

Bible Factsheet

The word Bible literally means 'book', although it is actually a collection of 66 smaller books.
It was written over about 1500 years by about 40 different authors, ranging from fishermen to kings, doctors to shepherds and scholars to prophets. The Bible claims that its human authors wrote down words that were inspired by God: "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1 Peter 1:21); "All scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16).
It is divided into two testaments: old – before Jesus was born new – during and after Jesus' life on earth.
It contains different types of writings: law, narrative, prophecy, poetry, wisdom, gospels, letters and apocalyptic (a special type of coded writing).
Many of the books in the New Testament were written by the apostle Paul, and were originally letters from him to various churches or individual Christians.
The order that the books appear in the Bible is not the order in which they were written, although Genesis is probably the oldest book (apparently written around 1450BC) and Revelation the most recent (apparently written around 95AD).
The books of the Bible were chosen according to the Canon – which means 'reed' or 'cane' and eventually came to mean 'measuring rod'.
By the time of Jesus, around the year 1, the list of books included in the Old Testament was established. The writings were accepted because of their authors. They were men from the Jewish nation who were considered to be chosen by God, e.g. prophets, kings.
The Old Testament was written in Hebrew.
The New Testament was written in Greek, with a little Aramaic.
In 376 AD, Bishop Athanasius wrote to his churches, with a list of all the books that he considered comprised the New Testament.
In 382 AD, an important council in Rome approved his list, and in 397 AD the Council of Carthage, in North Africa, agreed. And so the list was finalised. No single person approved the lists. The books were chosen because they were being used in all the churches at that time, and because these important councils endorsed them. Christians believe that God guided the churches to use these particular books.
Where significant doubts existed over the reliability and authenticity of manuscripts, those books were rejected from the Canon, and are not accepted as part of the Bible. Some of these are collected in The

Apocrypha, which many (but not all) Christians do not consider to have the same authority as the Bible.