth century. Bibles published today typically reflect some combination of these accumulated changes.

What kinds of literature make up the various books of the Bible?

The books of the Bible include such diverse forms as historical narrative, letter, law code, song lyric, poetry, proverb, parable, prophetic oracle, genealogy and apocalyptic, among others.

Why is the earlier part of the Bible called the First Testament?

Using the word “old” to describe the first part of the Bible can carry the unwanted connotation of something irrelevant and unnecessary. While we no longer live in the earlier acts of the biblical drama, we cannot understand our own place in the story without the record of those acts. The book of Hebrews speaks of the “first” covenant and then the climax of the coming of the “new” covenant. These words reflect the appropriate sequence and relationship of the two parts of the Bible.

Is this a complete Bible?

Yes. Unlike some special editions, chronological Bibles and condensed versions, *The Books of The Bible* contains the complete text of the Bible.

What translation is used in *The Books of The Bible*?

The first edition of *The Books of The Bible* utilizes *Today's New International Version (TNIV)* of the Bible. The *TNIV*, released in 2005, combines great accuracy with readability to reflect the best in contemporary biblical scholarship. International Bible Society, the translation sponsor and copyright holder, has distributed over one million *TNIV* Scriptures. Since this project focuses on the format of the biblical books, it is not necessarily tied to any particular translation and could be applied to other Bible versions. (Note: the decisions reflected by the unique formatting of *The Books of The Bible* were made by the Bible Design Group [see below] at International Bible Society, not by the Committee on Bible Translation, an independent group of scholars that oversees the text of the *TNIV*.)

Who developed *The Books of The Bible*?

This project was developed by International Bible Society (IBS). Founded in 1809, IBS is a non-profit Scripture ministry dedicated to reaching out with

God's Word across the globe in order to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In 2003, International Bible Society assembled the Bible Design Group for the purpose of exploring and producing a new visual presentation of the Bible. The group is comprised of consultants from the fields of Bible design and typesetting, biblical studies, global missions and active pastoral work, as well as graphic designers and WordWrights from the staff of IBS.

By the way, what is a WordWright?

“Wright” comes from an old English term referring to one who is skilled in a craft or in the production or building of something (such as a shipwright or playwright). A WordWright is someone who skillfully crafts a presentation of the Word of God that is faithful to Scripture's story.

Did other people review the work?

Yes. Throughout this project, the Bible Design Group sought input and suggestions from a wide range of qualified people: Bible scholars, specialists in translation and Bible publishing, pastors, ministry leaders, those using the Bible in evangelism and outreach, Bible study and church education groups, graphic designers, and longtime Bible readers, as well as some encountering the sacred text for the first time.

Why was it developed?

The Books of The Bible was developed to actively encourage more and better Bible reading. Since our founding in 1809, International Bible Society's purpose has been to energetically share the Holy Scriptures in evangelism and outreach. Unfortunately, recent data shows that the Bible is becoming an unknown book today,* with more Bibles purchased or received as gifts than are actually read.

Part of the reason for the decline of Bible reading, we believe, is a format that is often confusing and intimidating. The traditional format actually encourages the reading of short segments, rather than complete sections or whole books. We also believe that since the words of the Bible are sacred, any presentation of them should strive to be respectful and even beautiful.

** Research data on Bible reading and literacy can be found under the Resources section of this website.*

How will this format lead to more and better Bible reading?

By eliminating the elements that hinder good Bible reading, readers can see and appreciate elements such as literary genre, natural sections within books and the historical context. The common chapter and verse markings function as visual cues to readers, telling them to stop after taking in only a small section, or even a single sentence. Without these elements, readers will naturally absorb longer sections.

Grouping books according to literary type, similar theological tradition and chronology can lead to greater understanding. Presenting whole books will encourage the reading of whole books. And even when smaller parts of books are being studied (individual stories, sections or even individual sentences and phrases), locating these within the larger context will help readers keep the overall intentions of the biblical authors in mind.

Can this Bible be used when reading and studying the Bible with other people?

Yes! We believe strongly that the Bible can and should be read in community with others. The best way is to study whole books together over a period of time. But all too often, groups study the Bible topically by jumping around to a variety of Bible verses. It is precisely the chapter and verse system that allows, or even encourages, readers to isolate pieces of Scripture without considering the surrounding text. Skimming across the surface of the Bible like this almost guarantees that one will read these “verses” out of context. This type of Bible study frequently results in abnormal (or even bizarre) interpretations of the text. This way, the Bible can be made to say just about anything, even contradictory things.

The advantage of using *The Books of The Bible* format is that it takes a little longer to locate a passage. People who have been using preview editions report that this format naturally encourages them to read the desired “piece” of Scripture in its immediate context. We believe this is positive change from the way most of us have been taught to study the Bible. We’ve included a chapter and verse range on the bottom of each page, so readers can still easily find their way around.

Aren't you showing a disregard for the tradition that brought us the Bible?

We don't believe so. The church's tradition itself models an openness to change in the form of the Bible. We are attempting to listen respectfully to the church's history with the Bible, while maintaining the view that Scripture itself stands over and above any church tradition.

God's Spirit has always been active. We did not invent the Bible; we have received it, and we cannot be cavalier with it. But at the same time, just because someone once did something new to the text of the Bible does not mean we are bound to endorse that change today. The overriding issue really should be: What is good for the Bible itself, and for Bible readers?

Can you share an example of this from your presentation in *The Books of The Bible*?

Yes. A rather telling case is our treatment of the ancient Christian adoption of the fourfold gospel. It seems that rather early on, Luke's gospel was separated from his second volume, Acts, and placed in a group with the other gospels. There are important theological and historical points made by this fourfold collection and they cannot and should not be disregarded.

Yet the fact remains that Luke's original two-volume history, which has theological and historical concerns of its own, was split apart and other books were placed between the volumes (in some manuscripts Acts was placed near the very end of the New Testament). It is difficult to see why tradition (even early tradition) should override the work of the original author.

The Books of The Bible seeks to restore the unity that Luke himself clearly intended and places Luke and Acts together again. Yet we have not disregarded the importance of the fourfold gospel. We have attempted to express this concept in a fresh and even heightened way. Rather than blur the gospels into a group at the beginning of the New Testament, each gospel is now placed at the front of a set of closely related books.

Has tradition presented us with a single order of books in the Bible?

No. There is no “one perfect order” that has always been recognized. This is to be expected since the Bible is a collection of books that were written over a long period of time. In fact, it is really only to the codex (or book) form of the Bible that the question of order applies. When the biblical books were separate scrolls, there was no issue of what order they were in.

Aren't the decisions represented in the formatting of *The Books of The Bible* just your interpretation?

Of course, human decisions led to the development of this presentation of the Bible, just as with all the formatting decisions by others who have gone before us. The placement of chapter and verse divisions involved this kind of interpretation, as did previous orderings of the books. The same is true of Bible translation, and, for that matter, teaching and preaching.

This project has been worked on prayerfully. Knowing our own limitations, the results are no doubt imperfect. But if humans are made in the image of God, as the Bible teaches, then we were made to be decision-making beings. Given what we know about the history of the Bible, God's intention was not to drop the Bible ready-made from heaven, but to allow for real human involvement in its production and development.

We sincerely hope that this project helps start a conversation. We're eager to listen and learn from others, and are open to making changes in our work in the future.

What do you see as the future of *The Books of The Bible*?

We hope that others will embrace the principles behind *The Books of The Bible* and publish their own versions of the Scriptures released from the cumbersome changes of later centuries that serve neither the Bible nor readers well. The first rule of Bible publishing should be: do no harm. Publishers have the responsibility to *lead* Bible-buying markets well, not just *follow* them wherever they may go.

Above all, we desire people all over the world to come back to Bible reading in a renewed way, or to discover the Bible for the first time. Our goal is that *The Books of the Bible* will be the start of a lifelong journey of embracing the Scriptures and incorporating God's message of redemption into their lives.

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