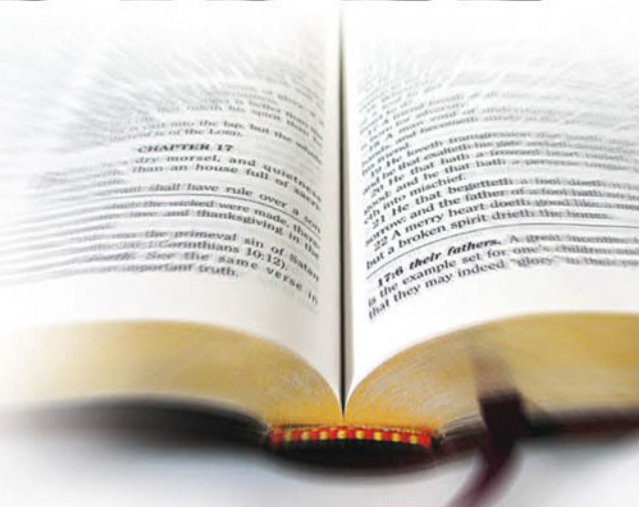


THE QUICK- START

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE BIBLE

- Easy-to-Use
- Fact-Filled
- Life-Changing



J. STEPHEN LANG

THE
QUICK
START
BEGINNER'S
GUIDE TO
THE BIBLE

J. STEPHEN LANG



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
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MAKING THE BIBLE USER-FRIENDLY

Here in the twenty-first century, can an ancient book be user-friendly? Can the life of King David, who lived around 1000 B.C., be accessible, or interesting, or relevant to contemporary individuals?

Granted, the Bible isn't as accessible as the Internet or MTV. It isn't supposed to be. It's the Word of God to human beings, not a multi-image promo for throwaway pop culture. The Bible is serious. It's concerned with morality, with ethics, with values. It's concerned with where we came from, how we should live, what our destiny is beyond this present life. In other words, it answers the basic human questions about the meaning of life.

But it *is* accessible. And it is interesting. If sex and violence help sell books and videos, then the Bible should sell well, for sex and violence are there. (Mark Twain snickered at libraries that banned his books but kept the Bible on their shelves.) The Bible presents the human tale, warts and all—and adds the divine element, making the picture complete. It's even more interesting than pop culture because it has everything the secular world has, *plus* a loving, forgiving, saving God. The Almighty God is, according to the Bible, approachable—friendly, if you will.

User-friendly means that an average, normal human being can approach without feeling threatened. Bible handbooks flood the market—and many seem to assume that the reader already knows the Bible fairly well and enjoys reading it. The book you are now

holding assumes no such thing. It assumes you are at least *interested* in the Bible—maybe slightly familiar with it, but maybe puzzled, curious, perhaps even hostile. It doesn't assume you know the order of the Bible's books, its main characters, its key teachings, its history, or its place in everyday life. It does assume that knowledge of these things is important—as important as knowing how to drive a car, program a video recorder, operate a microwave oven, fill out a tax return, or shop for nutritious food. In fact, this book assumes that knowing the Bible is *more* important than all these things. Yet it does not assume you must be a scholar or a college grad to know the Bible.

This book is written for several types of people:

- The new Christian who wants to become familiar with the Book of books, which is the foundation of Christian belief and living. The new believer can profit from studying this handbook alone, but I encourage group study when possible. Church and home classes or groups should find this book eminently user-friendly.
- The person who wants to get “reacquainted”—that is, the person who realizes he has neglected the Bible for too long and would like to become more familiar with it. Surveys consistently show that longtime churchgoers are often ignorant of basic Bible teachings. I hope this book will help to remedy that problem.
- The Christian who is familiar with the Bible but would like a refresher course, a kind of review of Bible 101, if you will. Pastors and professors often fall into this category.
- The non-Christian who is curious—curious as a seeker after truth, or maybe as one who opposes Christianity but wonders if the failings of Christianity are traceable to the Bible itself. For the seeker, I hope this book leads to further inquiry and commitment. For the hostile person, I hope at least to clarify. Certainly I include nothing here

that should make a non-Christian *less* respectful of the Bible and Christianity.

Several years ago I published *The Complete Book of Bible Trivia*. It has sold extremely well, which made me realize that a lot of people are interested in the “tidbits” of the Bible, its many interesting snippets of events, people, and places. Having looked at the Bible as *trivia*, I now move on to *significa*—the Bible as something that is, or can be, very significant in human life. My trivia book answered the question, Can the Bible entertain me? The book you are now holding answers the question, The Bible—what’s in it for me?

Beyond the Words:

WHAT IS THE BIBLE ALL ABOUT?

Bibles are sold by the millions every year across the globe. Are they being read? Some are, some aren't. If the sales figures meant anything, we would be a very Bible-literate people. But that isn't so.

It *was* so—in the past, anyway. If you read the history of the United States and England, you can't help but notice that great leaders of the past often quoted and referred to the Bible. Even when their actions were morally questionable, they were at least familiar with what the Bible taught. It was a part of education, just like learning the mythology of Greece and Rome, but more important than mythology because most people believed the Bible was *true*. Even people who questioned the miraculous elements in the Bible—Thomas Jefferson was one, for example—still believed that its moral and ethical teachings applied to human life. They believed that God in some way produced the Bible. Thus it wasn't just a book, such as a novel by Charles Dickens or a long poem such as *The Odyssey*. It had its origin in God wanting to reveal his will to the human race. People often claimed that they had “heard” God speaking to them individually. The general belief about the Bible was that it was God speaking to everyone who could read it or hear it being read aloud.

The word *Bible* simply means “the book.” One modern version was even marketed as *The Book*, which is accurate. But the Bible doesn't have one author in the same way most books have one

author. It was written over a span of hundreds of years by many different people. Each author had—as all authors do—an individual way of expressing himself in words. No two books of the Bible are exactly alike, even the ones by the same author.

What Are These “Books”?

Before we look deeper into the Bible, let's consider some terminology. Pastors and teachers talk about a particular “book” of the Bible. Meaning what? Each section of the Bible—there are 66 in all—is called a book, even though none of them is big enough to fill an entire book by itself. Thus we talk about the book of Psalms and the book of Jeremiah and the book of Acts. Most of these books fill up many pages (the longest one is the book of Psalms), but some are smaller (the book of Obadiah barely fills a page). So a book doesn't mean “something between two covers,” but “a component part.” Each book is divided into chapters and verses (more about these divisions later), and most of the books are attributed to a single author. The book of Acts, for example, is supposed to have been written by Luke (who also wrote the Gospel of Luke), and the book of Revelation was written by John. Some books have several authors. Psalms, for example, was written by King David and some others. Proverbs was written by King Solomon, Agur, Lemuel, and possibly others.

In some cases a particular book may have been edited. The book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament is supposed to have been written by Moses, but at its end it tells about Moses' death, so we have to assume that someone else edited the book and added the material about Moses' death at the end.

As mentioned earlier, *Bible* simply means “the book.” For people who accept it as divine, it is *the* Book, the most important book of all.

What Are the Books Named For?

The 66 books of the Bible are named a variety of ways. In the New Testament, the four Gospels—the stories of Jesus—are named

for their different authors (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). So are the Old Testament prophetic books, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Amos. And so are some parts of the New Testament (the epistles, or letters, of Peter, James, and John). Some books are named for their main character, who may or may not be the author. Some examples are Joshua, Ruth, Esther, Job, and Ezra.

The book of Acts is named for its content (it tells of the acts, or deeds, of the early Christians). So are the books of Revelation (it is a “revealing” of the future) and Exodus (it concerns the exodus, or exit, of the people of Israel from Egypt). Some books are named for their intended audience. This is true of most of the epistles or letters in the New Testament, which are addressed to, for example, the Romans, the Colossians, the Ephesians, and to individuals such as Timothy and Titus.

Some books seem to be named wrongly. For example, Numbers (the fourth book of the Old Testament) tells about a census, but this is only a tiny part of the book. And some names—Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Ecclesiastes, for example—make no immediate sense at all. If a book’s name seems strange, it’s probably because the name is an English form of an ancient name. (See pages 179-230 for a summary of each book and an explanation of the names.)

Note that a few books contain numerals in the titles. In the Old Testament you’ll find, for example, 1 and 2 Samuel. When you speak of these out loud, you say “First and Second Samuel,” not “One and Two Samuel.” The same applies to 1 and 2 Kings and to 1 and 2 Timothy, and to all other books with numerals in their names.

A note about the books by John. The New Testament has a large and important book called the Gospel of John. It is usually called John for short (as in “Our Bible study group is studying John for the next few weeks”). But the New Testament also has three epistles or letters written by the same John. These three are 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. They are much shorter than the Gospel of John. If you see “John” without a number preceding it, the reference is to the Gospel of John.

What Are These Two “Testaments”?

The Bible's 66 books are divided into two parts. The first part, the Old Testament, deals with the beginnings of the world and of God's dealings with the people known as the Israelites or Hebrews. The New Testament, written later, deals with Jesus, his disciples, and the earliest groups of Christians. *Testament* means “covenant” or “agreement,” and it refers to God's “contract” with his special people—the Hebrews in the Old Testament, the Christians in the new. You could think of *testament* as meaning “instruction manual” or “terms of agreement” for the people who wanted to know and do God's will.

What's in the Bible?

This instruction manual is, fortunately, more readable than most manuals. Unlike manuals, the Bible isn't written in a businesslike style. Within the 66 books are history (seldom boring), moral rules, rules about worship, advice for daily living, songs of praise and thanksgiving and despair, warnings against moral decay, prophecies, sermons, and more. With 66 books and many different authors, this kind of variety is to be expected.

Speaking of authors, the writers are a mixed group. Two of them, Moses and Paul, were well-educated by the standards of their times. But the other authors were (just to pick a few examples) fishermen (Peter, John), a tax collector (Matthew), a shepherd (Amos), kings (David, Solomon), a priest (Ezra), and a servant (Nehemiah). Not one of them was a “professional writer” in our sense of the term. Their written words were produced over a span of 1600 years. Given this time span, the 66 books, and the dozens of different writers, the Bible is obviously more than just a book. It is (and has often been called) the Book of books.

Unfortunately, all this diversity can be puzzling to a first-time reader of the Bible. Where should one begin? At page 1? Is it all worth reading, or are there parts that can be skipped? Which parts are really, *really* important? This book will try to answer all those questions, and more.

Why Is It Called “Holy”?

First, though, let’s consider the Bible’s other name: *Scripture*. This just means “writings,” and when people talk about the holy Bible and the holy Scriptures, what they mean is “these writings are so honored and respected and so different from other writings that we consider them *holy* or *sacred*.” That is, they exist not just because human beings wrote them and passed them on through the centuries, but because they really were a revealing of God to humanity. Because people have considered the Bible holy, they have thought of it as something more than just pleasure reading or a historical curiosity. If people hadn’t sincerely believed this for centuries, the Bible probably wouldn’t still be around today, unless perhaps some archaeologists happened to dig up some ancient pieces of papyrus.

Consider the great epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Both were written long ago, in roughly the same time period as certain books of the Bible. People still read these poems (both in the original Greek and in translated form) and discuss them. They are classics, as the Bible is. But no one *believes* in the truth of these poems. They may contain some historical material. But they are a mixture (a beautiful and well-written mixture) of mythology, religious beliefs, folk tales, and details about life in an ancient civilization—and they really don’t have any bearing on how we live our lives and find meaning. But the authors of those poems knew they were just writing poetry. They never included the words “Thus says the Lord...”—a phrase that crops up again and again in the Bible. So there are old books such as *The Iliad* that are classics but not holy. The Bible, for people who accept it, is a “holy classic.”

.....

The Christian feels that the tooth of time gnaws all books but the Bible. It has a pertinent relevance to every age.

.....

W.E. SANGSTER

Is the Bible the Only Holy Book in Existence?

Christianity is not the only religion with scriptures or holy

books. Most of the great world religions have some writings that they consider special. The fact is, all religions have traditions and teachings that are important. In what we call the “primitive” religions, these traditions may not be written down. The people of these religions may pass them on by word of mouth from one generation to another. Like the Bible, these traditions may include history, rules, and poetry.

The Jews have the Bible minus the New Testament, which they don't accept. Devout Jews order their lives around their Bible, particularly the first five books, which are known as the *Torah*. Many still follow the kosher food laws in the book of Leviticus (against eating pork, for example). Jewish rabbis and scholars have written hundreds of volumes of commentary on the Old Testament, so it is definitely a holy book for them.

The Muslims have the Qur'an (or Koran), written (unlike the Bible) by only one author, the prophet Muhammad. Muslims call it “the Noble Qur'an” or sometimes just “the Book.” Muslims believe that *Allah*—God—was the ultimate source of the Qur'an. This book guides the lives of devout Muslims, and the society and culture of

DON'T APPROACH THE BIBLE AS A BOOK OF RULES

Well, the Bible *does* have rules. All religions do. So do all schools, employers, sports teams, any kind of human grouping. No one joins a baseball team and gripes, “I don't like this ‘three strikes and you're out’ rule.” That's just baseball. Well, the Bible's assumption is that life, like baseball, has rules. They're not meant to stifle and repress. The rules are there for a good reason. (Any married person who's ever been suspicious of his spouse understands the wisdom of the “Do not commit adultery” rule. And anyone who owns any type of property understands “Do not steal.” The rules aren't all bad, are they?)

But it is wrong to see the Bible as a book of “do nots.” It has so much more: images of loving fellowship with God and with other people. The “do nots” are balanced with a lot of very positive “dos.”

Muslim nations across North Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere show the reverence people have for this volume.

Christians, Jews, and Muslims are “people of the book.” In theory, these three religions’ beliefs are supposed to be based on their holy books and on nothing else. Tradition, of course, also plays a role in their beliefs, but, in the final analysis, their books are the cornerstone of their beliefs.

Other religions also have holy books, but those religions don’t have the same level of reverence for those books as Christians, Jews, and Muslims do for theirs. Confucianism, for example, is based on the teachings (and writings) of the Chinese teacher Confucius. But some people aren’t sure whether Confucianism is a religion or just a philosophy. Confucianists respect Confucius’ writings, but they don’t really regard them as sacred.

The Hindu religion of India, which is very, very old, has many books—the Bhagavad-Gita, the Vedas, the Upanishads, and many others. Hinduism is more like a group of religions rather than just one, and there is no one book that the Hindus honor in the same way that Christians approach the Bible.

The Bible’s view of humans’ relationship with God is unique in all the world religions. In the Bible, God is the mighty King of the universe, the Master of all things, the awesome Supreme Being, the all-seeing Judge who knows our every thought and deed. Other religions have gods like this. But the Bible shows us other sides of this mighty God. He is approachable, he loves people, and he wants to be loved by us freely and willingly. He is not just the King, but also a father to those who love him. He wants his followers to be not only worshippers, but his *children*. As the Holy Spirit, this very personal God actually lives within his people, guiding and strengthening them. So the God of the Bible is uniquely both “Master of the universe” and “up close and personal.”

Why Are There So Many Versions of the Bible?

Every bookstore in every mall sells Bibles—and more than one version, too. You can’t buy the “real” Bible because the “real” one

was written in ancient Hebrew and Greek. So we have to trust translators who know these languages to give us an accurate idea of what the original authors meant to communicate. Because languages change over time, no translation can be “permanent,” although the King James Version, published in 1611, is still being read today. Words and phrases change, so every few years translation committees or publishers decide it’s time for a “new and improved” translation of the old Book. There are literally dozens of English translations today, though a handful qualify as the most popular.

If you look inside the front of a Bible, you will usually find a preface or introduction. This will usually explain when and why the specific translation was done. Most people today find it easiest to read a translation done after 1970. And as time passes, new translations will have to be done.

There is no “official” version that everyone agrees is the best. The one quoted in this book is the New International Version, completed in 1978. It has been well-received by readers (one test of its value as a translation) and by scholars (the other test of its value). Some other popular versions are the New Revised Standard Version, the New Jerusalem Bible, the New King James Version, and Today’s English Version (also called the Good News Bible). You’ll often see these versions referred to by their acronyms—NIV for New International Version, for example, and KJV for (you guessed it) the King James Version.

What Do the Numbers in the Text Represent?

If you open your Bible to the first book, Genesis, you’ll see a large “1” at the beginning, which indicates chapter 1. Back in the Middle Ages, the entire Bible was divided into chapters. Like the chapter divisions in any book, the chapters in the Bible help to break up the text and make it easier to locate a specific section. The smaller numbers in the text refer to verses. Generally there are one or two sentences in each verse, but not always. (The word *verse* does not mean that the material is poetry, by the way.) The verse divisions were done in the 1500s—again, to make it easier to locate a specific

section. If you're looking for the Ten Commandments, it's much easier if someone tells you, "They're in Exodus chapter 20" instead of, "They're somewhere in Exodus." Usually, to be brief, you would simply say, "Exodus 20."

Before the Bible was divided into chapters (around the year 1214) and verses (in 1551), people had to refer to parts of the Bible by the name of the book or by the author (or whoever people thought the author was). People would refer to the book of Isaiah by saying, "As Isaiah says..." Or they would say, "As Solomon says in Proverbs..." The chapter and verse numbers are a tremendous help, as they allow readers to find the exact location of specific words in a particular book.

The one book in the Bible that isn't divided into chapters is Psalms. It consists of 150 separate poems, and these are referred to as psalms, never as chapters. They are, like chapters, divided into verses. Instead of saying "Psalms, chapter 23, verse 2," you would say, "Psalm 23, verse 2."

You will *never* find any book or speaker that refers to page numbers in the Bible. Instead, when you want to take people to a specific place in the Bible, you refer to the book, the chapter, and the verse. For example, a pastor will announce on Sunday, "I will preach this morning on John 3:16." This means his sermon will be about John (a book of the New Testament) chapter 3, verse 16. Note that a colon (:) always separates the chapter number from the verse number. Romans 12:1 means "Romans chapter 12, verse 1." A few books of the Bible have only one chapter, so they have only verse numbers. So Jude 14 means "Jude, verse 14."

The numbers are always the same for specific chapters and verses regardless of which Bible translation you use. In other words, no matter what Bible you turn to, you will always find at Exodus 20:14 words similar to "You shall not commit adultery."

What Are the Subheads in the Books?

Most Bibles have, in addition to chapter and verse numbers, subheads. For example, the New International Version has, in chapter

2 of Genesis, the subhead “Adam and Eve.” These subheads aren’t actually part of the Bible text. They are aids the translators insert to give you an idea of what a particular section is about. They serve the same purpose as chapter titles and subheads in a regular book. These are useful if you’re looking for a particular subject, or if you’re just browsing. For example, if you’re looking for the Christmas story in Luke’s Gospel, it helps when you find the heading “The Birth of Jesus” at the beginning of chapter 2 in Luke.

What Is the Apocrypha?

Some Bibles don’t contain the Apocrypha, and others do. The books in the Apocrypha are an addition to the standard 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. All of the apocryphal books were written in—and most are concerned with—the long gap of time between the Old and New Testaments. When the Protestant churches broke away from the Catholic church in the 1500s, they questioned the Apocrypha, believing it wasn’t “inspired” in the same way that the other books of the Bible are. Protestant leaders noted that the Jews’ sacred books did not include the Apocrypha. All Catholic Bibles still include the Apocrypha. But the books of the Apocrypha have never been studied as closely or been considered as important as the other 66 books. We will deal more with the Apocrypha in a later section.

What Are *Text* and *Passage*?

When people speak of a portion or section of the Bible, they often refer to it as a *passage*. Example: “My favorite passage in the Bible is the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10.” A passage is always more than one verse; it may be as long as a chapter, or even longer. *Passage* could mean the same as *verses*, except that *verses* can also refer to verses from different places in the Bible. A passage, however, always refers to a continuous set of verses.

Text is just a way of referring to the words. You could speak of “translating the Hebrew text into English.” *Text* can also mean the same as *passage*. You might hear a pastor begin a sermon by saying,

“The text for my sermon today is Exodus 20:1-2.” Or, someone might say, “The author quoted a Bible text in his novel,” or “The author quoted a Bible passage in his novel.” Both statements mean the same.

Why Are the 66 Books in a Specific Order?

First, the New Testament follows the Old (naturally). Second, there is a chronological sequence in both Testaments—sort of. The Old Testament begins, appropriately, with Genesis and its story of the world’s creation. From Genesis to the book of Esther, the Old Testament books progress forward in time. But Esther is followed by Job, a book with no specific date attached to it. And Job is followed by Psalms, a collection of poems written over hundreds of years. Beginning with the book of Isaiah, the books known (collectively) as the Prophets fall into (roughly) a chronological sequence. Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, is generally supposed to have been the last prophet before the “silent years” between the Old and New Testaments.

Why did the Old Testament not use a strict chronological approach? Some of the books—Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, for example—simply don’t fit into a historical sequence. Over time, they found their niche between the historical writings (from Genesis to Esther) and the prophets (Isaiah to Malachi).

The New Testament begins with the birth of Jesus (told in the Gospel of Matthew), then gives the other three Gospels (Mark, Luke, and John), which are other accounts of Jesus’ life. The Gospels are followed by the book of Acts, which tells the story of Jesus’ followers after he had departed from the earth. Acts is followed by the epistles, or letters, written

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The Bible was never intended to be a book for scholars and specialists only. From the very beginning it was intended to be everybody’s book, and that is what it continues to be.

F.F. BRUCE

.....

to churches or individuals concerned with issues confronted by the early Christians. These letters aren't arranged historically. They are generally arranged according to size—that is, the first letter, Romans, is the longest. After the letters comes the last book, Revelation. It is the logical end to the Bible because it is concerned with the end of the world and the beginning of an entirely new world—heaven, that is. As in a good novel, Revelation is the climax, the “ending with a real bang.”

If you are new to the Bible, there are two ways to get to know the location of the books: You can memorize the sequence of the 66 books, or you can get in the habit of looking at your Bible's alphabetical list of the 66 books in the table of contents, which will enable you to find the book by page number. (By the way, one Bible version of the 1980s, the Alphabetical Bible, arranged the 66 books in alphabetical order. This version didn't sell well at all.)

These are the names of the books of the Bible, along with the usual abbreviations:

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen.	Proverbs	Pr.
Exodus	Ex.	Ecclesiastes	Eccl.
Leviticus	Lev.	Song of Solomon	S. of S.
Numbers	Num.	Isaiah	Isa.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Joshua	Josh.	Lamentations	Lam.
Judges	Jdg.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Ruth	Ruth	Daniel	Dan.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Hosea	Hos.
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Joel	Joel
1 Kings	1 Kgs.	Amos	Amos
2 Kings	2 Kgs.	Obadiah	Obad.
1 Chronicles	1 Chr.	Jonah	Jon.
2 Chronicles	2 Chr.	Micah	Mic.
Ezra	Ezra	Nahum	Nah.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Habakkuk	Hab.
Esther	Est.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Job	Job	Haggai	Hag.
Psalms	Ps.	Zechariah	Zech.
		Malachi	Mal.

New Testament

Matthew	Matt.	1 Timothy	1 Tim.
Mark	Mark (or Mk.)	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Luke	Luke (or Lk.)	Titus	Tit.
John	John (or Jn.)	Philemon	Phm.
Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	Jam.
1 Corinthians . . .	1 Cor.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Corinthians . . .	2 Cor.	2 Peter	2 Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1 John	1 Jn.
Ephesians	Eph.	2 John	2 Jn.
Philippians	Phil.	3 John	3 Jn.
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians . .	1 Thess. (or 1 Th.)	Revelation	Rev.
2 Thessalonians . .	2 Thess. (or 2 Th.)		

Why Are There Maps?

You don't need a map to enjoy or understand the Bible. But the Old and New Testaments both refer to events that took place in actual locations—cities, countries, rivers, etc. Since much of the Bible is history, maps are helpful, just as maps are helpful in any history book. Most Bibles contain at least a few maps that show the key places in the Old Testament (Israel and the nations that surrounded and conquered it) and the New Testament (Israel in Jesus' time, often with place names that have changed from the Old Testament names).

Why Are There Tables of Weights and Measures?

Back in Bible times, people did not use the same measurement systems we use today to refer to weights and measures. Nor was their money the same as ours. Most Bibles have charts or tables that show the rough modern equivalents of weights, measures, and money. A good modern translation of the Bible will probably communicate these things in the text itself.

What Is This *Concordance* at the End?

Some Bibles include a concordance, which is a sort of index. It lists the verses in the Bible that mention a particular word or name. Most

Bibles don't contain a *complete* concordance, which lists every word in the Bible and every verse that has that word. A complete concordance is large enough to require a whole book by itself. The concordances found in the backs of Bibles just mention certain selected verses and words. For example, a Bible concordance might list the word *love* and would cite such well-known verses as John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 13:2. Many concordances are available today in a software format.

Why Is There a Dictionary at the End?

Your Bible may not have one, but it's a nice thing to have. What you have is really a mini-dictionary. Since the Bible is so big and contains so much information about people, places, and events, a comprehensive Bible dictionary is a full book all by itself. The dictionaries in Bibles usually list only the most important people, places, and things, giving a brief definition of each one and telling why it is important and where you can locate it in the Bible. This is a useful tool for new readers. For example, many parts of the New Testament refer to a man named Abraham, whose story is in the *Old* Testament. Your Bible's mini-dictionary may explain where you can find the story of Abraham (it's in Genesis, chapters 12 through 25) and why he is considered so important in both the Old and New Testaments.

Why Are There Footnotes?

You will notice that most Bibles have footnotes at the bottoms of the pages. Like footnotes in any book, these contain important information. And as with any book, the important thing is the book's text, not its footnotes. But the Bible is an old book, and many of the footnotes help explain information that might otherwise puzzle the reader. *Study Bibles* are Bibles with extensive notes. If your Bible is a study Bible, it will probably say so on the cover and the spine of the book (*NIV Study Bible*, *Life Application Study Bible*, *Oxford Study Bible* are just a few examples.) With a study Bible you get a lot of historical and theological information in the footnotes, usually written by well-respected Bible scholars. These notes explain such matters as dates of

events, key ideas being expressed, and so forth. Some notes in study Bibles also explain how the passage applies to life.

Even Bibles that aren't study Bibles will sometimes have footnotes. Let's consider some examples from the New International Version's version of the book of Psalms.

At the end of Psalm 3, the Hebrew word *Selah* appears. The footnote at the page bottom says, "A word of uncertain meaning, occurring frequently in the Psalms; possibly a musical term." You don't have to know this to appreciate Psalm 3, but at least the footnote keeps you from puzzling over just what *Selah* means. (In effect, the footnote says, "Don't worry; the scholars aren't sure what it means, either.")

The same way, in Psalm 51, verse 6, you read, "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts." The accompanying footnote says, "The meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain." (Good translators are humble enough to admit they don't know everything.)

Psalm 14, verse 1, contains the word *fool*. The footnote at the page bottom states, "The Hebrew words rendered *fool* in Psalms denote one who is morally deficient." The footnote is explaining that the Hebrew word doesn't translate exactly into any one English word. Our English word *fool* is close, but it doesn't quite convey that it has a moral as well as mental meaning.

Psalm 18, verse 2, describes God as "my shield and the horn of my salvation." *Horn*, you say? The footnote says, "*Horn* here symbolizes strength." The footnote is bridging a gap and translating a psalm many hundreds of years old, explaining that "horn" has a symbolic and not a literal meaning. (The people in Bible times, being closer to nature, generally thought of "horn" as "a thing on an animal's head," not "a musical instrument.")

Psalm 87, verse 4, says, "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me." The footnote says that "Rahab" is "a poetic name for Egypt." Here is a case where the translation in the text itself is inadequate for clarity. The reader has heard of Egypt, but only a Bible scholar would know that "Rahab" and "Egypt" are the same. So the footnote supplies that bit of information.

Several places in Psalms the phrase "praise the LORD" occurs, always