

A Presentation of
Today's New International Version®



The Books of The Bible™



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Preface to **The Books of The Bible**

The Bible is not a single book, but a collection of many books that were written, preserved and gathered together so that they could be shared with new generations of readers. Reading, of course, is not an end in itself. Especially in the case of the Bible, reading is a means of entering into the story. The Bible is an invitation to the reader to first view the world in a new way, and then to become an agent of the world's renewal. Reading is a step in this journey. *The Books of The Bible* is intended to help readers enjoy their encounter with the sacred text and to read with more understanding, so that they may take their places more readily within this story of new creation.

The Bible is more than bare words. Those who wrote its books chose to put them in particular forms, using the appropriate literary conventions. Good readers will honor the covenant implied by these choices, and they will respect these conventions, in order to do justice to the text. Many different literary forms are found in the Bible: poetry, narrative, wisdom collections, letters, law codes, apocalyptic visions and more. All of these forms must be read as the literature they really are, or else misunderstanding and distortion of meaning are bound to follow.

Unfortunately, for some time now the Bible has been printed in a format that hides its literary forms under a mask of numbers that break the text into bits and sections that the authors did not intend. And so *The Books of The Bible* seeks instead to present each of the books of the Bible in their distinctive literary forms and structures. It draws on the fundamental insight that visual presentation can be a crucial aid to right reading, good understanding and a better engagement with the Bible.

Specifically, this edition of the Bible differs from the most common current format in several significant ways:

- chapter and verse numbers have been removed from the text;
- the books are presented according to the internal divisions that we believe their authors have indicated;
- a single-column setting is used to present the text more clearly and naturally, and to avoid disrupting the intended line breaks in poetic sections;
- footnotes, section headings and other supplementary materials have been removed from the pages of the sacred text;
- individual books that later tradition divided into two or more books are made whole again; and
- the books have been placed in an order that we hope will help readers understand them better.

Why have we made these changes? First of all, the chapters and verses that the Bible has been divided into aren't the work of the original authors. The present system of chapter divisions was devised in 1205, and our present verse divisions were added in the 1550s. Chapters and verses have imposed a foreign structure and made it more difficult to read the Bible with understanding. Chapter divisions typically don't correspond with the actual divisions of thought. They thus require readers to make sense of only part of a longer discussion as if it were complete in itself, or else to try to combine shorter discussions into one coherent whole. Moreover, because the Bible's chapters are all roughly the same length, they can at best only indicate sections of a certain size; this hides the existence of both larger and smaller thought units within biblical books.

When verses are treated as intentional units (as their numbering suggests they should be), they encourage the Bible to be read as a giant reference book, perhaps as a collection of rules or as a series of propositions. Also, when "Bible verses" are treated as independent and free-standing statements, they can be taken selectively out of context and arranged in such a way as to suggest that the Bible supports beliefs and positions that it really doesn't. In order to encourage greater understanding and more responsible use of the Bible, we have removed chapter and verse numberings from the text entirely. (A chapter-and-verse range is included at the bottom of each page.) The dubious benefit of allowing passages to be located quickly does not outweigh the negative factors that chapters and verses introduce to Bible reading.

Because the biblical books were handwritten, read out loud and then hand copied long before standardized printing came into being, their authors and compilers needed a way to indicate divisions within the text itself. They often did this by repeating a phrase or expression each time they made the transition from one section to another. We can confirm that particular phrases are significant in this way by observing how their placement reinforces a structure that can already be recognized implicitly from other characteristics of a book, such as changes in topic, movement in place or time, or shifts from one kind of writing to another. Through line spacing, we have marked off sections of varying sizes: the smallest are indicated by one blank line, the next largest by two lines, and so on, up to three or four. Our goal is to encourage meaningful units to be read in their entirety and so with greater appreciation and understanding.

Footnotes, section headings and other supplemental materials have been removed from the page in order to give readers a more direct and immediate experience of the word of God. (The translators' notes, an essential part of their work, appear at the end of each book.) But we have included introductions to each of the biblical books, to provide background information on why they were written and how we understand them to be put together. Beyond this, we encourage readers to study the Bible in community. We believe that if they do, they and their teachers, leaders and peers will provide one another with much more information and many more insights than could ever be included between the covers of a printed Bible.

The books of the Bible were written or recorded individually. When they were gathered together, they were placed into a variety of orders. Unfortunately, the order in which today's readers are used to encountering the books of the Bible is yet another factor that hinders their understanding. Paul's letters, for example, have been put in order of length. They are badly out of historical order, and this makes it difficult to read them with an appreciation for where they fit in the span of his life or for how they express the development of his thought. The traditional order can also encourage misunderstandings of what kind of writing a particular book is. For example, the book of James has strong affinities with other biblical books in the wisdom tradition. But it has been placed within a group of letters, suggesting that it too should be read as a letter. To help readers overcome such difficulties, we have sought to order the books in such a way that their literary types, the historical circumstances in which they were composed and the theological traditions out of which they speak will be evident. Our introductions to each of the different parts of the Bible will explain how we have ordered the books in these sections and why.

Just as the work of Bible translation is never finished, the work of formatting the Bible on the principles described here will never be completed. Advances in the literary interpretation of the biblical books will undoubtedly enable the work we have begun here to be extended and improved in the years ahead. Yet the need to help readers overcome the many obstacles inherent in the Bible's current format is urgent, so we humbly offer the results of our work to those seeking an improved visual presentation of its sacred books.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of many lay people, clergy, scholars and those engaged in active Scripture outreach who have reviewed our work. They have shared their considerable knowledge and expertise with us and provided valuable insights and guidance. However, final responsibility for all of the decisions in this format rests with us. Our hope and prayer is that the presentation of *The Books of The Bible* will give readers a deeper appreciation for, and a greater understanding of, these sacred texts.

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2007

The story
of God's creation
of the world,
its fall from his intention,
and the calling of Abraham
and his descendants—
the people of Israel
—to be God's instrument
for bringing blessing
to all peoples on earth,

presented in the books of

The First Testament

