

James McDonald

BEYOND BELIEF

Two thousand years of bad faith
in the Christian Church



G

BEYOND BELIEF

BEYOND BELIEF

*Two Thousand Years of Bad Faith
in the Christian Church*



JAMES McDONALD

Garnet
PUBLISHING

BEYOND BELIEF
Two Thousand Years of Bad Faith in the Christian Church

Published by
Garnet Publishing
8 Southern Court
South Street
Reading
RG1 4QS
UK

www.garnetpublishing.co.uk

Copyright © James McDonald, 2011

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

First Edition

ISBN: 978-0-86372-381-0

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Typeset by Samantha Barden
Jacket design by Garnet Publishing

Printed and bound in Lebanon by International Press:
interpress@int-press.com

errata and updates may be found online at
<http://www.badnewsaboutchristianity.com/errata/>

For Susannah Jones, née Lewis

CONTENTS



Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	xi
A Note on Scope and Sources	xiii
1 The Reliability of Christian Authorities	1
The Old Testament	1
The New Testament	34
Other Sources	71
Summary	85
2 The Development of Christianity	95
What Did Jesus Believe Himself To Be?	95
Who Founded Christianity?	116
How Old are Christian Doctrines and Where Did They Come From?	129
Where Did Other Christian Ideas and Practices Come From?	152
Is There Such a Thing as Orthodox Christianity?	177
How Did The Priesthood Arise?	197
3 Facts and Fictions	247
Manipulation of the Facts	247
Method 1: Suppress Inconvenient Evidence	247
Method 2: Select Sources and Arguments	251
Method 3: Fabricate Records	258
Method 4: The Retrospective Prophecy	269
Method 5: Attribute Ambiguous Authority to the Old Testament	278

Method 6: Ignore or Distort New Testament Injunctions and Examples	294
Method 7: Invent, Amend and Discard Teachings and Practices	302
Method 8: Manipulate Language	320
Case Study A: Re-branding a Sky God	342
Case Study B: Making One God Out of Many	351
Case Study C: How the Virgin Mary Stays a Virgin	367
Case Study D: How the Nativity Story Was Created	375
Case Study E: Textual Problems	382
Summary	393
4 Science and Christianity	405
Traditional Christian Battlegrounds	405
Recent Christian Battlegrounds	429
5 Religion Today and Tomorrow	445
Religious Discrimination	445
Christian Discrimination	449
Moral Dangers of Religion	452
Continued Abuse of Power	456
Present Dangers	459
Appendices	463
Appendix A: Jesus' Family	463
Appendix B: The Apostles	464
Appendix C: Postburial Events	466
Bibliography	467
Index	473

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



My sincere thanks go to Robert Dinwiddie and to Marcus Williamson for their invaluable suggestions and for their assistance in editing this book.

James McDonald
France, September 2010

INTRODUCTION



And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 8:32

To a large extent the history of the Western World over the last 2,000 years is the history of the Christian Church. Without understanding the role of the Church it is not possible to understand the history of Europe, the Middle East, Asia or the Americas. Nor is it possible to understand the development of ideas in such areas as politics, education, medicine, law, sociology and architecture: almost anything in fact from art to astrophysics.

Repercussions from crusades that took place over 900 years ago are still in evidence. The division of the Roman Empire in early Christian times also reverberates to the present day. The border between the eastern and western parts of the Empire re-emerged in the late twentieth century as a fault line in what was then Yugoslavia. That line is now the border between Croatia and Serbia. On the side that used to lie in the Western Empire Croats use the Latin alphabet of the Roman Catholic Church; on the other side, the side that used to lie in the Eastern Empire, Serbs use the Greek alphabet favoured by the Orthodox Church.

Whatever one's own personal beliefs, the Christian Churches provide material for the enquiring mind. Why did Jesus never forsake Judaism if his intention was to found a new religion? Why are there so many different Christian denominations? What do they all believe, and what exactly do they disagree about? Why do the Orthodox Churches claim to be catholic, and why does the Catholic Church claim to be orthodox? Why have long suppressed theories about the role of Magdalene generated such interest in recent times? In the course of looking at the history of the Christian Churches we will find the answers to these and many other questions.

Much of the material here can be confirmed by reference to the Bible, and even some of this will be surprising. Christians are now generally aware that Bible stories are often retellings of stories found in older pagan literature, but many are unaware that numerous gods are mentioned in the Bible, not to mention numerous 'christs'. Almost all will be surprised to discover that for the first few centuries mainstream Christians regarded the Emperor of the Roman Empire as infallible. Addressed as *Your Holiness* and acclaimed as *Pontifex Maximus* and *Bishop of Bishops*, a long line of Emperors were considered incapable of error on a range of matters including faith and morals, long before the concept of a Pope was invented.

The history of the Church is different from the version popularly taught in most European and North American schools. For example, few people, other than Church scholars, are aware that no original text of the Bible, or any part of it, survives. Nor that the texts that do survive are late and contradictory, and bear evidence of tampering (including the late addition of the stories of Jesus' birth and resurrection). Few realise the extent to which forged documents helped Churches to establish doctrine and political power.

Again, most Christians see their system of belief as dating from the earliest times, but this idea becomes difficult to sustain when one looks into when and how key doctrines were established.

This book is likely to contain some big surprises for anyone who is not already a Church scholar, and to explain a few puzzles. The scope is wide, from early history to the present day, from Chinese Nestorian Christians to American Mormons, from ancient Greek philosophical arguments to medieval theology and the rise of science and rationalism.

A NOTE ON SCOPE AND SOURCES



A major difficulty lies in defining exactly what the terms *Church* and *Churches* mean. How does a Church differ from a denomination or a sect? Which organisations count as Christian Churches? Do heretical groups? Do schismatic groups? Do those who deny traditional doctrines, as the Quakers do? Without being pedantic, it is difficult to specify exactly what the terms mean each time they are used. Generally the context will make it clear which denominations are included. There have always been different groups that call themselves Christian while disagreeing with each other on important points of doctrine.

When discussing the early Church, the context will make it clear whether the term Church covers the Jewish Christians, St Paul's group (from which most of today's mainstream Churches have evolved) or the various Gnostic groups.* From the fourth century onwards we are generally talking about St Paul's group, and the context will distinguish between Orthodox Churches (including what is now called the Roman Church) and the many other Churches. From around the time of the Crusades the context will distinguish between the Eastern (or Orthodox) Church and the Western Church (also called the Roman Church or Roman Catholic Church). After the Reformation the context will distinguish between the Western Churches: Roman on one hand and Western Reformed (mainly Protestant – Lutheran and Calvinist) on the other. Later still the context distinguishes between these and a proliferation of nonconformist Churches. The fact is that there have always been so many different factions that it is impractical to indicate in each case exactly which factions are included and which excluded. Any consequent ambiguity is the price of condensing the scope into a

* Gnostics are people who believe they possess a secret knowledge of spiritual matters, usually obtained by direct communication with God, or with a god.

single volume. Wherever the term *mainstream Churches* is used, it may be taken as encompassing all but the smallest fringe groups.

It may be helpful to clarify the relationship between the Orthodox Church (or Churches) and the Roman Church. In the first few centuries of the Christian Church, several cities were established as self-governing local centres. Although they were self-governing, they came to regard Constantinople, the new capital of the Roman Empire, as their centre. Greek, the language of the Empire, was also their language. One of the local Churches, the one based in Rome, subsequently split away from the others. Hence it is known as the *Church of Rome* or the *Roman Church*. It adopted Latin in place of the traditional Greek, so it also came to be known as the *Latin Church*. To contrast this Church from the other members of the federation, the other members were referred to collectively as the *Greek Church*.

Both Roman and Greek Churches claimed to encompass the whole of the one true Church and so called themselves catholic (from the Greek for *whole, general* or *comprehensive*). Both also claimed to be orthodox (from the Greek for *right thinking*). In practice, however, the Roman Church is generally referred to as the Catholic Church and the Greek Church as the Orthodox Church, though they are sometimes contrasted as the Western and Eastern Churches.

The Orthodox Church still regards itself as a federation of self-governing Churches, which are thus sometimes referred to as the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and so on. The Catholic Church, having its head in Rome, is sometimes called the Roman Catholic Church. To sum up:

Western Church = Roman Church = Catholic Church =
Roman Catholic Church

Eastern Church = Greek Church = Orthodox Church =
Greek Orthodox Church + Russian Orthodox Church etc.

As far as possible footnotes and references are to works that are readily available as well as authoritative, for example to popular English translations of works such as those of early historians like Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–c.340) and influential medieval works like *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches). So too, references to Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* are to a popular one-volume edition.

Most readers will not have access to early texts and in any case cannot be expected to be fluent in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Hence, extensive use has been made of English translations of the Bible. In this way, readers can confirm many of the points made in this book that might appear surprising. In general, quotations from the Bible are from the Authorised Version (also known as the King James Version), except where there is a clear reason not to use it, for example because the meaning is obscured by seventeenth-century English, or because a key word in it was mistranslated. Such cases are always indicated explicitly, and the source of the more recent translation is provided. Modern translations often include useful explanations and footnotes, and two of these have been used extensively – the *New International Version* or NIV (widely used by Protestant Churches) and the *Jerusalem Bible* or JB (widely used by the Roman Church).

THE RELIABILITY OF CHRISTIAN AUTHORITIES



THE OLD TESTAMENT

Here is wisdom; this is the royal Law; these are the lively Oracles of God.

Words spoken at the presenting of the Bible
at the British Coronation Service

In this chapter we will review the nature of the Old Testament, and assess some of the claims made for it by Jews and Christians.

The Old Testament is divided into a number of books, most of them originally written in Hebrew, all of them now considered by Jews to have been inspired by God. Some parts of some books were originally written in Aramaic,* some apparently in Syriac or other Middle Eastern languages, but all such texts were rendered into Hebrew. Later these Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek, Latin and other languages. Some additions to the text were written in Greek and survive only in Greek. The Jews distinguished between three kinds of book within the Old Testament: the *Torah* (Law), *Nebim* (Prophets) and *Ketubim* (Writings). They came to be regarded as divinely inspired in this same chronological order: first the *Torah*, later the *Nebim*, and later still the *Ketubim*.

For centuries the Church taught that God had communicated his word through certain Jewish prophets. There was no doubt about who these prophets were or what they had written, no question that the original text had ever been tampered with, and no possibility that errors had been introduced in authorised translations. Not only was the text

* Aramaic was a common language in the Middle East from around 700 BC to AD 700 (and is still spoken today in a few areas).

internally consistent and free from error, but it also contained nothing that was superfluous. Furthermore it was held that the text had been set down in chronological order. Those without learning generally held that the text was to be interpreted literally, but biblical scholars have always used a certain amount of interpretation (they call it exegesis) to help understand the more opaque passages.

Traditionally, Jews believed that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was the infallible word of God. Orthodox Christians held that the Greek translation called the Septuagint held the same status. For centuries this was the only version used by Christians. The Roman Church later accorded the same status to a fourth-century Latin translation (the Vulgate); and later still Protestants accorded it to their own translations. Many fundamentalist Christians still believe that the Old Testament is the literal and infallible word of God, but over the last 200 years or so virtually all Christian scholars have abandoned such beliefs.

What would we expect of the Old Testament if it were, as claimed, the word of God? We might reasonably expect that there would be no doubt about what constituted the Old Testament. The books in it, called the canon, should be clearly defined. Furthermore this canon should be unchanged from the earliest days of Christianity. We might even expect some sort of divine confirmation of it. We might also expect that the Bible would be original. We would not for example expect to find stories that have been plagiarised from neighbouring cultures or other religions. If the claims made for the Bible were true, then in view of their importance we might expect that the original manuscripts would have been carefully preserved. Failing this, we might expect that various copies would at least agree with each other. We certainly would not expect to find evidence of tampering and later editing. We might also reasonably expect various books to have been written by the authors to whom they are attributed, and in the historical periods claimed for them. Also, if translations were divinely inspired, as the Greek Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, and English Authorised Version have been claimed to be, then we might expect the same standards of them as of the original text. We would not expect to find evidence of deliberate mistranslation. Also, if the Bible represented the infallible word of God, then it might reasonably be expected to be internally consistent and free from factual errors.

These expectations are not unreasonable. Neither are they merely the expectations of modern rationalists. Christians have made all of these claims and in the past have persecuted people for doubting them.

The Canon of the Old Testament

Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Ecclesiastes 12:12

There is no evidence that any divine agency ever issued or confirmed an authorised list of contents for anything like a Bible, or even for an Old Testament. Jewish scholars disagreed with each other about what constituted Holy Scripture. When the Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37–c.100) listed books believed to be of divine origin he counted only four amongst what would now be called the Writings.¹ Later Jews (and Christians) would count no fewer than eleven.

By the time of Jesus, the Jews had included some books as scriptural on grounds that are now known to have been flawed. The book of Esther, for example, is a popular romance that does not even mention God. Furthermore, the story in it looks suspiciously like a version of an old Babylonian myth. There was much debate in Jewish circles as to whether Esther should be counted as scripture, and eventually it won hesitating approval, primarily because it justifies the Jewish institution of Purim.* However, the book had to be reduced by half to make it acceptable. The Song of Songs, also called Canticles, is an anthology of love poems, whose place in the canon was also disputed. It won approval on the erroneous ground that its author was Solomon, hence its alternative name, the Song of Solomon. Its explicit sex scenes have long caused unease amongst both Jews and Christians, who have traditionally mollified themselves with the belief that it is some sort of allegory. Ecclesiastes found its way into the canon because it was also mistakenly believed to have been written by Solomon. Uncomfortable material was removed: for example 18 psalms had to be dropped from the book of Psalms.² The

* Purim is a Jewish holiday that commemorates the deliverance of Persian Jews from a purported plot to exterminate them around the fifth century BC.

book of Daniel found its way in under false pretences, having been written much later than it purports to have been.

The Jews in Jerusalem were stricter than the Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora* in what they regarded as divinely inspired. Greek-speaking Jews included 1 Esdras, Judith, Tobit (Tobias) and the books of the two Maccabees with the histories, and Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (= Ben Sirach) and Baruch and the Prayer of Manasseh with the poetic and prophetic books, while the Song of the Three Holy Children, Susanna and the Elders, and Bel and the Dragon were appended to the book of Daniel. Arguments about what was and what was not genuine scripture prompted Jewish scholars to consider the question around the end of the first century AD. The first attempt at settling a definitive Jewish canon was reputedly made around AD 90 at the Council of Jamnia, where Jewish scholars discussed the validity of various books. If such a council did ever meet,³ its decisions apparently failed to reach the Jews of the Diaspora, for they continued to accept as scripture works that other scholars had rejected, and indeed they continued to tamper with and supplement what they already had for many years to come.

When early Christians addressed the problem of what to regard as canonical, there was a distinct lack of agreement. No one knows what Jesus would have regarded as canonical. He probably never considered the question, since the question of a canon had not yet arisen. The first Christian known to have assembled a definitive list of Christian writings was Marcion (AD *c.*85–160), a ship owner and native of Sinope (Sinop in modern Turkey), in the latter half of the second century AD. He had a low opinion of Christianity's Jewish origins and omitted the whole of the Old Testament. Stimulated into action by Marcion, the Church Father Irenaeus (AD *c.*130–*c.*200), Bishop of Lyons, compiled his own canon, which did include a version of the Old Testament.

Books that were held to be non-canonical by Jewish scholars continued to be regarded as canonical by the Jews of the Diaspora, and this dichotomy has echoed throughout Christendom to the present day, since Christian scholars generally accepted the Jews as authorities on their own scriptures. Initially the Church accepted the disputed books, at least partly because the Septuagint included them, and the Septuagint

* The Jews of the Diaspora were Jews living outside the traditional Bible lands.

was considered to have been divinely inspired. Nevertheless, particularly unconvincing books, such as Esther, were excluded.⁴ Leading churchmen were still disputing books like Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus as late as the eighth century,⁵ and disagreements continued for centuries to come. When Protestants started reconsidering the canon they rejected the disputed books, falling back into line with the Hebrew texts but printing the disputed ones as an appendix. At the Council of Trent in 1545–7 the Roman Church reconsidered its attachment to the Septuagint and decided to reject from the canon 1 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh, along with a late addition, 2 Esdras.⁶ The Eastern Churches reached their own compromise in 1672, accepting some disputed books and rejecting others.⁷

So it is that the principal Churches still disagree about the canon of the Old Testament. Roman Catholic versions of the Bible include seven whole books and several further parts of books that are omitted from Anglican and Protestant versions. The material missing from the Anglican versions (listed in Article 6 of the 39 Articles) is included in the Apocrypha, now generally bound as a separate volume.⁸ The Apocrypha takes its name from the Greek word *apocryphos* meaning *hidden away*. Works hidden away in the Apocrypha were so unlikely that they have given rise to the word *apocryphal*, meaning fanciful or imaginary. In his German Bible, Martin Luther (1483–1546) excluded 1 and 2 Esdras not only from the canon, but also from the appendix of apocryphal works. To complicate matters further, some books that are not generally considered even apocryphal by modern Churches are considered as fully canonical by some ancient Churches. For example, the Ethiopic Church regards 1 Enoch as canonical. Their case is strengthened by the fact that a New Testament author cites 1 Enoch as though it were valid scripture.⁹

The key point here is not that some biblical works are fanciful but that there is no reliable way of knowing which works possessed God's own authority. Was it the selection of the Jews of Jerusalem or the Jews of the Diaspora? Was it the works chosen by the Eastern Churches or the Western Church, or by the Roman Catholics, the Protestants, or by one of the hundreds of other Christian sects with their own canon? It seems odd that God should have permitted such a lack of clarity and so much disagreement about the contents of his divine revelation. It is also odd that the true word of God is not immediately distinguishable from the work of impostors. No version of the canon was so obviously divine

that it could inspire universal agreement. Indeed, Churches typically decide their canons by a majority vote. Furthermore, all the oldest Churches have revised their canons over the centuries. For many people, the implication is that all such canons are not the selections of God at all but of fallible and capricious human beings.

An Original Work?

... Tear down your house, I say, and build a boat. These are the measurements of the barque as you shall build her: let her beam equal her length, let her deck be roofed over like the vault that covers the abyss; then take up into the boat the seed of all living creatures

The Epic of Gilgamesh, c.2500 BC (translation by N. K. Sandars)

If the books of the Old Testament contained God's unique revelation, they might reasonably be expected to be original. If on the other hand they were writings typical of the Middle East between 2,000 and 3,000 years ago, they would be likely to contain material plagiarised from other works and from neighbouring peoples. Which pattern does the Old Testament best fit? Did any biblical stories exist before God revealed them to his chosen people?

The Old Testament is not a single work but a collection of ancient Jewish writings. As a cursory glance shows, it is an amalgamation of laws, genealogies, chronicles (or histories), myths, proverbs, poetry, songs, eroticism, propaganda, prophecy, allegories, morality tales and humorous stories. In the original Hebrew there are numerous folk etymologies, puns and acrostics.* However, nearly all of these are lost in translation.‡ Any good story or choice morsel circulating in the Middle

* An acrostic is a poem in which the first letter in each line spells a name or other word.

‡ The original Hebrew is full of folk-etymology puns, along the lines of man ('adam) being created from earth ('adamah), which are lost in translation. Similarly the name Eve is derived from the verb 'to live'. Puns explain many apparently random phrases, for example 'Tell it not in Gath' resonates more in Hebrew, in which the words *tell* and *Gath* sound similar. Examples of acrostics may be found in the first four chapters of Lamentations, also Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145, and Proverbs 31:10–31. In traditional English versions of the Bible, Psalm 119 is still divided up using Hebrew letters as numbers.

East could be included in the anthology, subject to amendments where necessary. The Jewish scholars who compiled the books that now comprise the Old Testament borrowed from the songs, folk tales and myths not only of the Jews themselves, but of their neighbours too. This sort of plagiarism was both widespread and acceptable in the Middle East at the time.

To take a well-known example, the story of Noah's ark (Genesis 6–8) closely parallels the story of a flood given in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.¹⁰ *Gilgamesh* is an Assyrian work dating from around 2500 BC, almost 2,000 years before the biblical account was written. The story from *Gilgamesh* is the more complete version. In fact the biblical account appears to be an amalgamation of two derivative versions of the *Gilgamesh* story. Odd details are lost in the biblical account: for example where in *Gilgamesh* a raven, a dove and a swallow are sent to find dry land, in the biblical version only a raven and a dove are sent. Both stories appear to explain rainbows. In the biblical version Jahveh places his bow in the sky as a reminder of his covenant not to cause such a flood again. In the older version the goddess Ishtar dedicates her spectacular necklace with the 'jewels of Heaven' made by the sky god. The Jews would certainly have known this epic. It was to be found in many Eastern libraries – fragments have been found in Turkey, Syria, Israel and Egypt.¹¹ A Babylonian version of the story is also known, again older than the biblical version, and again more complete. There is also a well-known Greek version of the story.

The story of Moses' mother hiding her infant son in a basket of rushes caulked with pitch, and entrusting him to the river, is also adapted from an older Middle Eastern story. The original river was the Euphrates, the role of Pharaoh's daughter was played by the goddess Ishtar, and the child grew up to be the Mesopotamian king, Sargon of Akkad. In ancient times rivers were thought of as the embodiment of gods, so in the original tale the mother was entrusting her child to a deity, not abandoning him to the elements. The story of Moses, which may be found in Exodus 2:1–10, dates from about 1,000 years after that of Sargon.

Another well-known story from the Old Testament is that of God giving Moses tablets of stone on which were inscribed God's commandments. But long before then the Babylonian Sun god Shamash had handed stone tablets of the law to Hammurabi, a king during the

first dynasty of Babylon, around 4,000 years ago. Again there are clear parallels: Hammurabi received his tablets on top of a ziggurat, while Moses received his on top of a mountain.¹² The laws given to Hammurabi are sophisticated, exceeding 280 in number. They evidently provided the basis not only for the story of divine laws being inscribed on tablets, but also for some of the later Jewish laws. To take an example, the Code of Hammurabi states that:

If a man shall put out the eye of another, then let his own eye be put out. If a man shall knock out the teeth of another... then let his own teeth be knocked out

The familiar Mosaic Code (Exodus 21:23–4) is more concise:

...thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth...

Hammurabi predated Moses by many hundreds of years. God seems to have copied the behaviour of other Middle Eastern gods. For example many divinities practised the art of separating the waters, as God did for Moses and his followers fleeing from Egypt.

Other Old Testament events have clear parallels in classical mythologies. For example the story of the Tower of Babel echoes that of the Giant's staircase to Olympus. Samson slaying the lion echoes Hercules slaying the Nemean lion (and also has an older parallel in the saga of Gilgamesh). Again, in Genesis (22:1–13) God tests Abraham by telling him to kill his son Isaac and offer him up as a burnt offering. At the last minute God settles for the sacrifice of a ram instead. This is an adaptation of another old Sumerian legend, tailored to demonstrate God's mercy and benevolence. It also has a classical parallel. When Agamemnon was about to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia, the goddess Diana, struck by compassion, substituted a goat at the last minute.

Many passages occur in more than one book of the Bible,¹³ a reminder of the fact that the Jews considered these books to be quite distinct works, and an illustration of how freely writers would borrow from other writers. Psalms 14 and 53 are the same, except that a Hebrew editor has substituted one divine name (Elohim) for another (Jahveh). Genesis (19:4–8) contains a story of how Lot offered his virgin daughters to the Sodomites in order to appease them. This was a popular Middle Eastern tale. Indeed it was so popular that it appears again in a slightly

different form in the book of Judges (19:22–5). The participants are different but the story is much the same. Apparently, different authors have adapted the same basic story for their own purposes, adding different endings to make different points.

The pagan origin of many Old Testament stories has long been known. Sometimes the scribes who did the borrowing did little to disguise their plagiarism, for example failing to amend the text to its new home. Thus, in the Jerusalem Bible, Proverb 22:20 makes reference to ‘thirty chapters of advice and knowledge’, alluding to the *Wisdom of Amenemophis*, on which, as is confirmed in a footnote, ‘this whole passage is based’. Psalm 104 contains material from the *Hymn to the Sun* of the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten, dating from around 1340 BC. Other psalms were originally written in honour of Baal.¹⁴ Again, biblical texts are so similar to older pagan Canaanite texts that it has been possible to explain certain odd-looking Hebrew passages by referring to the Canaanite versions – they turn out to be either mistranslations or mistranscriptions.¹⁵

Textual Problems

Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.

Job 5:7 (Authorised Version)

It is man who breeds trouble for himself as surely as eagles fly to the height.

Job 5:7 (Jerusalem Bible)

There is no single original text of the Old Testament, nor is there a single original version of even one book of it. The Jews were remarkably free in early times to edit and re-edit their Hebrew texts. They did not regard their scriptures as a single body, but as separate works. As we have already seen they often copied chunks of one book into another, sometimes changing names and other details to meet the needs of the moment. Impious suggestions were also doctored. For example, it seemed wrong that God should stand before Abraham, so the two swapped places and Abraham now stood before God. There were genuine errors too. A common one was to incorporate marginal notes into the text.

Typically, one scholar would add a note giving his explanation of an opaque passage. A later scholar, copying the manuscript, would interpret the note as a correction and copy it as part of the main text.¹⁶

In later times (after AD 100) Jewish scribes began to take pains to ensure that texts were accurately copied, for example by checking the number of letters and words in the new manuscripts. The texts then settled down to relative uniformity, although they preserved errors and contradictions originating from earlier editing. Until the twentieth century, the oldest known Hebrew manuscript was only about 1,000 years old. When much older texts were rediscovered, it was possible to confirm what had previously been suspected – that numerous passages had been inserted, duplicated, scrambled or omitted.

A further difficulty was that different Jewish sects each tampered with the scriptures to suit their own teachings. For example the Samaritans had their own version, and so did the Essenes. There were also mainstream variants, and it is now generally accepted that the traditional text, known as the Masoretic Text, is ‘only one late and arbitrary line, surviving from an earlier uncontrolled variety’.¹⁷ The texts are only relatively uniform, and surviving manuscripts frequently disagree with each other. The New International Version (NIV) of the Bible gives variant readings in footnotes, showing that Hebrew manuscripts often disagree with each other, and with Greek, Syriac and other texts. Here are extracts from the preface to the NIV explaining how the translators worked:

For the Old Testament the standard Hebrew text, the Masoretic Text as published in the latest editions of *Biblia Hebraica*, was used throughout. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain material bearing on an earlier stage of the Hebrew text. They were consulted, as were the Samaritan Pentateuch and the ancient scribal traditions relating to textual changes. Sometimes a variant Hebrew reading in the margin of the Masoretic Text was followed instead of the text itself... The translators also consulted the more important early versions – the Septuagint; Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion; the Vulgate; the Syriac Peshitta; the Targums; and for the Psalms the *Juxta Hebraica* of St Jerome (c.340–420). Readings from these versions were occasionally followed where the Masoretic Text seemed doubtful and where accepted principles of textual criticism showed that one or more of these textual witnesses appeared to provide the correct reading.

A recent international committee, considering the text of the Old Testament, identified some 5,000 places where the Hebrew was so puzzling that it might need to be corrected. A few of these are noted in footnotes to modern translations, although different translations handle them in different ways.

Some cases look like simple errors. According to the Masoretic Text corresponding to 1 Samuel 1:24, Sarah took a three-year-old bull to Shiloh, but according to most other manuscripts she took three bulls rather than one. In other cases it appears that the scribes have created rather a mess by deliberate tampering. Take for example the case of the killing of Goliath. Everyone knows that he was killed by David. The Bible says so, at least it does if one reads 1 Samuel 17:49–51. But according to the original text of another passage in 2 Samuel, Elhanan killed him:

And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite, slew Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

This is not what is printed in the Authorised Version, however. The translators have inserted the words 'the brother of' before Goliath's name in 2 Samuel 21:19 so that the Authorised Version reads:

And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite, slew *the brother of* Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

The words 'the brother of' are italicised in the Authorised Version because they are interpolations – additions made by the translators. They are absent in more accurate recent translations. So why did Christian scholars manipulate the text in this way? In mitigation they could claim that they were merely bringing it into line with a third version of the story in 1 Chronicles 20:5:

And there was a war again with the Philistines; and Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear staff was like a weaver's beam.

But why then did 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles contradict each other in the original texts?

What seems to have happened is this: Goliath was killed by Elhanan, and the story, dating from around 950 BC, was recounted in both 1 Chronicles and 2 Samuel. Some 350 years later it was felt that David's reputation needed a boost, so David was made into the hero of the story and this new version was included in 1 Samuel. To cover their tracks the Jewish editors changed the passage in 1 Chronicles by adding the words 'Lahmi the brother of'. They neglected however to change 2 Samuel in the same way, leaving a contradiction which later English translators obligingly tried to cover up using the same technique. The original interpolators made another gaffe, for they used the new David and Goliath story to explain how David came to meet Saul (1 Samuel 17:31–2), neglecting to square it with a different story about how they met, which appears in chapter 16. Early manuscripts contain only one of the two stories, further evidence that the contradictions arose through tampering.¹⁸

The book of Chronicles routinely tidies up earlier historical accounts. For example in an original story the actions of King Asa were slightly flawed:

And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD... But the high places were not removed... (1 Kings 15:11–14)

Asa would have been more impressive if he had removed the (pagan) high places, so in Chronicles we read:

And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God: For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places... (2 Chronicles 14:2–3)

Jewish history was routinely rewritten to show a favourite leader in a good light, or to confirm God's attachment to the Jewish people. Sometimes God was introduced into a story to explain key events. A story in 2 Chronicles 18:31–2 is essentially the same as that in 1 Kings 22:32–3, except that the mechanics of Jehoshaphat's escape is different. In the earlier version he simply calls out to those who are about to attack him:

And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they

turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. (1 Kings 22:32–3)

In the improved version he calls out to God, and God is responsible for his delivery:

And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them to depart from him. For it came to pass, that, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back again from pursuing him. (2 Chronicles 18:31–2)

Significantly, the original text is not altered, but added to. The later text (Chronicles) is almost identical except that an additional sentence has been inserted.

A man called Jether has different nationalities according to different manuscripts.¹⁹ It appears that it was politically correct for him to become an Israelite, and this was achieved simply by doctoring the text. Did Solomon have a mere 40 stalls for chariot horses, or a much more impressive 4,000,²⁰ and did Jashobeam kill three men on a single occasion, or was it 30 men, or 300, or even 800 men?²¹ There are numerous such inconsistencies, both between different books, and different manuscripts of the same book.²² Such tampering can be detected only when the editors failed to cover their tracks early enough and well enough. We can never know how many times they covered their tracks successfully.

Like the Jewish scribes who had not always been careful of the truth, neither were Christians. Early Christians tampered with the Septuagint, but this tampering was exposed by comparison with the original Hebrew. Christians then accused Jews of suppressing the truth in their Hebrew versions. But the Jews had largely stopped tampering with their ancient texts by the end of the first century AD and were thus routinely vindicated by the evidence. For example, in the Septuagint, Psalm 96 was amended to include an apparent prophecy about the Lord ruling from the tree (i.e. the cross). The fact that Jewish versions included no such line was explained away by the fact that the perfidious Jews had

removed it from the text. In fact it was the Christians who had been responsible for the tampering, a fact easily confirmed by comparing the texts with older copies in both Greek and Hebrew. Christians also inserted a line in Jeremiah to foretell Christ's descent into Hell: 'The Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel who slept in the earth of the grave, and He went down to them to preach to them His salvation.' This fraudulence has been quietly dropped, but the writings of the Church Fathers confirm that they believed it to be genuine and thought that the Jews had tried to suppress it.²³ We will come across a number of other attempts by Christians to insert convenient text – often either retrospective prophecies or justifications for novel doctrines.

Authorship, Order and Dating

Having now shown that every book in the Bible, from Genesis to Judges, is without authenticity, I come to the book of Ruth, an idle, bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country-girl creeping slyly to bed with her cousin Boaz. Pretty stuff indeed to be called the word of God!

Thomas Paine (1737–1809), *The Age of Reason*, Part II

Traditionally God was held to have been the author of all books of the Bible, just as Muslims believe Allah to have been the true author of the Koran. In both cases, part of the evidence of divine authorship was the sublime quality of the language used. Many Muslims hold that God must have written the Koran because no human could produce such beautiful prose. Unfortunately its supernatural beauty seems to be discernible only by Muslim speakers of Arabic and remains opaque to other Arabic speakers. The position of the Old Testament is less convincing. Even the most pious Christian scholars found the original text crude and uncouth. St Jerome for example found the language of the prophets 'harsh and barbarous', much preferring the quality of writing of pagan authors such as Cicero and Plautus.

Another problem is that of identifying the human authors. Most books of the Old Testament were not written by the people whose names they bear. Many were written and edited over a long period by unknown hands. Traditional ascriptions are known to be unreliable, and

textual analysis reveals some books to be the work of more than one writer. The oldest book whose author is known is an apocryphal book called Ecclesiasticus or Ben Sirach, written by the Jewish scholar Jesus ben Sirach at a surprisingly late date (around 200 BC).

The books of the Law were traditionally believed to have been written by Moses, although this has long been discounted by scholars. No one previously seems to have been unduly concerned that Moses sometimes referred to himself in the third person, as in Numbers 12:3, but writing about his own death and burial (Deuteronomy 34:5–7) raised a few questions. A further give-away was the phrase ‘...before there reigned any king over the children of Israel’ (Genesis 36:31). This could only have been written after there had been a king, which was centuries after the time of Moses. Moses was not the only person traditionally identified as a biblical author to write as historical fact about events that occurred after his death. Samuel, in 1 Samuel 25:1, gives an account of his own death and burial. Again, Joshua (in Joshua 24:31) tells us that ‘... Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua’.

Scholars generally accept that at least four different hands were responsible for the books traditionally attributed to Moses, and that their contributions have been interwoven by a creative editor (a *redactor*, the scholars call him). The four strands are known as *Yahwist*, *Elohist*, *Deuteronomic* and *Priestly*. These four strands are often identifiable by characteristics in the writing, such as the name the author used for God. For example the *Yahwist* author calls God JHVH or YHWH (spoken as ‘Yahweh’) while the *Elohist* author calls him Elohim. The *Deuteronomic* author introduced changes by the Levites after the fall of the kingdom of Israel and was responsible for a three-volume work that we now know as Deuteronomy, Joshua and Kings. The *Priestly* author edited these traditions together after the Babylonian Exile. The four traditions are often denoted by the letters J, E, D and P, though J and E were edited together before the others and so are often denoted together as JE. The P strand includes the books of Numbers and Leviticus and also forms the framework into which the earlier books were fitted after the Exile.

Other works are also joint efforts edited together by one or more redactors. The book of Isaiah for example is now generally acknowledged to have been written by three authors, known to scholars for convenience as Isaiah 1, Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 3. Isaiah 2 appears to have been an exponent

of the retrospective prophecy. He predicted the coming of Cyrus the Great in the 530s BC after the event, and had his work incorporated into that of Isaiah 1, which dated from 200 years earlier.

Another retrospective prophet is responsible for Zechariah's astonishing prescience, and yet another one for Jeremiah's. Jeremiah's interpolator was caught out by an ancient Greek translation of the original text. Comparing it to the later Hebrew text showed that the Hebrew version had been supplemented by retrospective prophecies.²⁴ Again, some works are specifically identified as being written by Solomon or David, or other kings or their sons, but these ascriptions are now discounted. As the Jerusalem Bible confirms, the Song of Songs was not written by Solomon but by an unknown author after the Exile, and Ecclesiastes not by a son of David, as it claims, but by an unknown author (possibly a number of unknown authors), again after the Exile.

The Jews took many centuries to agree on a body of scripture. Such a body had crystallised by the time of Rabbi Akiva a few generations after the time of Jesus. As we have already seen, the Jews distinguished three kinds of book:

- The *Torah*, which comprises the first five books of the Bible, i.e. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The word *Torah* translates as *Teaching*, but these books are generally known in English as the *Law*. The Jews regarded them as being on a higher level than the other books.
- The *Nebim* (English *Prophets*), which comprise Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel along with the 12 minor prophets. In the New Testament reference is sometimes made to 'the Law and Prophets', meaning the *Torah* and the *Nebim*.
- The *Ketubim* (or *Writings*), the remaining books, which have a lower status than the Law and the Prophets.

These categories were ignored by Christians, who came to regard all of the works as equally inspired. In the Christians' Old Testament, the books appear in a different order, with the prophets placed last, so that the final book, Malachi, appears to lead into the New Testament.

Traditionally the order of the books was believed to reflect the chronological order of the events described. Many old versions of the Bible included a chronology, often in a margin parallel to the text, which was regarded as being as free from error as the text itself. However

much it was refined, the chronology was flawed by numerous absurdities and contradictions, as demonstrated by the freethinker Thomas Paine (1737–1809) in his book *The Age of Reason*.²⁵ At the time Paine was accused of blasphemy, as much for querying the chronology as for questioning other aspects of the Bible. No reputable Church now tries to sustain a full traditional biblical chronology.

Perhaps the most infamous case of misdating and misrepresentation is the book of Daniel. It purports to have been written during the Babylonian Exile, but scholars now accept that it was written about 400 years later, between 167 and 164 BC, at least partly in Aramaic. It is propaganda compiled to encourage resistance to the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, who was then trying to crush the Jewish religion. It tells how Daniel and his associates refused to compromise on matters of faith during the Babylonian Exile, but displays ignorance of the period, and of the Persian succession, and uses Macedonian words that were unknown at the time it was supposedly written.²⁶ It is a hotchpotch of stories, some in Aramaic, some in Hebrew; some (retrospectively) describing visions, some incorporating known Babylonian tales; some regarded as canonical, some apocryphal.

The most recent Old Testament writings date from around AD 120 – almost a century *after* Jesus lived, which suggests that God continued to refine his old Covenant with the Jews long after he had superseded it with his new one. Divine authorship is also compromised by the parochialism of the text. Whoever wrote the books of the Old Testament knew about nomadic life and tribal warfare in Middle Eastern deserts, but little else. For example locusts are covered exceptionally well, but penguins are badly underrepresented.

Evidence of Tampering

...it is, I believe, impossible to find in any story upon record so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions and falsehoods as are in these books.

Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, Part II

For many centuries the mainstream Churches denied that there was any evidence of tampering in God's divine word, but this position is no

longer tenable, and no mainstream Church now seeks to deny that biblical texts were tampered with. For example the introduction to the Pentateuch in the Jerusalem Bible concludes with the statement that ‘Throughout, the hands of the Deuteronomic and Priestly editors are often to be observed, annotating and adapting’.

Sometimes the text has been tampered with in an effort to make sense of it. For example, in 2 Samuel 24:10 David regretted having carried out a census, saying he had ‘sinned greatly’, even though God had told him to do so. Some 200 years later the story was revised so that it was Satan who instigated the census, but the revisers neglected to revise the original. So it is that a duplicate of the same story appears at 1 Chronicles 21:1, except Satan replaces God.

Sometimes, the disruption of regular patterns betrays the fact that changes have been made either deliberately or accidentally. For example acrostic poems have been broken up, presumably by people who failed to realise that the text formed an acrostic. Psalms 9 and 10 are really a single poem, each verse starting with a Hebrew letter in alphabetical order, but as a note in the Jerusalem Bible puts it ‘in the present text there are several letters without their strophes’. Again, in Psalm 145 one of the verses (‘Nun’) is missing from the Hebrew text and has had to be supplied from Greek texts (see the Jerusalem Bible Psalm 145, note a).

Another give-away arises from taking a passage and inserting it elsewhere without checking the context. Thus for example 2 Samuel 23:9 says that the Philistines were gathered ‘there’ but gives no indication of where ‘there’ was. Presumably the passage was picked up from another part of the text where the location of the action had already been established. A parallel passage at 1 Chronicles 11:13 identifies the place as Pas Dammim, and this is frequently substituted in translations of 2 Samuel to cover up the error. Again whoever inserted the text saying that God spoke to Moses ‘face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend’ (Exodus 33:11) apparently failed to check that this was consistent with the main narrative, which at verse 20 has God saying to Moses ‘Thou canst not see my face’.

If the same fact was stated several times, then a scribe who wanted to tamper with it had to be sure that he changed every incidence. This was often difficult. In the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint, Jacob is credited with having 75 descendants when his family came to Egypt;

this is also the number quoted by Acts 7:14. But the Masoretic Text gives the number as 70, and this is the figure that appears in biblical versions of Genesis and Exodus.²⁷

The Ten Commandments provides a series of examples of the dangers of tampering. The first problem is that there are two versions of the Commandments, at Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. The two versions contradict each other by giving different reasons for observing the Sabbath.²⁸ As a note to the Jerusalem Bible says at Exodus 20: ‘This is the Priestly version of the Ten Commandments; another version, the Deuteronomic, is found in Deuteronomy 5, and it is the second which has been adopted by the Church’. But this is only the start, because neither of these versions is the original. The original Ten Commandments, inscribed by Moses at God’s dictation, bear little resemblance to either of them, being concerned mainly with religious festivals and taboos (Exodus 34:14–26). It is this list that is explicitly identified in the text as the ‘Ten Commandments’ and is stated to have been written on the tablets that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:27–9). But there is yet another problem, because there are more than ten commandments listed here, which means that this list has been tampered with as well²⁹ – quite apart from the fact that the whole collection was overtaken by the current Ten Commandments. Furthermore other sets of laws are listed that contradict each other in many details.³⁰

Footnotes in the Jerusalem Bible demonstrate all sorts of errors and sometimes how they arose:

‘...not always consistent’ (Numbers 22b)

Not an accurate figure (1 Kings 20b)

The chronological details cannot be harmonised... (Esther 1c)

...a ‘modernisation’ by a later hand. (Zechariah 6c)

Different sources have been conflated (Genesis 21b)

...later elaboration... (Genesis 32a)

Two narratives are conflated here... (Joshua 6a)

...contains several traditions put together by an editor;... (Judges 21a)

Editorial comment (Exodus 15a)

Two versions of the institution of the monarchy, a key episode in the history of Israel, are to be found alternating in the five chapters from 1 Samuel 8. One is by an anti-royalist author and the other by a royalist.³¹

Another area particularly subject to both mistakes and deliberate tampering was provided by the numerous genealogies contained in the Old Testament. The New International Version (NIV) identifies dozens of inconsistencies in footnotes, sometimes several in the same genealogy.³² As an explanation of why two genealogies differ, the Jerusalem Bible (see 1 Chronicles 2 note b) points out that ‘Genealogies were often deduced from relationships between clans. This reconstruction of the descendants of Caleb may differ from the list in vv.18–24 because it was made at a date when alliances between clans were different.’

Errors of Translation

Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?

Job 39:9

Ancient Middle Eastern alphabets contained no vowels. In the earliest biblical texts only the consonants were written down, without punctuation. This provided plenty of scope for misunderstandings, especially as the tense had to be guessed from the context. In many cases the wrong vowels were later inserted, giving the wrong word and the wrong meaning. Again, since there was no equivalent to our quotation marks it is often difficult to identify the end of a speech. There were no gaps between words, and all letters were capitals, so it was sometimes difficult even to tell where one word ended and the next began. Furthermore the Jews did not use separate symbols for numbers, but like the Greeks and the Romans, used letters instead, a practice that opened up further possibilities for confusion. In addition, Hebrew writers often swapped back and forth between first, second and third person personal pronouns, and even when they did not it is not always clear which pronoun referred to which noun. Most translations iron out such ambiguities without comment.

We have seen that the original biblical texts contained errors of various sorts, but further errors have been introduced by translators. Sometimes these errors are deliberate interpolations by translators, performed to tidy

up inconvenient or inconsistent passages. In other cases they are genuine mistakes. The following examples include both types.

The Septuagint

Translations of the books of the Old Testament were made during the third and second centuries BC, probably for the library at Alexandria. The translations were made into the common Mediterranean language of the time, which was Greek. This collection is called the Septuagint, which in Latin means seventy, because of a tradition that it was translated by seventy scholars, all of whom were inspired and who independently produced identical translations.³³ The name is sometimes abbreviated as LXX, the Roman numerals for seventy.

In the first century, the New Testament did not exist and authority was believed to reside in the Septuagint and in Jesus' sayings, which circulated orally. At one time both Jews and Christians regarded the Septuagint as divinely inspired, but over the course of time many errors were revealed, and the Jews adopted better translations. The Eastern Church retained its attachment to the Septuagint, while the Western Church adopted a Latin translation instead. The Septuagint was then virtually abandoned within Western Europe. For many centuries the Greek version was regarded there as no more than the book belonging to schismatic Eastern Churches.

The Hebrew and Greek texts differed in many ways, even before Christians started interpolating their own text.³⁴ In the original text the book of Esther is simply a nationalistic Jewish tract. Christians were not comfortable with the fact that it made no mention of God. Translators therefore inserted references to God into their versions of the Septuagint. From there the additions were transferred to other early translations.

Other additions are more difficult to discover, but are sometimes given away by linguistic features. For example, the story of Susanna and the Elders does not exist in the ancient Hebrew texts, only in the Greek. Had Hebrew editors suppressed it, as Christians claimed? Or had Greek editors added it, as the Jews claimed? As Julius Africanus noted as early as the third century AD, a principal feature of the story is a pun that works only in Greek, and the story therefore seems likely to be an addition to the original Semitic text.

Vulgate

As Jews, Jesus and his disciples would have used Aramaic as their everyday language. In view of their location and their professions, we have no reason to suppose that any of them knew Greek.

Koine, a form of Greek, was the common language of the Mediterranean, and this was the language used by the Pauline Christians. Educated Romans had always spoken Greek rather than Latin, and even up to the third century the language of Roman Christians was Greek. Hippolytus (AD c.170–c.236) was the last Western theologian to write in Greek, and Tertullian (AD c.160–c.225) the first to write in Latin. In Rome, the Eucharist (Communion) continued to be celebrated in Greek up to the time of Pope Damasus (reigned 366–84). Yet in time the Western Church would claim that Latin was the peculiar language of Christianity.

Although the Bible was originally written mainly in Hebrew and Greek, the Western Church ceded primacy to its own translation. St Jerome translated (most of) the Bible into Latin probably between 384 and 404, based on Hebrew and Greek texts, along with earlier Latin translations. His version is known as the Vulgate, so called because it was written as a new vulgar (i.e. common) edition. At the time it was controversial. There were riots over some of Jerome's translations, which were held to amount to tampering with established traditions.³⁵ In time it became established not merely as authoritative, but divinely inspired. In 1546 the Council of Trent pronounced the Vulgate to be the only authentic Latin text. It is still considered authoritative on questions of faith and morals by the Roman Catholic Church.³⁶ How widely it differs from modern translations (such as the Jerusalem Bible) may be seen by the dual numbering system adopted in the Jerusalem Bible.³⁷ We note a couple of errors for historical interest:

In Exodus 34:29 the Authorised Version records that when he came down from Mount Sinai '...Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone...'. This corrects an error in the Vulgate, which records that when Moses came down from the mountain he knew not that there were horns upon his countenance. The problem was caused by the lack of diacritical marks to represent vowel sounds: in Hebrew the words *qaran*, to shine, and *qeren*, to bear horns, have exactly the same consonants. St Jerome chose the wrong one and translated it with the Latin *cornuta*; so, later, did Luther, who translated it with the German *gehornt*. Because of this mistranslation, many of the most famous depictions of Moses

show him with a set of horns. The most spectacular examples are the well-known painting by Rembrandt and the statue by Michelangelo.

When Adam and Eve are being evicted from the Garden of Eden, God promises that snakes and mankind will be enemies: mankind will strike snakes on the head and snakes will strike mankind on the foot. In the original Hebrew of Genesis 3:15 God cursed the snake saying ‘it [mankind] shall crush thy head’. This was translated into Greek as ‘he [man] shall crush thy head’, which Jerome turned into ‘she [Mary] shall crush thy head’, a mistranslation that has been known for centuries but was held onto by the Church possibly because it helped bolster the claims of Mariologists. According to them Mary will one day crush Satan’s head under her immaculate foot. The error was still receiving papal confirmation in the nineteenth century³⁸ and this is still a favourite theme in the Roman Catholic art of southern Europe. The mistranslation has been admitted by the Roman Church only recently – well within living memory. The Jerusalem Bible has *it* rather than *she*, without so much as a footnote by way of explanation, surprising since this switch reverses the Catholic Church’s position on what it traditionally cited as the most important text to justify its Marian doctrines – what it calls a ‘proof-text’.

Like other Church leaders of his time St Jerome had a low opinion of sex. In the Vulgate version of the book of Tobit, he made Tobias wait three nights before consummating his marriage (see for example Tobit 8:1–10 in the Douay-Rheims Bible, a Catholic translation of the Vulgate into English). In modern versions, consummation of the marriage has reverted to a single night (Tobit 8:1–9), but the bizarre numbering of the verses in the Jerusalem Bible shows that changes have been made. (For a time the Church tried to enforce three ‘Tobias nights’ during which newly married couples had to refrain from sexual intercourse, though a dispensation could be bought for a fee.³⁹)

Another problem was the way Jesus spoke to his mother ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee?’ (*Gynai, ti emoi kai soi*, in the original Greek, John 2:4). Greek scholars had no doubt that this constituted a stern rebuke.⁴⁰ To people like St Jerome who were already in the process of elevating Mary above the rest of womankind, a more opaque translation was needed, and so he translated it as ‘Woman, what is that to me and to thee?’, which rather takes the edge off it.⁴¹ This softer translation is repeated in the Douay-Rheims Bible (in English), but it is now generally accepted that the original conveys a rebuke.

Authorised Version

Probably the greatest-ever blunder in translation involved the name of God. As already mentioned, in early Hebrew only consonants were written down. There were no letters to fulfil the role of vowels (diacritical marks were sometimes used instead, but not always). One of the Hebrew names of God, written JHVH and probably pronounced something like Yahweh, was regarded from the third century BC as too awful to speak aloud, except in special circumstances. When reading the scriptures aloud, accepted Jewish practice was to substitute the word *Adonai* (Lord) for *Yahweh*. To remind readers about this, the diacritical marks belonging to the word *Adonai* were written along with the name JHVH. The reader would see the name JHVH but say *Adonai*. Not knowing this, European translators in the sixteenth century combined the consonants and diacritics to produce a new name *Jahovah* or *Jehovah*. Some modern versions still use this name; others have reverted to *Yahweh*.

As modern translations admit, many terms used in the Bible are no longer in common use or understood. Among them are some names for animals, flowers, architectural features, clothing, jewellery, and musical instruments. Christians can mostly gloss over these shortcomings – for instance, no one is much worried about what distinguishes the four types of creature mentioned in Joel 1:4. On the other hand, for those who opt to, it must be difficult to follow the Old Testament dietary laws, when no one knows to which animals the prohibitions refer. Some of the traditional translations now seem a little quaint. The Hebrew *re'em* for example was translated into Greek as *monoceros*, and thence into English as *unicorn*. Modern versions translate *re'em* less exotically as *wild ox*.

More serious is the mistranslation of words for doctrinal reasons. For example in Isaiah 14:15 the Hebrew word for a grave (*Sheol*) was translated as Hell – suggesting that the ancient Jews had a concept of an afterlife and eternal punishment. In fact they had neither – these ideas were introduced by Greeks and Egyptians a few generations before Jesus. Again, the continuity of the priesthood from ancient times could ostensibly be confirmed by having the first priest Aaron being invested with a bishop's crown of office rather than some sort of mullah's headgear. So it is that in the Authorised Version, Leviticus 8:9 relates that Aaron wore a *mitre*, while more accurate modern translations render the word as *turban*.

If the translators of the English Bible were divinely inspired, then it is odd that they remained ignorant of some of the hidden information

in their texts. When Babylon represented the Jews' greatest enemy it was often impolitic to mention the place by name, so a code word was substituted. The Jews used the Atbash code, a simple substitution cipher that rendered Babylon as *Sheshach* and Chaldea as *Leb-kamai*.⁴² The translators of the Bible were apparently unaware that they were writing about Babylon and Chaldea, and simply transcribed the words as Sheshach and Leb-kamai.

In other cases, tampering is designed to disguise the true meaning of the text. The eroticism of the Song of Songs was a little too explicit for most translators. In the Authorised Version the lady in the Song of Songs 5:4 tells us:

My beloved put his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.

The words *of the door* are de-italicised because they do not exist in the original text. Modern translators are even more coy, referring to a latch or latch-opening instead of a hole.

The translators of the Authorised Version did their best to paper over the cracks in the original texts. As we have already seen, they doctored the account of Goliath's death in 2 Samuel. To take another example, they were faced by a contradiction concerning a woman called Michal, a daughter of Saul. According to 2 Samuel 6:23 she remained childless until her death, but according to 2 Samuel 21:8 she had five sons. The Authorised Version disguised this contradiction by implying that she merely brought up these sons for someone else (Adriel). More modern versions of the Bible prefer a method used by a few early manuscripts and replace the name Michal by the name Merab in one of the stories. (The NIV admits the truth in a footnote; the Jerusalem Bible keeps quiet about it.)

According to 1 Samuel 13:1 Saul reigned for one year, but the text then goes on to talk about when he had reigned for two years. The Authorised Version tried to gloss over the problem by some judicious punctuation: 'Saul reigned for one year; and when he had reigned for two years over Israel...'. The NIV abandons the Hebrew in favour of a few late manuscripts of the Septuagint giving a different account: 'Saul was <thirty> years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel for <forty-> two years'. The Jerusalem Bible avoids the problem by simply missing out the first verse altogether and starting at verse 2.

Often, translators mistranslated the ancient text to reflect the prejudices of their own times. In late medieval times Christians firmly believed that God had cursed women with suffering in childbirth. This idea is not present in the Hebrew, which refers to concept like 'labour', but translators introduced ideas of 'pain' and 'suffering' into European texts, and these ideas became so entrenched that they continue in modern translations of the Bible.⁴³

An even more damaging example is that of Hell. By translating different words as *hell*, bibles like the Authorised Version give the impression that the concept of hell dates back to ancient Jewish times, which it does not. Reading an English bible alone it would be impossible to distinguish *Gehenna* in the New Testament from *Sheol* in the Old. Completely different ideas are thus confabulated in English translations, which together seem to confirm the existence of a Satanic realm under the earth. Often a better translation for *Hell* would be *grave*, a different concept altogether.

Witchcraft was a topical issue by the time that the Authorised Version was commissioned in the early seventeenth century, and King James wanted confirmation that the practice of witch killing had divine approval. The names of wrongdoers were therefore now translated as *witch*. For example Exodus 22:18 was translated as 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'. But this was not the most natural translation. The original Hebrew had been *mekashshephah* (magician, diviner, or sorcerer), which had been rendered into Greek as *pharmakos* (druggist, apothecary, maker of potions) and into Latin as *Maleficos* (evil doer, criminal). No one suspected that the term referred to a witch or Devil worshipper, until it became necessary to justify witch persecutions. In modern translations the word is generally rendered as 'sorceress', though there is also a good case for 'poisoner'. Again, the woman consulted by Saul (1 Samuel 28:7) had really been a fortune teller or *ba'alath ob*, a 'mistress of the talisman'. In Latin she became a *mulierem habentem pythonem*, 'a woman possessing an oracular spirit', but in order to conform to the requirements of seventeenth-century England, she became a Devil worshipper as well, the famous witch of Endor.

Other Translations

Translations have always been angled to suit the views of the translators, and not always for doctrinal reasons. As we have just seen, flexibility in

translation can justify activities like witch-hunting. But there have been many other motivations, for example to confirm that kings are divinely appointed. Traditional Christian anti-Semitism has also been accommodated, for example by minimising the Jewishness of important biblical characters. Speaking of his German translation of the Bible, Martin Luther said 'I endeavoured to make Moses so German that no one would suspect he was a Jew'.⁴⁴ This was perfectly in line with the traditional techniques employed to make the text conform to current orthodoxy.

Modern translations use a variety of more subtle techniques to manipulate the text. One is to introduce a section heading above a piece of text indicating that the subject matter concerns one thing when it might otherwise be interpreted as concerning something else. Thus for example in the NIV, the real Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:14–26) are not flagged as such, though the text explicitly describes them (verse 28) as the Ten Commandments. By contrast the later laws are so flagged by a heading, though the text does not identify them as the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). To take another example, the Church has traditionally justified the practice of taxing people through the tithe system by reference to a biblical passage at Deuteronomy 25:4 that does not mention tithes at all. A few versions of the Bible continue an old convention of inserting a heading that mentions tithes and thus helps foster the impression that tithes were justified by scripture.

Again, quotation marks are inserted in places that make the passage conform to Christian requirements, and inverted commas are used to smooth over inconvenient terms. Thus for example the need to deny that there is more than one god is achieved in the NIV by placing the word *gods* (in Psalm 82:1 and 6) in inverted commas, so that Jahveh gives judgement not among the gods, but among the 'gods'. The inverted commas suggest that these gods – who are so clearly identified as such – seem not to be gods at all.

Inconvenient *sons of God* become *children of Israel* in Deuteronomy 32:8. As in earlier translations, the free use of pronouns disguises the number of deities around. For example the following passage looks wrong in the mouth of God 'I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah' so it is instead translated as 'I overthrew some of you, as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah' (see Amos 4:11 NIV). Capital letters can be used to the same end: *a god* becomes *God* so that

Jahveh ceases to be one god among many (see Deuteronomy 4:33 NIV). Names of gods can be represented as different names for one God. Compare the first two verses of Psalm 91, first according to the Authorised Version, then with the real names of God instead of the conventional translations (key words in italic type):

He that dwelleth in the secret place of *the most High* shall abide under the shadow of *the Almighty*. I will say of the *LORD*, He is my refuge and my fortress: my *God*; in him will I trust. (Authorised Version)

He that dwelleth in the secret place of *Elyon* shall abide under the shadow of *Shaddai*. I will say of *Jahveh*, He is my refuge and my fortress: my *Elohim*; in him will I trust. (cf. Jerusalem Bible)

The following table shows how some principal translations deal with the various names of the ancient Jewish gods found in the Old Testament:

Hebrew	Authorised Version	New International Version	Jerusalem Bible	Example
YHWH or Yahveh	LORD	LORD	Yahweh	Passim
YHWH Elohim	LORD God	LORD God	Yahweh God	Genesis 2:4
Adonai	Lord	Lord	Lord	Isaiah 7:14
Adonai YHWH	Lord GOD	Sovereign LORD	Lord Yahweh	Ezekiel 6:11
Shaddai	the Almighty	the Almighty	Shaddai	Psalm 91:1
El Shaddai	the Almighty	the Almighty	El Shaddai	Genesis 49:25
Ja	LORD	LORD	(Allelu)ia	Psalms 149:1 and 150:1
Elyon	the most High	the Most High	the Most High Elyon	Psalm 82:6 Psalm 91:1
El Elyon	the most high God	God Most High	God Most High	Genesis 14:18
Jahveh Sabaoth	LORD of Hosts	LORD Almighty	Yahweh Sabaoth	Malachi 1:10
Eloah (singular)	the Holy One	the Holy One	the Holy One	Habakkuk 3:3
Elohim (plural)	God	God	God	Psalm 91:2

(The names *Jahveh* and *Yaweh* are just variant spellings. Other translators prefer *Yahveh*.)

At least one biblical writer found it necessary to assure readers that Jahveh and El Shaddai were the same god: in Exodus 6:2–3 God explains that he had not used the name Jahveh in earlier times. It is more than likely that Jahveh and El Shaddai were originally separate gods.

Other divinities are melded into one by appropriate punctuation, for example the ‘fear of Isaac’ in Genesis 31:42 becomes a description of God rather than a separate god. So does the ‘God of Abraham’ also mentioned in 31:42 and the ‘Mighty One of Jacob’ mentioned in Genesis 49:24 (NIV). The existence of other divinities is also disguised by judicious mistranslation. The original text of Psalm 110:3 refers to the womb of the goddess of the dawn, but it is not acceptable to mention that the Jews recognised other deities, so the Authorised Version speaks evasively of the womb of the morning. The Jerusalem Bible distorts the passage even further. In this version the womb does not even belong to the morning, let alone a goddess, and it is impossible from the English to deduce that the original author was referring to the womb of a goddess called *Dawn*.

Capital letters are important weapons in the armoury of orthodox Christian translators. By capitalising certain words they can be made into names, and by capitalising phrases it is possible to make them into titles. Thus in the New Testament Jesus is given the title of Son of man, but when the same phrase occurs in the Old Testament referring to someone else (as it is throughout the book of Ezekiel) it is more convenient to render it without capitals as the son of man, so that it is not a title at all. Another example of a name being manipulated is that of the supernatural character called Wisdom. In English translations of the Bible her name is written wisdom, without a capital W, so that it does not look like a name at all. It is possible to read English translations without even suspecting the existence of a character called Wisdom, though she played a major part in Jewish and early Christian theology. By denying her a capital letter, her claim to divinity looks much weaker than it is. The same would be true of the second person of the Trinity if we translated *logos* as *word*, instead of *the Word*. Similarly the *Holy Spirit* would look rather less impressive as a mere *holy spirit*.

Careful translation also avoids the embarrassment to Christians of referring to people other than Jesus as *Christ*. In fact many individuals are referred to in the Old Testament as *Christ* (Hebrew messiah, English ‘anointed’). When applied to Jesus in the New Testament the word is always used as a title, but when it is used of kings and high priests in the

Old Testament it is rendered as ‘the anointed’ (see for example Leviticus 4:5, 4:16 and 6:22). Psalm 105:15 should really be translated as ‘Touch not my christs’, which does not sound right to orthodox Christian ears. In almost all translations of Isaiah 45:1, God refers to Cyrus the Great as *his anointed*, rather than as *his christ*, which is just as correct.

Inconvenient text can simply be dropped, though missing lines can sometimes be identified by missing verse numbers. Another possibility is to swap the verses around to make the meaning more acceptable, as at Judges 1:19. In the Authorised Version God himself could not drive people from a valley because they had iron chariots.

And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

... not very impressive for an omnipotent God. In the Jerusalem Bible the word order is changed and the sense of the account jiggled so that God is not involved in the difficulties that occurred in the valley or plain at all, only in the victory in the highlands.

19b they could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had iron chariots

19a Yahweh was with Judah, and Judah subdued the highlands.

... but the game is partially given away by verse 19b preceding 19a.

Contradictions and Inconsistencies

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

Proverbs 26:4

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

Proverbs 26:5

God created both man and woman on the sixth day (Genesis 1:27), having already created the plants and animals. But later, after the seventh

day, he formed Adam from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7), then the plants and animals again, then Eve. In the seventeenth century scholars noted the inconsistencies and deduced that there had been two creations, first of the gentiles then of the Jews. Scholars in the next century realised that the story is composed of two separate accounts, although it took 200 years for this realisation to gain general acceptance. It is now widely accepted to be correct, and biblical scholars concur that the first account was written by the Priestly (P) source and the second by the Yahwist (J) source.

Again, the story of the flood is a confabulation of two versions of the Babylonian story of Gilgamesh, one P, and the other J. In the P version, only one male and one female of each species is saved (Genesis 6:19–20), whereas in the J version, seven (or seven pairs) of each clean animal species and one pair of unclean animal species are saved (Genesis 7:2–3).

Ages and timings are frequently unreliable. Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began his reign according to 2 Chronicles 36:9, but he was eighteen according to 2 Kings 24:8. The two books also disagree about how long he reigned in Jerusalem. Again, Ahaziah was 22 years old when he ascended the throne according to 2 Kings 8:26, but he was 42 years old according to 2 Chronicles 22:2. The first sounds slightly more reasonable since the second would make him two years older than his own father. Other stories in the Bible also stretch the imagination. Enemies of the Jews for example were incredibly tenacious. The Edomites rebelled (2 Kings 8:22) after every male of that race had been killed (1 Kings 11:16). The Midianites were even more impressive. With all their males killed and females captured (Numbers 31:7–9) they somehow managed to defeat the Israelites (Judges 6:1–5). The Amalekites, having been utterly destroyed by Saul (1 Samuel 15:7–20), rose up against David, who left neither man nor woman alive amongst them (1 Samuel 27:9), after which they attacked him yet again (1 Samuel 30:1–17).

There are conflicting versions of what happened when the Assyrian Sennacherib demanded increased tribute from Hezekiah. According to 2 Kings 18:14–16, Hezekiah simply pays up. But, in the subsequent passage, 2 Kings 18:17–19:37, he appears to defy Sennacherib. The angel of the Lord then appears and kills 185,000 of Sennacherib's men during the night so that Sennacherib is obliged to return home defeated. In one place the Old Testament says that Aaron died at Mosera (Deuteronomy 10:6) but in another that he died on Mount Hor (Numbers 20:27–8).

God himself is not always consistent. The modern Ten Commandments say that God will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children (Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9), but Ezekiel 18:20 says that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father.⁴⁵

Factual Errors and Anachronisms

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.

2 Kings 19:35

Factual errors in the Old Testament are widely (but not universally) accepted. Like any pre-scientific narrative, the Old Testament makes assumptions about the nature of the world that are now realised to be false. For example frequent references are made to the waters under Earth – waters that many ancient peoples believed in and that gods could use to flood the world (cf. Genesis 7:11) but are now known not to exist. Again we know today that stars do not sing (Job 38:7), that Earth does not have edges or corners (Job 38:13, Psalm 2:8, Ezekiel 7:2), and that snow and hail are not kept in storehouses (Job 38:22). The Bible also makes factual errors on subjects like geography, history and etymology, and assumes the efficacy of traditional folk magic (e.g. Genesis 30:37–43).

Accounts of the creation of the world are clearly incompatible with what is now known about cosmology and geology. The story of the creation of Adam and Eve does not square with archaeological or evolutionary evidence. The animal species known to science, which include over 4,600 species of mammals alone, could not fit into Noah's ark, whose dimensions are given in the biblical story.⁴⁶ Errors revealed by science could fill a book; indeed such errors did fill many books in the nineteenth century when many Christians still believed in the literal truth of the Bible. Biblical arithmetic is not too reliable either. In Ezra 2 a list of the men of Israel is given, the total of which is stated to be 42,360 but which is really 29,818. Nehemiah 7 gives essentially the same list, but with some changes. This time the total is 31,089, though it is still stated to be 42,360.

Another class of error in the Old Testament comprises the numerous statements and promises that have proved to be false. For example the earthly punishments promised in Deuteronomy 28:15–68 to those who fail to obey God do not appear to have ever been visited on a single offender. God promised that men and women who follow his laws will never be childless, nor will their cattle; and neither will God’s followers ever become ill (Deuteronomy 7:14–15). But none of these promises has been kept. The Jews were told repeatedly that they would not lose their land, but they lost it for many centuries. They were also told repeatedly that they would always have a king to rule over them, but they do not have one today.⁴⁷ The Old Testament says that Jerusalem will always be a peaceful abode (Isaiah 33:20), which it has frequently not been; and that the uncircumcised will never enter it again (Isaiah 52:1), though they enter it today, by the thousand. Ezekiel 26 predicts that Nebuchadnezzar will take and destroy Tyre, but he failed to do so and had to be satisfied with Egypt instead.

Old Testament authors often failed to appreciate that times change. They frequently projected titles, rituals and customs from their own time into the distant past. The author of Chronicles (third century BC) did it when writing about the time of David (tenth century BC). The author of Esther (third or fourth century BC) did it when writing about ancient Persia around the fifth century BC, and the author of Daniel (167–164 BC) did it when writing about events 400 years earlier. In each case the author was trying to present his work as being much older than it really was. Like the original authors, later interpolators gave themselves away in various ways. According to Genesis (12:16) Pharaoh gave Abraham a number of animals including camels. The problem here is that camels were not domesticated until some 200 years after the time of Abraham. Since Pharaoh is hardly likely to have provided wild animals as a reward, the passage must be a later interpolation. Again, in Genesis (40:22) Pharaoh has his chief baker hanged. But this form of capital punishment was unknown in Egypt at the time. Again the story seems to have been added later. Aaron placed manna in front of the ‘Testimony’ or Tablets of the Law – before these Tablets of the Law existed (Exodus 16:34). According to 1 Samuel 17:54, David took Goliath’s head back to Jerusalem, but this is hardly likely. Jerusalem was not annexed until years later. Saul’s capital at this time was Gibeah in Judah. Genesis 17:11 reports God’s supposed commandment:

And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.

This is the reason why to this day Jewish males are circumcised. The problem is that when Genesis was purportedly written all Mesopotamian peoples practised circumcision. The custom could be regarded as especially Jewish only much later, when neighbouring peoples no longer practised it. The passage is thought to have been added during the Babylonian Exile, when Jewish leaders were keen to maintain the distinction between their own people and the uncircumcised Babylonians.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), *Jesus and the Word*

Christian Churches have generally been successful in fostering the impression that the New Testament represents a divinely inspired, consistent, authoritative, factual account of historical events, dating from the earliest days of the Church and written by those most closely connected with the life of Jesus. In the following sections we shall look at how well these ideas match up with modern scholarship. We shall also look at the books of the New Testament. Has the present selection of books (the ‘canon’) always been accepted? Alternatively, is the idea of a canon a later and arbitrary concept? Does the canon include questionable material? Does it exclude material that has a better claim to inclusion? Does it contain errors, contradictions or inconsistencies? Does it contain additions or amendments to the original text? Does it contain errors of translation?

The New Testament consists of 27 books: four gospels, The Acts of the Apostles (which is really a sequel to the Gospel of Luke), 21 letters, and the book of Revelation. This much is agreed by all. Hardly anything else is. The following attempts to present the views of the majority of Christian scholars.

APPENDICES



APPENDIX A: JESUS' FAMILY

Mark 6:3	Mark 15:40	Matthew 13:55–6	Matthew 27:56
Children of Mary Siblings of Jesus the carpenter	Children of Mary (who may or may not be Mary the mother of Jesus)	Children of the carpenter and Mary Siblings of Jesus	Children of Mary (who may or may not be Mary the mother of Jesus)
James	James the less	James	James
Joses	Joses	Joses	Joses
Juda		Judas	
Simon		Simon	
Unnamed sisters	Possibly, Salome	Unnamed sisters	

Luke 24:10 refers to Mary the mother of James, who may or may not be Mary the mother of Jesus.
Galatians 1:19 refers to James, the Lord's brother. Jude 1 refers to Jude the brother of James.

Jesus' brothers (brethren) are referred to in John 7:3, Acts 1:14, and 1 Corinthians 9:5.

Joses = Joseph = Joset

Jude = Judah = Judas = Judaeus

APPENDIX B: THE APOSTLES

Matthew 10:2–4	Mark 3:16–19	Luke 6:14–16	John 1 and 21	Acts 1:13 and 26
Simon (Peter)	Simon (Peter)	Simon (Peter)	Cephas = Simon Peter ¹	Peter
Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew
John	John	John		John
James son of Zebedee	James son of Zebedee	James		James
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Thomas	Thomas	Thomas	Thomas ²	Thomas
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Nathanael ³	Bartholomew
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew		Matthew
James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus		James son of Alphaeus
Simon the Canaanite	Simon the Canaanite	Simon the Zealot		Simon the Zealot
Lebbaeus whose surname was Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Judas the brother (or son) of James	Judas ⁴	Judas the brother (or son) of James
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot		Matthias (in place of Judas Iscariot)
	Levi the son of Alphaeus ⁵ (2:14)	Levi (5:27)		
James , ⁶ the Lord's brother (13:55)	James , the Lord's brother (6:3)			
13	14	13	6	12

Simon Peter and Andrew were brothers (John 1:40)

John was the brother of James, son of Zebedee, they were known as the sons of thunder (Boanerges) (Mark 3:17)

James son of Zebedee = James the great

James son of Alphaeus is generally identified with James the less, although Mark 15:40 suggests that James the brother of Jesus may be James the less, if the Mary referred to here is Jesus's mother.

Altogether there are no fewer than 16 names given to apostles (the 12 listed in Matthew 10:2–4 plus the four in bold text), excluding Judas Iscariot's replacement, Matthias.

NOTES

- 1 Cephas is Aramaic for Peter.
- 2 Thomas was also called Thomas Didymus. Thomas means twin in Aramaic, as does Didymus in Greek.
- 3 Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, John 21
- 4 John 14:22 refers to a Judas other than Judas Iscariot.
- 5 Levi, the son of Alphaeus, is conventionally identified with Matthew.
- 6 James the Lord's brother is mentioned elsewhere and specifically identified as one of the apostles (Galatians 1:19). He is also known as James the Righteous (or Just). He is sometimes identified with James the less (Mark 15:40), although the title James the less is generally accorded to another James, the son of Alphaeus. He cannot be the James known as James the Great, since he is mentioned as still living after the death of James the Great (Acts 12:2 and 12:17). In any case James the Great was stated to be the son of Zebedee.

APPENDIX C: POSTBURIAL EVENTS

Who Visited Jesus' Tomb?

Matthew 28:1	Mark 16:1-9	Luke 24:1-11	John 20:1-14	1 Corinthians 15:5-8
Mary Magdalene the other Mary	Mary Magdalene Mary mother of James Salome	Mary Magdalene Mary mother of James Joanna other women	Mary Magdalene	

Who did Jesus appear to after the Resurrection?

Matthew 28:9-20	Mark 16:9-14	Luke 24:1-33	John 20:14-29	1 Corinthians 15:5-8
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	-	Mary Magdalene	-
'the other' Mary	Two others	Cleopas One other	-	-
-	-	Simon (Peter)	-	Peter
The Eleven	The Eleven	The Eleven	The disciples	The Twelve
-	-	-	-	> 500 men
-	-	-	-	James
-	-	-	Thomas + disciples	-
-	-	-	The disciples	All the apostles
-	-	-	-	Paul

BIBLIOGRAPHY



- Ackerknecht, Erwin H., *A Short History of Medicine* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
- Argyle, Michael and Beit-Hallahmi, Benjamin, *The Social Psychology of Religion* (London: RKP, 1975).
- Armstrong, Karen, *A History of God* (London: Mandarin, 1993).
- Ashe, Geoffrey, *The Virgin* (London: Arkana, 1988).
- Augustine, St, *City of God* (London: Penguin, 1984), (English translation by Henry Bettenson).
- Baigent, Michael and Leigh, Richard, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (London: Corgi, 1991).
- Baker, J. H., *An Introduction to English Legal History* (London: Butterworths, 1971).
- Barber, Malcolm, *The Trial of the Templars* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Barkow, Jerome *et al* (eds.), *The Adapted Mind* (Oxford University Press, 1997).
- Barracough, Geoffrey, *The Medieval Papacy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).
- Berman, David, *A History of Atheism in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- Bocock, Robert and Thompson, Kenneth, *Religion and Ideology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).
- Boyer, Carl B. and Merzbach, Uta C., *A History of Mathematics* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1989).
- Bradford, Ernle, *The Shield and the Sword* (London: Fontana, 1974).
- Brenon, Anne, *Les Cathares* (Paris: Jacques Granger, 1997).
- Brooke, John Hedley, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- Chadwick, Henry, *The Early Church* (London: Pelican, 1967).

- Christie-Murray, David, *A History of Heresy* (Oxford University Press, 1989).
- Clark, Sir George, *Science and Social Welfare in the Age of Newton* (Oxford University Press, 1949).
- The Code of Canon Law* (London: Collins, 1983). (English translation.)
- Cohen, A. (ed.), *The Soncino Chumash* (London: Soncino Press, 1974).
- Confucius, *The Analects* (London: Penguin, 1979). (English translation by D. C. Lau.)
- Costen, Michael, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).
- Coudert, Allison, *Alchemy, The Philosopher's Stone* (London: Wildwood House, 1980).
- Cozens, M. L., *A Handbook of Heresies* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1974).
- Curtis, Vesta Sarkhosh, *Persian Myths* (London: British Museum Press, 1993).
- Dalrymple, William, *From the Holy Mountain* (London: Flamingo, 1998).
- Daniell, Christopher, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066–1550* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- Darwin, Charles, *The Origin of Species* (London: Penguin, 1968).
- Davies, R. Trevor, *Four Centuries of Witch-Beliefs* (London: Methuen, 1947).
- Davis, C. S. L., *Peace, Print & Protestantism 1450–1558* (St Albans: Paladin, 1977).
- Dawkins, Richard, *The Selfish Gene* (London: Penguin, 1976).
- , *The Blind Watchmaker* (London: Penguin, 1986).
- , *River out of Eden* (London: Phoenix, 1996).
- Deanesly, Margaret, *A History of the Medieval Church* (London: Routledge, 1972).
- Dennett, Daniel C., *Breaking the Spell, Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Penguin, 2006).
- , *Consciousness Explained* (London: Penguin, 1991).
- , *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (London: Penguin, 1998).
- Early Christian Writings* (London: Penguin, 1987). (Translation by Maxwell Staniforth, edited by Andrew Louth.)
- Ehrman, Bart D., *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (Oxford University Press, 1993).
- The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin, 1972). (English translation by N. K. Sandars.)

- Eusebius, *The History of the Church* (London: Penguin, 1965). (English translation by G. A. Williamson.)
- Evans, Christopher, *Is Holy Scripture Christian?* (London: SCM Press, 1971).
- Finocchiaro, Maurice A., *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History* (London: University of California Press, 1989).
- Flew, Antony, *An Introduction to Western Philosophy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).
- Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1995). (English translation by Richard Howard.)
- Fox, Robin Lane, *The Unauthorised Version* (London: Viking, 1991).
- , *Pagans and Christians* (London: Penguin, 1988).
- Fraser, Lady Antonia, *The Gunpowder Plot: Terror and Faith in 1605* (London: Arrow, 1999).
- Frayling, Christopher, *Vampyres* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).
- Frazer, James G., *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1957).
- Freud, Sigmund, *Totem and Taboo* (London: Pelican Books, 1938).
- Gibbon, Edward, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Penguin, 1987).
- Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths* (2 vols.) (London: Pelican Books, 1960).
- , *The White Goddess* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).
- Harrington, Daniel J., *Wisdom Texts from Qumran* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- Harris, Sam, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (London: Bantam Press, 2007).
- Herrick, Jim, *Against the Faith* (London: Glover & Blair, 1985).
- Hibbert, Christopher, *The Roots of Evil* (London: Penguin, 1966).
- Hick, John (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977).
- Hitchens, Christopher, *God Is Not Great* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007).
- Humphreys, Margaret, *Empty Cradles* (London: Corgi Books, 1995).
- Jahoda, Gustav, *The Psychology of Superstition* (London: Pelican, 1970).
- Johnson, Paul, *A History of Christianity* (London: Penguin, 1976).
- Johnson, Steven, *Emergence* (London: Penguin, 2001).
- Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996). (English translation.)
- Kahl, Joachim, *The Misery of Christianity* (London: Penguin Books, 1971). (English translation by N. D. Smith.)

- Kamen, Henry, *The Spanish Inquisition* (London: The Folio Society, 1998).
- Kelly, J. N. D., *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A & C Black, 1968).
- , *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford University Press, 1986).
- Kerényi, C., *The Gods Of The Greeks* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974). (English translation by Norman Cameron.)
- Kidd, B. J., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church* (2 vols.). (London: SPCK, 1932).
- Knight, Margaret (ed.), *Humanist Anthology* (London: RPA, 1967).
- The Koran* (London: Penguin, 1974). (English translation by N. J. Dawood.)
- Kramer, Heinrich and Sprenger, James, *Malleus Maleficarum* (London: Arrow, 1971). (English translation by Montague Summers.)
- , *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (3 vols.). (London, 1888).
- Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1978).
- , *Montaillou* (Abridged English Version) (London: Penguin, 1978).
- Lloyd G. E. R., *The Revolutions of Wisdom* (London: University of California Press, 1989).
- Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe (De Rerum Natura)* (London: Penguin, 1951). (English translation by R. E. Latham.)
- MacKay, Charles, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (London: Random House, 1980). (Originally published in 1841 under the title *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions.*)
- McKay, John P., et al, *A History of Western Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991).
- Marsh, John, *Saint John* (Commentary). (London: Pelican, 1968).
- Meyer, Marvin W. (translator), *The Secret Teachings of Jesus, Four Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1986).
- Murray, Gilbert, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (London: Watts & Co, 1935).
- , *Humanist Essays* (London: Unwin, 1964).
- Nelli, René, *Les Cathares du Languedoc* (Paris: Hachette, 1995).
- Nineham, D. E., *Saint Mark* (Commentary). (London: Pelican, 1969).
- Norton, David, *A History of the Bible as Literature* (2 vols.). (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- Norwich, John Julius, *Byzantium The Early Centuries* (London: Penguin, 1992).
- , *Byzantium The Apogee* (London: Penguin, 1993).

- , *Byzantium The Decline and Fall* (London: Penguin, 1996).
- O'Shea, Stephen, *The Perfect Heresy* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2000).
- Obianyo, Anene, *Christ or Devil?* (Nigeria: Delta, 1988).
- Pagels, Elaine, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: Orion, 2006).
- Paine, Thomas, *The Age of Reason* (New York: Prometheus, 1984).
- Peterson, Michael, et al, *Reason & Religious Belief, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 1991).
- Pollock, Sir Frederick and Maitland, Frederic William, *The History of English Law* (Vol. 1). (Cambridge University Press, 1968).
- Potter, Harry, *Hanging in Judgement* (London: SCM Press, 1993).
- Ranke-Heinemann, Uta, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990). (English translation by John Brownjohn.)
- Redwood, John, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).
- Richards, Jeffrey, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- Ridley, Matt, *The Red Queen* (London: Penguin, 1994).
- Riley-Smith, Jonathan, *The Atlas of the Crusades* (London: Times Books, 1991).
- Robinson, James M. (General Editor), *The Nag Hammadi Library* (London: Harper Collins, 1990).
- Roquebert, Michel, *L'Épopée Cathare* (5 vols.). (Privat; v1 1970, v2 1977, v3 1986, v4 1989, v5 1998).
- Romer, John, *Testament: The Bible and History* (London: Michael O'Mara, 1988).
- Runciman, Sir Steven, *A History of the Crusades* (3 vols.). (London: Penguin, 1971).
- , *Byzantine Style and Civilization* (London: Penguin, 1990).
- Russell, Bertrand, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1979).
- , *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991).
- Sagan, Carl, *The Demon-Haunted World* (London: Headline, 1997).
- Sale, Kirkpatrick, *The Conquest of Paradise* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991).
- Scholder, Klaus, *A Requiem for Hitler* (London: SCM Press, 1989).
- Scott, George Riley, *A History of Torture* (London: Senate, 1995).
- Seznec, Jean, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (Princeton University Press, 1972). (English translation by Barbara F. Sessions.)

- Slack, Kenneth, *The British Churches Today* (London: SCM Press, 1961).
- Smith, George H., *Atheism: The Case Against God* (New York: Prometheus, 1979).
- Staniforth, Maxwell (ed.), *Early Christian Writings* (London: Penguin, 1987).
- Stone, Darwell, *Outlines of Christian Dogma* (London: Longmans, 1927).
- Strathern, Paul, *The Medici* (London: Pimlico, 2005).
- Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (London: Penguin, 1971). (English translation by Michael Grant.)
- Tannahill, Reay, *Sex in History* (London: Abacus, 1981).
- Thomas, Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1991).
- Toy, John, *What Are Apocryphal Writings* (York: The Vicar's Press, 1991).
- Trevelyan, G. M., *Illustrated English Social History* (4 vols.). (London: Pelican, 1964).
- Tribe, David, *100 Years of Freethought* (London: Elek, 1967).
- Tyerman, Christopher, *God's War, A New History of the Crusade* (London: Penguin, 2007).
- Vermes, Geza, *Jesus The Jew* (London: SCM Press, 1983).
- de Voragine, Jacobus, *The Golden Legend* (2 vols.). (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). (English translation by William Granger Ryan.)
- de Waal, Frans, *Good Natured. The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and other Animals* (Harvard University Press, 1996).
- Walter, Nicholas, *Blasphemy Ancient and Modern* (London: Rationalist Press, 1990).
- Walvin, James, *Black Ivory, A History of British Slavery* (London: Harper Collins, 1992).
- Ware, Timothy, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin, 1991).
- Warner, Marina, *Alone of All Her Sex* (London: Picador, 1967).
- Wells, G. A., *Religious Postures* (La Salle: Open Court, 1967).
- , *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (New York: Prometheus, 1967).
- Whitehead, Benjamin, *Church Law* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1911).
- Wilson, A. N. *Jesus* (London: Flamingo, 1993).
- Wilson, Bryan, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1982).
- Wolpert, Lewis, *Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast, The Evolutionary Origins Of Belief* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006).
- Yallop, David, *In God's Name* (London: Corgi, 1988).
- Young, Frances, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 1996).