

Theo 210, SESSION #01: A Glossary of Important Terms for Biblical Studies The University of St. Francis

Basic Terms for Biblical Studies

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Scripture - Originally just meaning “writings” (Latin *scriptus* = “written”; cf. Greek γραφή/ *graphe*, Hebrew *mikra*), “scripture” now almost always refers to *religious writings* that are considered *authoritative, foundational, and/or sacred* by some religious group (see Matt 26:54-56; Luke 24:27-45; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 3:16). Thus, there are not only Jewish scriptures and Christian scriptures, but also Muslim scriptures, Hindu scriptures, etc.

Canon - An official list or collection of writings that a particular religious group considers as its “core scriptures” or “authorized books,” which are used by the group as the basis for its religious beliefs, moral precepts, and communal practices. The Greek word κανών (“*kanon*”) originally meant “measuring rod; rule; criterion” (cf. 2 Cor 10:13-16; Gal 6:16), but later came to mean such a list of writings that met certain criteria. “**Canonization**” or to be “**canonized**” refers to the process by which a book was accepted into the official list of core scriptures (such as the Bible) by a particular religious group. A scriptural canon is usually considered “*fixed*” or “*closed*,” meaning that no additional books will be added to it.

Bible - An authorized collection of Jewish scriptures (the “Hebrew Bible”) and/or Christian scriptures (often simply “the Bible”). We usually think of this as one “book”; but it is really a whole “library,” a compilation of many different books of various literary genres. The word comes from the Greek τα βιβλία (“*ta biblia*”), which is a plural word meaning “books” (see John 21:25; 2 Tim 4:13; Rev 20:12). Actually, one should always ask, “*Whose Bible?*” - because the Jewish Bible, the Catholic Bible, the Protestant Bible, and other “Bibles” are significantly different from each other (containing 24, 66, 73, or more books, as explained below). Although “Bible” is used metaphorically in many non-religious settings (a Golf Bible, a Bible for computer programmers, etc.), it does not properly refer to the scriptures of other religions (i.e., there is no “Muslim Bible” or “Hindu Bible”).

Testament / Covenant - These terms originally referred to a “formal agreement” (Hebrew *berith*, Greek *diatheke*, Latin *testamentum*) between two parties, with obligations on each side and consequences for breaking the agreement. “Testament” is later also used to refer to the written “covenants” between God and the Jewish and/or Christian people, as contained in the “Old Testament” and/or the “New Testament” (see Jer 31:31; Luke 22:20; Heb 8:7–9:17).

Scriptural / Canonical / Biblical - When used by Jews or Christians, these adjectives seem interchangeable, referring to any books contained in their Bibles (i.e., part of the “canon” of the Jewish and/or Christian scriptures). But remember: which books are considered part of the Bible depends on whom you ask! The 27 books of the New Testament are considered “scriptural/biblical” by all Christians, but not by Jews; and several books of the Old Testament are considered “canonical/biblical” by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians, but not by Jews or Protestant Christians (as explained in detail below). Moreover, the “scriptural” writings of any non-Judeo/Christian religion should not be called “biblical”; and they should only be called “canonical” if they are part of an “official list” of writings considered sacred by that religion.

non-biblical / non-canonical / non-scriptural books - Ancient writings that are *not* part of the Bible, including the OT Pseudepigrapha (Jewish), and many early Christian writings (many of which also called Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses). But again, beware: the same writing might be considered “biblical” by one group and “non-biblical” by another group!

Caution with some possibly ambiguous terms:

- **Jewish Scriptures** - can refer *either* to the Hebrew Bible (HB, for ancient or modern Jews who read Hebrew) *or* to the Septuagint (LXX, for ancient Jews and early Jewish-Christians who spoke Greek).
- **Christian Scriptures** - refers *not only* to the New Testament (NT), *but also* to the Old Testament (OT), since Christians accept *both* testaments in their Bibles.
- **Greek Scriptures** - can refer *either* to the LXX alone (for ancient Greek-speaking Jews) *or* to the combination of LXX *and* NT (for ancient and modern Greek-speaking Christians).

Ancient Jewish Scriptures:

Hebrew Bible (HB) - A collection of 24 “books” (or large “scrolls”), traditionally called the *Mikra* in Hebrew (or *Miqra*, lit. “writings”), now often referred to as the “**TaNaK**” or “Tanakh” (from the Hebrew names of its three main sections: *Torah* + *Nevi'im* + *Khetuvim*). It is closely related, but not identical, to what Christians call the “Old Testament” (see below). Most of the books in the HB were composed between the 10th and 6th centuries BCE, although they also contain some older source materials. Most were originally written in Hebrew, but a few books (or parts of them) were composed in Aramaic, a closely related ancient language. Throughout history, Jews have used these books as their “scriptures,” although many ancient Jews (esp. Greek-speaking Jews living outside of Palestine) had even larger collections of scriptures (some from more recent times, some composed in Greek; see the LXX below). The official “canon” of the HB was not determined until around 90 AD, when the leading Jewish rabbis of the time limited their biblical collection to the 24 Hebrew (or partly Aramaic) writings that came from the 6th century BCE or earlier. The HB is divided into the following **three categories** (with the second category frequently sub-divided in two):

Torah - often translated “Law,” but more accurately meaning “**Teaching**” or “**Instruction**” in Hebrew. Strictly speaking, “Torah” refers to the first five books of the HB (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), considered the “core” of the Bible by all Jews; they are sometimes also called the “*Five Books of Moses*” (due to the traditional opinion that Moses himself wrote all of them). More broadly, the word “Torah” is sometimes used to refer to the entire “Tanak.” Many Jews also distinguish between the “Written Torah” (in the Bible) and the “Oral Torah” (other instructions given to Moses on Mount Sinai, but not written down until much later, in the “rabbinic literature” of the 3rd to 7th centuries).

Nevi'im - meaning “**Prophets**”; subdivided in Jewish Bibles into the “*Former Prophets*” (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings - which also contain stories of early “prophets” like Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, Nathan, etc.), and the “*Latter Prophets*” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and “The Twelve” Minor Prophets; note that Jews do not include the Book of Daniel among the “Prophets,” but in the following category).

Ketuvim (or *Khetuvim*) - meaning “**Writings**”; this “miscellaneous” group includes the books of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes (called “*Wisdom Literature*” by Christians), the books of Ruth, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles (considered “*Historical Books*” in Christian Bibles), and the books of Daniel and Lamentations (placed among the “*Prophets*” in Christian Bibles).

Septuagint (LXX) - A collection of up to 53 books of ancient Jewish Scriptures written in Greek, including translations of all 24 books of the HB (Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah are longer in the Greek versions than in the original Hebrew), as well as seven or more additional books (the “Deuterocanonical Books”) that are not found in the HB. Several versions of the LXX have been preserved, some of which are slightly larger than others. The LXX was first translated and compiled around 250 BCE, probably in or near Alexandria, Egypt. The name “Septuagint” (meaning “seventy”) comes from an ancient Jewish legend that tells how 70 (or 72) scholars translated the whole collection (or at least the Torah) in 70 days. All the books of the LXX were considered “scriptures” by most Greek-speaking Jews and early Christians; thus it became the basis of the Christian “Old Testament” (see below). In contrast to the three divisions and 24 books of the HB, the LXX rearranges, renames, subdivides, and/or expands some of the books, and adds several more books, thus resulting in up to 53 books in **four main divisions**:

Pentateuch (Greek, lit. “five scrolls”) - the same five foundational books as in the “Torah” of the HB: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Historical Books - includes not only the four “*Former Prophets*” of the HB (although two are subdivided and renamed: Joshua, Judges, 1 Kingdoms, 2 Kingdoms, 3 Kingdoms, 4 Kingdoms), but also several of the books categorized as “*Writings*” in the HB (Ruth, Esther, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah), and several books not found in the HB (Judith, Tobit, 1 & 2 Maccabees, and sometimes 1 Esdras and 3 & 4 Maccabees).

Poetic Books - includes some of the miscellaneous “*Writings*” of the HB (Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Job) and several more books not found in the HB (Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach/Ecclesiasticus, and often Psalm 151, Odes, and Psalms of Solomon).

Prophetic Books - placed at the end as a fourth category; include not only the “*Latter Prophets*” of the HB (first the Minor Prophets, counted as 12 separate books, followed by the three Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), but also the books of Daniel and Lamentations (considered “*Writings*” in the HB), and a few other writings associated with Jeremiah and Daniel but not found in the HB (Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Susanna, Bel & the Dragon).

Deuterocanonical Books / OT Apocrypha - seven (or more) books that are in the LXX but not in the HB (Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch - think of the mnemonic “*T. J. McWEB*”), as well as some additions to the books of *Esther* and *Daniel* (longer in LXX than in HB). These texts *are* considered part of the biblical

canon by Orthodox and Catholic Christians (although recognized as later additions, and thus called “*Deuterocanonical*,” meaning a “second canon”), but they are *not* considered canonical by Jews and most Protestant Christians today (who call them “*Apocryphal*”). Some Protestant Bibles include the Apocrypha in a separate section between the OT and NT; some Orthodox Bibles have even more books, which are not considered canonical by Catholics (1 & 2 Esdras, 3 & 4 Maccabees, Psalm 151, etc.).

Overview Chart: see my comparison of the arrangement of the HB/OT books in Jewish, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant versions of the Bible.

Shorthand Summary: LXX = the ancient Greek translation of HB books + the “Apocrypha” or “Deuterocanonical Books.”

Non-Biblical Ancient Jewish Literature:

Pseudepigrapha - refers broadly to other ancient Jewish writings which are not part of the HB nor of the LXX, but are often attributed to a biblical figure (e.g. Jubilees, 1 Enoch, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, etc.). They were popular among ancient Jews, and thus are very valuable for historical purposes, even if they were never considered biblical by most people.

Inter-Testamental Literature - another collective term for an even broader range of Jewish literature written “between” the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) - several collections of ancient writings (2nd century BCE to 2nd century CE) discovered between 1947 and 1956 in various caves near the NW shores of the Dead Sea; most famous are the large scrolls and numerous small fragments found in eleven caves near the ruins at Khirbet Qumran, associated by most scholars with the Essenes (a monastic group in Ancient Judaism); although copies of most books of the Hebrew Bible were also found there, more important are the original writings of the Essene/Qumran group itself.

Philo - an important Jewish writer who lived in Alexandria in the early 1st cent. CE (roughly contemporary with Jesus); he used Greek philosophical language and images to interpret Jewish biblical traditions (and vice-versa).

Josephus - the most important Jewish historian from the late 1st century CE; he was a general at the beginning of the First Jewish War against Rome, but surrendered early and then wrote a history of the “Jewish War,” as well as a large history of his people, entitled “The Antiquities of the Jews.”

Rabbinic Literature - various collections of Jewish writings from the 3rd through 7th centuries CE, although they contain some traditions attributed to earlier rabbis, including some famous contemporaries of Jesus. Many Orthodox and Conservative Jews believe that the chain of tradition goes all the way back to Moses, who received both the written Torah (the Bible) and the Oral Torah (other traditions) from God at Mount Sinai. The most important rabbinic writings include the following:

- **Mishnah** -
- Mekilta, Sifra, Sifre, Tosefta, etc. -
- **Talmud** -
- Midrashim -
- Targumim -

Caution: *The DSS contain both biblical and non-biblical texts, but neither the Pseudepigrapha, nor the writings of Philo, Josephus, the Rabbis, or any other "Intertestamental Literature" is considered "biblical" by anyone, although some of this literature contains "biblical commentaries."*

Christian Scriptures (containing two parts:
both the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament”)

Old Testament (OT) - A collection of 53, or 49, or 46, or only 39 ancient Jewish books (depending on which Bible you have), including the history of God’s interactions with the people of Israel and related literary works from ancient Judaism. Although Jesus, his disciples, and the first few generations of Jewish Christians spoke Aramaic and used the Hebrew Bible (**HB**), the vast majority of early Christians spoke Greek (including the four Evangelists, Paul, and all other NT authors); thus, they read and quoted from the Septuagint (**LXX**) version of the ancient Jewish Scriptures. Some 2nd-century Christians thought that the God of the OT was so different from the God and Father of Jesus that they wanted to throw away the HB and *replace* it with the Gospels and writings of the Apostles. Most early Christians, however, used the newer Christian writings (eventually called “New Testament”) *in addition* to the Jewish Scriptures (which were contrasted as the “Old Testament”). Some modern scholars refer to the OT as the “First Testament,” in contrast to the NT as the “Second Testament.” Just like the **LXX** version of the Jewish Scriptures, the Christian OT is divided into four categories:

- **Law** - the same five books as in the “*Torah*” of the HB and the “*Pentateuch*” of the LXX: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy;
- **Historical Books** - the large collection of “Historical Books” from the LXX, covering the history of the people of Israel, from the time of Joshua to the Maccabees (thus covering from the late 13th century to the early 2nd century BCE);
- **Wisdom Literature** - the “Poetic Books” of the LXX, but rearranged to place Job first, followed by
- **Prophets** - the same “Prophetic Books” of the LXX, but rearranged to place the four “Major Prophets” first (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and a few smaller writings associated with them, such as Lamentations and Baruch), followed by the twelve “Minor Prophets” (note these are called “minor” not because they are less important than the “major” prophets, but only because their books are significantly shorter!).

Orthodox vs. Catholic vs. Protestant Versions of the OT - Some of the *Eastern Orthodox Churches* today include up to 53 books in their Old Testament, based on the largest version of the Septuagint. By the late Middle Ages, however, the *Western Church* (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church, but before the Protestant Reformation), had accepted only 46 books in its Old Testament (including the “Deuterocanonical” books of Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, and Baruch, but omitting such books as 1 & 2 Esdras, 3 & 4 Maccabees, Psalm 151, etc.). In the early 16th century, however, *Martin*

Luther and other Protestant reformers noticed that their Bibles contained several books that were not in the Hebrew Bibles used by their Jewish neighbors (“the Synagogue down the street,” so to speak). Since they knew the OT was originally the Bible of the Jewish people, Luther decided to remove those extra books from his Bible (calling them “Apocrypha”), thus reducing the number of OT books to 39. The Protestant Reformers did *not*, however, go back to the arrangement of the HB, but retained the same order and categorization of the OT books as found also in the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, based on the LXX version of the ancient Jewish scriptures (see my Comparative Chart of Jewish and Christian Bibles). Thus, it is totally wrong to say that the Catholic Church (and/or the Eastern Orthodox Churches) *added* some extra books to the Bible. Exactly the opposite is true: the Protestant reformers were the ones who *removed* several books that were part of the OT from the very beginnings of Christianity (recall that the LXX was composed around 250 BCE!).

New Testament (NT) - A collection of 27 early Christian writings composed by various authors from the middle of the 1st to very early 2nd centuries CE; it is sometimes called the “Second Testament,” especially by Jewish scholars, in contrast to the “First Testament” (the HB).

- All 27 of these books and letters were originally written in *Greek* (the “Koine” or “common” Greek of the time), although some may have had older Aramaic sources.
- Most of these writings were already considered “biblical” or “scriptural” by Christians by the end of the 2nd century.
- There were hundreds of other works written by Christians in the first few centuries that were not included in the New Testament.
- The official list of 27 approved writings (the NT “canon”) was not finalized until the end of the 4th century.
- The NT consists of a variety of *different* works in *different* literary genres, including the following categories:

Gospels - early Christian narratives about the words and actions, the life and death of Jesus. The word “Gospel” is derived from the Old English “god-spel” (*god* = good; *spel* = news), which is equivalent to Greek *eu-angelion* (*eu* = good; *angelion* = message; *angelos* = messenger). Originally “gospel” referred to *oral* proclamations (see Mark 1:14-15), but it is later used for a particular genre of *written* literature (based on its use in Mark 1:1).

- The NT includes three “**Synoptic Gospels**” (Matthew, Mark, Luke), called “Synoptics” because they see Jesus “with the same eye”,

- and the “**Fourth Gospel**” (John), which is substantially later than and different from the Synoptics in content, style, and theology.
- We know of about 30 other early Christian “Gospels” that were not accepted into the New Testament (called “non-canonical Gospels”).
- All four canonical Gospels were originally written in Koine (“Common”) **Greek** between the late 60’s and early 90’s of the 1st century.
- The Gospel authors are usually called the four “**Evangelists**” (from Greek *euangelion*, lit. “good news”).
- The official titles are “The Gospel *according to...*” (although we often use the shorter but less accurate titles “Gospel *of...*”)
- The **Q-Document** (“**Quelle**” = “source” in German) is a hypothetical collection of sayings & teachings of Jesus. Many scholars think it was a written source (from the 50’s?) used later by Matthew and Luke, but it is now lost.

Acts of the Apostles - an early partial account of the historical spread of Christianity; not a complete “history” of 1st-century Christianity, since it focuses only on a few people and a few events from a particular perspective, but leaves out most of what we would want to know about how Christianity spread to other parts of the early Roman Empire and beyond.

- It was written by the same person who authored the third Gospel (the evangelist called “Luke”).
- Thus Luke/ Acts together should be considered a two-volume work, even if the two parts are now separated by John’s Gospel.

Epistles or Letters - written by some of the early apostles to various Christian communities or individuals, including:

- Thirteen “*Letters attributed to Paul*” (Rom, 1 & 2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1 & 2 Thess, 1 & 2 Tim, Titus, Phlm); these are often subdivided into:
 - seven “authentic” or “*undisputed Pauline Letters*” (Rom, 1 & 2 Cor, Gal, Phil, 1 Thess, Phlm), since almost all scholars agree that Paul himself wrote these,
 - and six “disputed” or “*deutero-Pauline Letters*” (Col, Eph, 2 Thess, 1 & 2 Tim, Titus), since some scholars think these are “authentic” [written by Paul], while others argue they were written by Paul’s followers;
 - the three letters written to early “pastors” (1 & 2 Tim, Titus) are usually also called the “*Pastoral Epistles*.”
- An anonymous sermon apparently written “*To the Hebrews*” (but *not* written by or even attributed to Paul!),

- And seven “Catholic Epistles” (James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 & 2 & 3 John, Jude); “Catholic” means “universal, general”, indicating that these letters were written to a wider audience of many different Christians, not just one community.

Book of Revelation (*not plural!*) - also called “*The Apocalypse*.” A book containing seven short letters addressed to the “Churches of Asia,” and a long series of highly symbolic “visions” attributed to a certain man named “John,” culminating in the destruction of all evil and the establishment of “a new heaven and a new earth,” and “the new Jerusalem.”

Non-Canonical Early Christian Literature:

NT Apocrypha & Pseudepigrapha - refers broadly to other early Christian writings of various genres that were not accepted into the New Testament, even though many are attributed (falsely) to an apostolic figure; some (but far from all) of these are “Gnostic” writings (stemming from various Gnostic sects), which were rejected because they were considered theologically inadequate or objectionable by the dominant strands of early Christianity; other writings were judged theologically acceptable, but were not accepted into the NT Canon because they were not judged to be “apostolic” (not stemming from the first generation of apostles, thus not old enough). See the [Non-Canonical Literature](#) page for comprehensive lists and full texts.

- Apocryphal *Gospels* - such as the Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of James, Gospel of Judas, Gospel of Mary Magdalene, etc. (about 30 total)
- Apocryphal *Acts* - such as the Acts of Peter, the Acts of Paul, the Acts of Thomas, the Acts of Andrew, the Acts of John, etc.
- Apocryphal *Epistles* - such as the Epistle to the Laodiceans, the Correspondence between Paul and Seneca, the Pseudo-Titus Epistle, etc.
- Apocryphal *Apocalypses* - such as the Apocalypse of Peter, the Ascension of Isaiah, the Christian Sibyllines, various Gnostic apocalypses, etc.

Nag Hammadi Library - A collection of fifty-two texts (forty-five separate titles, with some duplicates) bound in thirteen papyrus codices from the fourth century; discovered in 1945 in Upper Egypt, near the town of Nag Hammadi. Many but not all of these texts, which are written in Coptic (an Egyptian-Greek hybrid language of the early Christian era), are “gnostic,” including several of the apocryphal texts mentioned above and several texts that were previously unknown. See the [Nag Hammadi Library](#) page for more details.

Patristic Literature - Writings of the “fathers” (bishops, theologians, and other influential leaders) of the early Church, again comprising a variety of genres: letters & epistles, homilies & sermons, theological and philosophical treatises, biblical commentaries, etc. These writings are often subdivided into two main groups: Ante-Nicene Literature (from before the Council of Nicea, 325 CE) and Nicene & Post-Nicene Literature (from after 325). See the Early Church Fathers page for full texts.

- Some of the *earliest Ante-Nicene writers* include Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus of Lyons, etc.
- The four greatest *post-Nicene* authors of the *Eastern/Byzantine Church* are Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nazianzus.
- The four greatest *post-Nicene* authors of the *Western/Latin Church* are Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, Augustine of Hippo, and Gregory the Great.

Documents of the Ecumenical Councils - Brief summaries of Christian beliefs (called “Creeds”) and other decrees were agreed upon at meetings of the leading bishops of the early Church, esp. during the 4th and 5th Centuries, but continuing throughout the centuries. The first four Ecumenical Councils were held at Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451).

Translations and Editions of the Bible:

Itala, or Old Latin - Christians in the Western Roman Empire (Italy & environs) began translating the Christian scriptures (both OT & NT) into their own native language, Latin, during the 3rd and 4th centuries. The OT books were usually translated from the LXX (the Greek translation and expansion of the HB - see above), while the NT books were translated from the original Greek texts.

Vulgate - a Latin version of both the Old and New Testaments, translated in the late 4th and early 5th centuries by St. Jerome at the request of Pope Damasus; it became the “official” Latin version of the Catholic Church for many centuries (i.e., the one used for the readings proclaimed during the Mass, as found in the official “Lectionaries”), intended to replace the various different “Old Latin” versions. As a true biblical scholar, Jerome was familiar not only with the Old Latin and the Greek versions of the New Testament, but also with the Old Latin, Greek (LXX) and Hebrew (HB) versions of the Old Testament. While comparing all these versions, Jerome based his own new Latin translation on the original language of each book, as far as possible. Thus, he translated the books of the HB from Hebrew into Latin, the deuterocanonical books (the extra OT books found in the LXX but not in the HB) from Greek into Latin, and the NT books from Greek into Latin.

Medieval Translations - Since the Vulgate was the dominant edition of the Christian Bible in the West from the 5th century onward, the earliest translations of the Bible into Anglo-Saxon, German, English, and other European languages were all translations of the Latin Vulgate, rather than being produced from the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek for the various books of the OT; Greek for the books of the NT). In other words, they were translations of translations!

Modern Translations - From the time of the Reformation onward (16th century), scholars have stressed the need to translate each biblical book from its original language, as far as possible. That is, rather than translating the book of Isaiah from its version in the Latin Vulgate or the Greek Septuagint, one should use the original Hebrew version of Isaiah. One serious difficulty still remains, however, when there are several significantly different Hebrew versions of certain books, as is the case with Isaiah. There is not only the “Masoretic text” (medieval Jewish text), but several different Hebrew versions were discovered in the 20th century among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Summary Chart - to avoid confusion between so many different editions and versions and sections of “The Bible”:

Full Name	Abbrev.	Language	Origin	Contents	NT?
Hebrew Bible	HB, or TaNaK	mostly Hebrew originals; some later parts in Aramaic	Hebrew-speaking Ancient Israel (between ca. 1300 and 300 BCE)	24 books	no
Septuagint	LXX	mostly Greek translations of HB books; some additional books written in Greek	Greek-speaking Jewish Diaspora (Alexandria, Egypt - ca. 250 BCE)	46 to 53 books	no
Old Testament	OT	originally Hebrew , Aramaic, & Greek; later Latin and all other translations	Christian name for Jewish Scriptures (Cath & Orth use LXX; Prots use HB)	39 to 53 books	no
New Testament	NT	all originally Greek (some Aramaic sources?); later Latin and all other translations	Greek-speaking early Christians (Eastern Roman Empire; 1st century CE)	27 books	yes
Vulgate	Vulg.	Latin translations from the various originals	Latin-speaking Western Christianity (St. Jerome; ca. 380-420 CE)	OT & NT	yes

Some Important Tools for Biblical Research [see also my [NT Bibliography](#) page]:

Study Bible - an edition which prints not only the biblical text itself (as in a “Reader’s Bible”), but also extensive “editorial material,” including introductions, footnotes, cross-references, and appendices with maps, charts, time-lines, etc.

Bible Atlas - a book containing lots of maps and diagrams, and often also pictures and helpful discussions of biblical geography; good ones include the *Harpers Bible Atlas* and the *Macmillan Atlas of the Bible*.

Bible Commentary - a book of modern scholars’ explanations of biblical texts, arranged in biblical order (book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter, verse-by-verse); it usually includes notes on items necessary for understanding the text (historical, geographical, linguistic, etc.), and a scholar’s interpretation of its meaning (theological, rhetorical, and/or narrative); good one-volume commentaries covering the whole OT and NT include the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* and the *Harpers Bible Commentary*; multi-volume commentary series go into much more depth on each biblical book.

Bible Dictionary - contains articles on most biblical names, places, images, themes, and other words in alphabetical order; the best ones currently available are the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ABD; 6 vols.; 1992), the *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* (IDB: 4 vols. 1962; and IDBS: a “Supplement” vol. 1969), and the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (1996).

Lexicon - a dictionary explaining the meaning of ancient Hebrew or Greek words, and usually also providing some references for where and how they are used in ancient literature.

Concordance - a book listing all the passages in the Bible (OT and NT) in which a particular word is used; be careful when using English concordances, since a particular Hebrew or Greek word might be translated with various different English words; so always also look up related words and synonyms!

Parallel Bible - an edition which prints several English translations (often 4, 6, or 8 different ones! - and sometimes also the original Greek or Hebrew text) in parallel columns on the same pages so you can compare them easily; the texts follow the biblical order from Genesis to Revelation (or Matthew to Revelation if it covers only the NT).

Gospel Synopsis - a book which prints similar pericopes from the Gospels (either the Synoptics only, or possibly all four Gospels) in parallel columns on the same pages for easy comparison; it uses only one English translation (and/or Greek texts). Our *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, edited by K. Aland, is based on the RSV (Revised Standard Version). Pericopes are arranged roughly from the beginning of Matt to the end of John, but since pericopes are in different orders in the Synoptics, and most of John's material is not in the Synoptics at all, many pericopes have to be printed out of biblical order or printed twice.

Interlinear Bible - an edition in which each line of the original biblical text (OT Hebrew or NT Greek) is followed by a line containing a literal English equivalent directly underneath each Hebrew or Greek word; since the word order of the ancient languages is very different from any modern languages, the English equivalents seem very strange, chopped up, and out of order; thus a smooth English translation is usually also provided in the margins.

Other Important Terms:

Genre - the literary “form” or “category” of a text (not just biblical, but any literature); larger genres in the NT include Gospels, Letters, Acts, Apocalypses, Novels, Biographies, etc.; smaller genres within the Gospels include parables, sayings, controversy dialogues, healing miracles, exorcisms, nature miracles, etc.

Pericope (*not* “periScope”; *pronounced* “peh-RIH-cuh-pee”) - an individual “passage” within the Gospels, with a distinct beginning and ending, so that it forms an independent literary “unit”; similar pericopes are often found in different places and different orders in the Gospels; pericopes can include various genres (parables, miracle stories, evangelists’ summaries, etc.)

Parable - a metaphorical story featuring common images and vivid comparisons, but usually with a twist; many (but not all) of Jesus’ parables are about the Reign of God. *Caution:* “parables” are only stories told **BY** Jesus, but **not** all stories **about** Jesus; the Gospels’ descriptions about Jesus’ actions are better called “passages,” “paragraphs,” “stories,” or “pericopes.”

Exegesis - careful investigation of the original meaning of a text in its historical and literary contexts; the word comes from a Greek verb meaning “to lead out of” (Greek “*ex*” = “out”; “*ago*” = “to lead/go/draw”); the process basically involves asking analytical questions about various aspects of the texts and their contexts; the opposite process is called *Eisegesis*, which means “*reading* [your own opinions] *into*” the text (*not* a good idea in biblical studies!)

Criticisms - various methods of doing biblical exegesis, each having a specific goal and a specific set of questions; biblical “criticism” does not mean “criticizing” the text (i.e. what you don’t like or don’t agree with), but asking “critical” questions (based on “criteria” that are as clear, careful, and objective as possible).

Some Contrasting Pairs:

Primary Literature - writings or sources from *ancient* times, such as the biblical texts themselves

Secondary Literature - anything written by *modern* scholars, often interpreting the ancient texts

Manuscripts - ancient (or modern) texts “written by hand”; often copies of copies of copies, with significant differences

Print Editions - printed copies; made after the invention of moveable-type printing by Johannes Gutenberg, ca. 1453

Ancient Versions - translations into other ancient languages, such as Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, etc.

Modern Translations - translations into English, Spanish, German, and other modern languages

Papyrus - an Egyptian *plant*; a paper-like writing material made from it; cheaper, but not as durable; see esp. P52 and P75

Parchment (Vellum) - animal *skins* prepared for writing; much more durable, but also much more expensive; see Vaticanus

Scroll (Roll) - long sheets written on one side only, then rolled-up (could be made of papyrus or vellum)

Codex - written on both sides, then bound in book form (could also be made of papyrus or vellum)

Majuscule - early manuscripts written in
ALLCAPITALLETTERSUSUALLYWITHOUTPUNCTUATIONORSPACES

Minuscule - later manuscripts written with small letters, with punctuation and spaces between words