



The Oxford Companion to the Bible (Oxford Companions)

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The Bible has had an immeasurable influence on Western culture, touching on virtually every aspect of our lives. It is one of the great wellsprings of Western religious, ethical, and philosophical traditions. It has been an endless source of inspiration to artists, from classic works such as Michaelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Handel's *Messiah*, or Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to modern works such as Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers* or Martin Scorsese's controversial *Last Temptation of Christ*. For countless generations, it has been a comfort in suffering, a place to reflect on the mysteries of birth, death, and immortality. Its stories and characters are an integral part of the repertoire of every educated adult, forming an enduring bond that spans thousands of years and embraces a vast community of believers and nonbelievers.

The Oxford Companion to the Bible provides an authoritative one-volume reference to the people, places, events, books, institutions, religious belief, and secular influence of the Bible. Written by more than 250 scholars from some 20 nations and embracing a wide variety of perspectives, the *Companion* offers over seven hundred entries, ranging from brief identifications--who is Dives? where is Pisgah?--to extensive interpretive essays on topics such as the influence of the Bible on music or law.

Ranging far beyond the scope of a traditional Bible dictionary, the *Companion* features, in addition to its many informative, factual entries, an abundance of interpretive essays. Here are extended entries on religious concepts from immortality, sin, and grace, to baptism, ethics, and the Holy Spirit. The contributors also explore biblical views of modern issues such as homosexuality, marriage, and anti-Semitism, and the impact of the Bible on the secular world (including a four-part article on the Bible's influence on literature).

Of course, the *Companion* can also serve as a handy reference, the first place to turn to find factual information on the Bible. Readers will find fascinating, informative articles on all the books of the Bible--including the Apocrypha and many other ancient texts, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, Pseudepigrapha, and the Mishnah. Virtually every figure who walked across the biblical stage is identified here, ranging from Rebekah, Rachel, and Mary, to Joseph, Barabbas, and Jesus.

The *Companion* also offers entries that shed light on daily life in ancient Israel and the earliest Christian communities, with fascinating articles on feasts and festivals, clothing, medicine, units of time, houses, and furniture. Finally, there are twenty-eight pages of full-color maps, providing an accurate, detailed portrait of the biblical world.

A vast compendium of information related to scriptures, here is an ideal complement to the Bible, an essential volume for every home and library, the first place to turn for information on the central book of Western culture.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This latest Oxford Companion contains more than 700 signed entries treating the formation, transmission, circulation, sociohistorical situation, interpretation, theology, uses, and influence of the Bible. Despite its dictionary arrangement and the encyclopedic nature of many of its entries, this volume does not fit the mold of standard Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, which focus primarily on the Bible and on means of understanding it in context. Unlike them, this companion aims to "trace the Bible's ongoing significance in such areas as the arts, law, politics, and literature." Entries written by over 250 leading international scholars reflect the current state of biblical scholarship. Topics are generally well selected, though it is not clear why Mormonism and Christian Science are the only nontraditional Christian groups treated, nor why the Scofield Reference Bible is the only special edition of the Bible considered separately. Still, this well-written, authoritative work will be particularly useful to general readers and to students and scholars working in non-biblical fields.

- Craig W. Beard, Univ. of Alabama at Birmingham Lib.

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From [Booklist](#)

After covering most of the world's major national literatures and literary genres, with this volume the venerable Oxford Companion series finally addresses perhaps the most famous literary work of all. According to the introduction, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible (OCB)* "is an authoritative reference for key persons, places, events, concepts, institutions, and realities of biblical times." Taking what is called a "maximalist position," the volume treats "any book or part of a book that is recognized as canonical by any religious community." Editors Metzger, coeditor of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (1991), and Coogan, an associate editor of the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, have compiled a work that will stand for some time as a definitive one-volume treatment of the Bible.

The Oxford Companion to the Bible opens with a list of the 267 contributors, most academically affiliated, who come from a variety of religious backgrounds. The volume is arranged alphabetically by topic, with cross-references within articles noted by an asterisk before the word, and many *see* references scattered throughout the work. All articles are signed. The volume concludes with a bibliography, an index, and 14 color maps (each a two-page spread) with an index. Entries vary greatly in length, from some 200 words for *Blasphemy* and *Fear* to more than 22 pages for *Literature and the Bible* and more than 29 pages for the longest entry, *Translations*. Many entries are subdivided into separate articles, each with a separate contributor (e.g., *Interpretation, History of*). Taking into account these separate articles, *OCB* features 706 articles within 668 entries.

As with other Oxford companions, the work features readable articles that the educated layperson can understand. Although the introduction states that it can be used by "students and teachers in high schools," some articles such as *Ecclesiastes, The Book of*, which describes the book as "less ecclesial than sapiential," may be difficult for the high school student.

Given the relatively low number of entries compared with other one-volume works on the Bible, it would be unfair to compare *OCB* with works such as *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, which contains some 3,700 biblical terms with entries on every name used at least three times in the Bible. *OCB* goes into greater detail on topics than *Harper's* but avoids an entry for every person or event. Unique to *OCB* are such thematic entries as

African American Tradition and the Bible, *Children's Bibles*, *Freud and the Bible*, and *Popular Culture and the Bible*. Whereas *Women* receives 21/2 pages in *Harper's*, *OCB* devotes 12 pages to the topic. Traditional entries, such as those on most of the books of the Bible, are dealt with in equally notable fashion.

The one drawback to this volume is the lack of bibliographies at the end of entries. While this is not an unusual practice in Oxford companions, the concluding 114-entry bibliography seems downright meager when confronted with the breadth of the work. Although the subdivision by 13 topics ("History," "Textual Criticism," etc.) within the bibliography helps, one wishes for more. On the other hand, the detailed index is a welcome enhancement (a feature missing from *Harper's*), allowing the reader to note where, for example, Moses is mentioned throughout the volume. The index also includes each contributor's name with the page numbers written.

Even for libraries that already seemingly have their fill of reference works on the Bible, *OCB* provides a significant addition to the reference literature, providing a substantial amount of depth at a reasonable price. While *Harper's* still is adequate for ready reference, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* provides more substance on many topics.

Review

"Provides the general reader with an affordable, authoritative introduction to the Bible. Over 700 articles from 250 contributors reflect a wide range of denominations and current scholarship in the field. Though the form is that of a traditional alphabetic dictionary with the expected articles on the people, places, books of the Bible and matters of faith, there is, as the editors put it, 'sustained and systematic attention' to the Bible's continuous influence in other areas of life including the arts, literature, law, politics popular culture, and even science."--American Libraries

"Generous biblical maps, even-handed entries, a thorough index and some incisive long articles make this a blessing."--The Philadelphia Inquirer

"For those forward-minded students already poised for college days, here's a crash course on getting ahead. Before having trouble with Milton in paradise or struggling eternally in Dante's Inferno, plan to place a copy of the Oxford Companion to the Bible in the trunk along with other academic lifesavers."--The Dallas Morning News

"Should be on the reference shelf of every decent library and, given its modest price, serious readers of the Bible will be well tempted to acquire a copy."--Commonweal

"The Oxford Companion to the Bible is excellent, packed with solid information soberly and carefully presented, a reliable guide to an intricate subject."--The Very Reverend Professor Henry Chadwick, Ex-master of Peterhouse College, Cambridge University

"Entries written by over 250 leading international scholars reflect the current state of biblical scholarship....Well written, authoritative...will be particularly useful to general readers and to students and scholars in nonbiblical fields."--Library Journal

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sandra Spier:

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