
the Peoples'
BIBLE

the Peoples' BIBLE

New Revised Standard Version
with the Apocrypha

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To the Reader

This preface is addressed to you by the Committee of translators, who wish to explain, as briefly as possible, the origin and character of our work. The publication of our revision is yet another step in the long, continual process of making the Bible available in the form of the English language that is most widely current in our day. To summarize in a single sentence: the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is an authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, which was a revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which, in turn, embodied earlier revisions of the King James Version, published in 1611.

In the course of time, the King James Version came to be regarded as "the Authorized Version." With good reason it has been termed "the noblest monument of English prose," and it has entered, as no other book has, into the making of the personal character and the public institutions of the English-speaking peoples. We owe to it an incalculable debt.

Yet the King James Version has serious defects. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of biblical studies and the discovery of many biblical manuscripts more ancient than those on which the King James Version was based made it apparent that these defects were so many as to call for revision. The task was begun, by authority of the Church of England, in 1870. The (British) Revised Version of the Bible was published in 1881-1885; and the American Standard Version, its variant embodying the preferences of the American scholars associated with the work, was published, as was mentioned above, in 1901. In 1928 the copyright of the latter was acquired by the International Council of Religious Education and thus passed into the ownership of the Churches of the United States and Canada that were associated in this Council through their boards of education and publication.

The Council appointed a committee of scholars to have charge of the text of the American Standard Version and to undertake inquiry concerning the need for further revision. After studying the questions whether or not revision should be undertaken, and if so, what its nature and extent should be, in 1937 the Council authorized a revision. The scholars who served as members of the Committee worked in two sections, one dealing with the Old Testament and one with the New Testament. In 1946 the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament was published. The publication of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, took place on September 30, 1952. A translation of the *Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical* Books of the Old Testament followed in 1957. In 1977 this collection was issued in an expanded edition, containing three additional texts received by Eastern

Orthodox communions (3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151). Thereafter the Revised Standard Version gained the distinction of being officially authorized for use by all major Christian churches: Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox.

The Revised Standard Version Bible Committee is a continuing body, comprising about thirty members, both men and women. Ecumenical in representation, it includes scholars affiliated with various Protestant denominations, as well as several Roman Catholic members, an Eastern Orthodox member, and a Jewish member who serves in the Old Testament section. For a period of time the Committee included several members from Canada and from England.

Because no translation of the Bible is perfect or is acceptable to all groups of readers, and because discoveries of older manuscripts and further investigation of linguistic features of the text continue to become available, renderings of the Bible have proliferated. During the years following the publication of the Revised Standard Version, twenty-six other English translations and revisions of the Bible were produced by committees and by individual scholars--not to mention twenty-five other translations and revisions of the New Testament alone. One of the latter was the second edition of the RSV New Testament, issued in 197l, twenty-five years after its initial publication.

Following the publication of the RSV Old Testament in 1952, significant advances were made in the discovery and interpretation of documents in Semitic languages related to Hebrew. In addition to the information that had become available in the late 1940s from the Dead Sea texts of Isaiah and Habakkuk, subsequent acquisitions from the same area brought to light many other early copies of all the books of the Hebrew Scriptures (except Esther), though most of these copies are fragmentary. During the same period early Greek manuscript copies of books of the New Testament also became available.

In order to take these discoveries into account, along with recent studies of documents in Semitic languages related to Hebrew, in 1974 the Policies Committee of the Revised Standard Version, which is a standing committee of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., authorized the preparation of a revision of the entire RSV Bible.

For the Old Testament the Committee has made use of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977; ed. sec. emendata, 1983). This is an edition of the Hebrew and Aramaic text as current early in the Christian era and fixed by Jewish scholars (the "Masoretes") of the sixth to the ninth centuries. The vowel signs, which were added by the Masoretes, are accepted in the main, but where a more probable and convincing reading can be obtained by assuming different vowels, this has been done. No notes are given in such cases, because the vowel points are less ancient and reliable than the consonants. When an alternative reading given by the Masoretes is translated in a footnote, this is identified by the words "Another reading is."

Departures from the consonantal text of the best manuscripts have been made only where it seems clear that errors in copying had been made before the text was standardized. Most of the corrections adopted are based on the ancient versions (translations into Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, and Latin), which were made prior to the time of the work of the Masoretes and which therefore may reflect earlier forms of the Hebrew text. In such instances a footnote specifies the version or versions from which the correction has been derived and also gives a translation of the Masoretic Text. Where it was deemed appropriate to do so, information is supplied in footnotes from subsidiary Jewish traditions concerning other textual readings (the *Tiqqune Sopherim,* "emendations of the scribes"). These are identified in the footnotes as "Ancient Heb tradition."

Occasionally it is evident that the text has suffered in transmission and that none of the versions provides a satisfactory restoration. Here we can only follow the best judgment of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text. Such reconstructions are indicated in footnotes by the abbreviation Cn ("Correction"), and a translation of the Masoretic Text is added.

For the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament the Committee has made use of a number of texts. For most of these books the basic Greek text from which the present translation was made is the edition of the Septuagint prepared by Alfred Rahlfs and published by the Württemberg Bible Society (Stuttgart, 1935). For several of the books the more recently published individual volumes of the Göttingen Septuagint project were utilized. For the book of Tobit it was decided to follow the form of the Greek text found in codex Sinaiticus (supported as it is by evidence from Qumran); where this text is defective, it was supplemented and corrected by other Greek manuscripts. For the three Additions to Daniel (namely, Susanna, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, and Bel and the Dragon) the Committee continued to use the Greek version attributed to Theodotion (the so-called "Theodotion-Daniel"). In translating Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), while constant reference was made to the Hebrew fragments of a large portion of this book (those discovered at Qumran and Masada as well as those recovered from the Cairo Geniza), the Committee generally followed the Greek text (including verse numbers) published by Joseph Ziegler in the Göttingen Septuagint (1965). But in many places the Committee has translated the Hebrew text when this provides a reading that is clearly superior to the Greek; the Syriac and Latin versions were also consulted throughout and occasionally adopted. The basic text adopted in rendering 2 Esdras is the Latin version given in *Biblia Sacra,* edited by Robert Weber (Stuttgart, 1971). This was supplemented by consulting the Latin text as edited by R. L. Bensly (1895) and by Bruno Violet (1910), as well as by taking into account the several Oriental versions of 2 Esdras, namely, the Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic (two forms, referred to as Arabic 1 and Arabic 2), Armenian, and Georgian versions. Finally, since the Additions to the Book of Esther are disjointed

and quite unintelligible as they stand in most editions of the Apocrypha, we have provided them with their original context by translating the whole of the Greek version of Esther from Robert Hanhart's Göttingen edition (1983).

For the New Testament the Committee has based its work on the most recent edition of *The Greek New Testament,* prepared by an interconfessional and international committee and published by the United Bible Societies (1966; 3rd ed. corrected, 1983; information concerning changes to be introduced into the critical apparatus of the forthcoming 4th edition was available to the Committee). As in that edition, double brackets are used to enclose a few passages that are generally regarded to be later additions to the text, but which we have retained because of their evident antiquity and their importance in the textual tradition. Only in very rare instances have we replaced the text or the punctuation of the Bible Societies' edition by an alternative that seemed to us to be superior. Here and there in the footnotes the phrase, "Other ancient authorities read," identifies alternative readings preserved by Greek manuscripts and early versions. In both Testaments, alternative renderings of the text are indicated by the word "Or."

As for the style of English adopted for the present revision, among the mandates given to the Committee in 1980 by the Division of Education and Ministry of the National Council of Churches of Christ (which now holds the copyright of the RSV Bible) was the directive to continue in the tradition of the King James Bible, but to introduce such changes as are warranted on the basis of accuracy, clarity, euphony, and current English usage. Within the constraints set by the original texts and by the mandates of the Division, the Committee has followed the maxim, "As literal as possible, as free as necessary." As a consequence, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) remains essentially a literal translation. Paraphrastic renderings have been adopted only sparingly, and then chiefly to compensate for a deficiency in the English language--the lack of a common gender third person singular pronoun.

During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism arising from the inherent bias of the English language towards the masculine gender, a bias that in the case of the Bible has often restricted or obscured the meaning of the original text. The mandates from the Division specified that, in references to men and women, masculine-oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture. As can be appreciated, more than once the Committee found that the several mandates stood in tension and even in conflict. The various concerns had to be balanced case by case in order to provide a faithful and acceptable rendering without using contrived English. Only very occasionally has the pronoun "he" or "him" been retained in passages where the reference may have been to a woman as well as to a man; for example, in several legal texts in

Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In such instances of formal, legal language, the options of either putting the passage in the plural or of introducing additional nouns to avoid masculine pronouns in English seemed to the Committee to obscure the historic structure and literary character of the original. In the vast majority of cases, however, inclusiveness has been attained by simple rephrasing or by introducing plural forms when this does not distort the meaning of the passage. Of course, in narrative and in parable no attempt was made to generalize the sex of individual persons.

Another aspect of style will be detected by readers who compare the more stately English rendering of the Old Testament with the less formal rendering adopted for the New Testament. For example, the traditional distinction between *shall* and *will* in English has been retained in the Old Testament as appropriate in rendering a document that embodies what may be termed the classic form of Hebrew, while in the New Testament the abandonment of such distinctions in the usage of the future tense in English reflects the more colloquial nature of the koine Greek used by most New Testament authors except when they are quoting the Old Testament.

Careful readers will notice that here and there in the Old Testament the word LORD (or in certain cases GOD) is printed in capital letters. This represents the traditional manner in English versions of rendering the Divine Name, the "Tetragrammaton" (see the notes on Exodus 3.14, 15), following the precedent of the ancient Greek and Latin translators and the long established practice in the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue. While it is almost if not quite certain that the Name was originally pronounced "Yahweh," this pronunciation was not indicated when the Masoretes added vowel sounds to the consonantal Hebrew text. To the four consonants YHWH of the Name, which had come to be regarded as too sacred to be pronounced, they attached vowel signs indicating that in its place should be read the Hebrew word *Adonai* meaning "Lord" (or *Elohim* meaning "God"). Ancient Greek translators employed the word *Kyrios* ("Lord") for the Name. The Vulgate likewise used the Latin word *Dominus* ("Lord"). The form "Jehovah" is of late medieval origin; it is a combination of the consonants of the Divine Name and the vowels attached to it by the Masoretes but belonging to an entirely different word. Although the American Standard Version (1901) had used "Jehovah" to render the Tetragrammaton (the sound of Y being represented by J and the sound of W by V, as in Latin), for two reasons the Committees that produced the RSV and the NRSV returned to the more familiar usage of the King James Version. (1) The word "Jehovah" does not accurately represent any form of the Name ever used in Hebrew. (2) The use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom the true God had to be distinguished, began to be discontinued in Judaism before the Christian era and is inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church.

It will be seen that in the Psalms and in other prayers addressed to God the archaic second person

singular pronouns *(thee, thou, thine)* and verb forms *(art, hast, hadst)* are no longer used. Although some readers may regret this change, it should be pointed out that in the original languages neither the Old Testament nor the New makes any linguistic distinction between addressing a human being and addressing the Deity. Furthermore, in the tradition of the King James Version one will not expect to find the use of capital letters for pronouns that refer to the Deity--such capitalization is an unnecessary innovation that has only recently been introduced into a few English translations of the Bible. Finally, we have left to the discretion of the licensed publishers such matters as section headings, cross-references, and clues to the pronunciation of proper names.

This new version seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible as it has been known and used through the years. It is intended for use in public reading and congregational worship, as well as in private study, instruction, and meditation. We have resisted the temptation to introduce terms and phrases that merely reflect current moods, and have tried to put the message of the Scriptures in simple, enduring words and expressions that are worthy to stand in the great tradition of the King James Bible and its predecessors.

In traditional Judaism and Christianity, the Bible has been more than a historical document to be preserved or a classic of literature to be cherished and admired; it is recognized as the unique record of God's dealings with people over the ages. The Old Testament sets forth the call of a special people to enter into covenant relation with the God of justice and steadfast love and to bring God's law to the nations. The New Testament records the life and work of Jesus Christ, the one in whom "the Word became flesh," as well as describes the rise and spread of the early Christian Church. The Bible carries its full message, not to those who regard it simply as a noble literary heritage of the past or who wish to use it to enhance political purposes and advance otherwise desirable goals, but to all persons and communities who read it so that they may discern and understand what God is saying to them. That message must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning; it must be presented in language that is direct and plain and meaningful to people today. It is the hope and prayer of the translators that this version of the Bible may continue to hold a large place in congregational life and to speak to all readers, young and old alike, helping them to understand and believe and respond to its message.

For the Committee,
BRUCE M. METZGER

Introduction

Why The Peoples' Bible?

The United States is rapidly becoming a nation of widely different cultures with a multiplicity of worldviews. Similar diversification is evident around the globe, particularly in major cities. By the midpoint of the twenty-first century, whites of European descent are expected to constitute less than 50 percent of the total U.S. population—in a nation with a plurality of races, ethnicities, and cultures.

It is easy for the members of any dominant majority group to imagine themselves at the center of things and others as peripheral. Given a long history in which European conquest and colonialism were intertwined with Christian missionary efforts among other lands and peoples, including North America, and given the particular history of slavery, conquest, and wave after wave of immigration that has produced the present diversity in the United States, it has long been possible for white Christians of European descent to imagine that the Bible was "theirs" more than it belonged to others. They could read themselves into the biblical story, spontaneously identifying themselves with the people of God. But the rich diversity of communities of faith has now made impossible the assumption that any one people "owns" the Bible. We are pleased to present *The Peoples' Bible*, a study Bible that speaks to this new reality.

Multicultural perspectives and culture-critical methods are squarely at home in contemporary biblical scholarship. But until now, teachers and religious leaders who have wanted to explore these issues with their students and congregations have necessarily relied on "extra" resources—texts or commentaries alongside a study Bible, for example. The inevitable impression is that the questions raised in multicultural and culture-critical scholarship are somehow extraneous questions, brought by marginalized "others" to a Bible that remains transcendent, universally authoritative, and ethnically neutral.

The Peoples' Bible shatters the misperception that the Bible is somehow color- and culture-blind. Through informative and stimulating articles and introductions by renowned biblical scholars from richly diverse backgrounds, thought-provoking text-boxes, and a beautiful four-color gallery that highlights the myriad ways in which our cultural backgrounds determine our perceptions, *The Peoples' Bible* opens our eyes to the complex interactions of

peoples, at cultural crossroads through centuries of history, that gave rise to our Bible. This resource draws us into a new encounter with Scripture as the product of many cultures, at home in many cultures, and shows that the Bible really is a peoples' Bible.

The Peoples' Bible seeks to reach a mass audience of people who have often felt left out and voiceless in their encounter with other study Bibles. These include people at the grassroots as well as people in the academy. In order to give voice to those who have been silenced by dominant narratives in Western culture, *The Peoples' Bible* offers some of the best insights of scholars from a wide array of cultures and ethnicities, writing in accessible language. The editorial team and writers are comprised of scholars from communities traditionally underrepresented in mainstream biblical scholarship in the United States, whose perspectives have consequently been underrepresented in study Bibles as well: African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, and Native Americans. Some white interpreters who have a track record offering perspectives rarely heard have also contributed to this study Bible, and the editors have sought a balance of men and women writers as well.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible has been selected by the editors and the publisher as the translation for *The Peoples' Bible*. This choice was made because of the NRSV's wide acceptance for accuracy in translation from the original languages of the Bible and for its effort to use gender-inclusive language to communicate in a modern idiom.

The Perspective of The Peoples' Bible

The Peoples' Bible envisions the Bible as a crossroads: a place of both collision and of convergence. On the journey of biblical interpretation there are collisions between one or another culture and Scripture, between cultures themselves, between dominant and marginal perspectives, and across imbalances of power in society. These realities are reflected here as scholars often present multiple perspectives on a biblical text. Yet the Bible is also a place of convergence where people meet at the crossroads, finding points of common ground and shared interest.

The Peoples' Bible gives the Bible back to the reader and invites a peoples' interpretation of Scripture through each reader's own unique social lens. Readers will resonate with voices speaking from life settings similar to their own. Biblical narratives will engage readers in ways that prompt reflection on their own life journeys. How we read the Bible, like our understanding of life itself, is affected by many dimensions, including our age, gender, race, culture, socioeconomic class, religion, ability, sexual preference, and nation of origin. *The Peoples' Bible* taps into this reservoir of feeling and insight to inform the reader's understanding

of these ancient texts. Studying the Bible with only one's own set of lived experiences or educational viewpoints limits the possibilities for gaining meaning from biblical texts. This study Bible brings together the interpretive lenses of scholars from many peoples, whose many perspectives produce a mosaic of wisdom and affirmation. The reader's own view is enriched by the vast cultural diversity of scholarly knowledge offered in *The Peoples' Bible*.

Not only does *The Peoples' Bible* offer the reader the space to explore Scripture from multiple social locations, it also invites a fresh discussion of the critical issues facing citizens of the twenty-first century. Many people have rejected biblical faith, believing that it has no power to address contemporary racism and injustice. The writers in this study Bible engage with passion the Bible's potential for social justice and liberation, originally meant for times long ago yet still proclaiming a timely word today. They also describe how the biblical authors struggled with the limitations of their own settings as they tried to interpret God's will and work. The essays and introductions in *The Peoples' Bible* speak with a refreshing candor about how, throughout history, the Bible has been manipulated and misused to support colonization, slavery, genocide, ethnic cleansing, sexism, and a host of other forms of oppression. The residue of oppression still marks much current biblical interpretation and theological musing. The publication of *The Peoples' Bible* marks a new era of inclusion and freedom in which all peoples and all voices are welcome to the table of biblical interpretation—a process that we hope will serve as a catalyst for a more just society and a reconciled human family.

How The Peoples' Bible is different

In order to appreciate the wealth of meaning in Scripture, it is often necessary to recognize and set aside, at least momentarily, our own culture-bound assumptions so that we can understand the perspectives of other people. This study Bible embraces multiple cultural approaches that reflect the current cultural mosaic in the United States. It relies on established historical-critical, literary-critical, and social-scientific methods, but also on the perspectives of postcolonial, feminist, and Afrocentric criticism, to name a few. *The Peoples' Bible* highlights interpretations that emerge from diverse and particular contexts.

We are committed to the possibility that all may learn to read the Bible as though we have never read it before, from social locations where we have never stood before. For example, men may learn to read Scripture through the eyes of women; those accustomed to reading the Bible from the perspective of the dominant culture may read through the eyes of those at the margins; and so on. Precisely because biblical interpretation differs from one cultural perspective to the next, and from one social location to the next, any of us who wish to gain a deeper understanding of the Bible must involve ourselves in what may well feel like a risky

endeavor: to listen to the Bible by listening to one another. It is toward that end that we are pleased to offer *The Peoples' Bible*.

The editors

George "Tink" Tinker: I am an enrolled member of the Osage (*Wazhazhe*) Nation and professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology. I have taught here for nearly twenty years, bringing an Indian perspective to a predominantly Euro-American school. As an American Indian academic originally trained in biblical studies (Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union), I am committed to a scholarly endeavor that takes seriously both the liberation of Indian peoples from their historic oppression as colonized communities and the liberation of white Americans, the historic colonizers and oppressors of Indian peoples.

Wil Gafney: I teach the "scriptures of Israel"—by which I mean a wealth of literature including the Hebrew Bible (the scriptures of contemporary Judaism); the ancient Jewish writings treasured by many Christians as the Apocrypha or Deutero-canonical biblical writings; the Greek translation of Jewish scriptures made in North Africa, the Septuagint; the Samaritan Pentateuch; and the writings represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a black feminist with post-colonial commitments to and beyond the African Diaspora, my interest in these overlapping bodies of literature and their languages leads me to explore how translations, theories, and practices either open up or cover up biblical texts. I am an Episcopal priest who is a member of two congregations, the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas and the Dorshei Derekh Reconstructionist (Jewish) Minyan, both in Philadelphia.

Frank M. Yamada: I am Sansei, third-generation Japanese American, who grew up on the West Coast of California, which locates me one generation after the internment of more than 200,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. I grew up in a nominally Buddhist home, before converting to Christianity when I was in college. I received my training as a scholar at a Protestant seminary, where historical criticism was the dominant form of investigation. Ironically, this is also where I began to develop interest in the destabilizing practice of postmodern biblical interpretation. All of these forces of cultural conflict and fusion are reflected in my identity—a hybrid construction that seeks to refuse oversimplified characterizations of Asia or America in my Asian American body. Because of my identity, I am often drawn to conflicts and contradictions in the biblical text, seeing them not as a problem to be fixed but as difficult and sometimes painful openings into another people's understanding of the world and God.

Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz: Just as the Bible has shaped the way I read and understand my

life, my life has shaped the way I read and understand the Bible. Through my experiences as a Latina woman of Mexican heritage, born and bred in the bicultural borderlands between Mexico and the United States, I have come to appreciate and read the Bible as a hybrid text where many borders, voices, and meanings converge. So, as a reader, believer, and lecturer of the Christian Scripture, I find myself constantly negotiating and contesting the meanings and stories of the Bible as I seek to responsibly interpret and appropriate its message in a culture and time that is thousands of years and miles away from its original context. Ultimately, my goal as an informed reader of the Bible is to empower minority readers as agents of historical change in the ongoing process of decolonization and liberation, to dismantle oppressive interpretations and to offer inclusive and transformative readings that can bring about justice and liberation for all of God's creation.

Curtiss Paul DeYoung: I am a white male of Dutch and English ancestry who is a citizen of the United States, ordained in the Church of God (Anderson, Ind.), and professor of Reconciliation Studies at Bethel University. My biblical interpretation has been transformed from a de facto Eurocentric bias to a more multicultural perspective through theological training at Howard University School of Divinity and years of reading biblical scholars and theologians from Native American, Asian, Latin American, African, Arab, and African American perspectives. My racial self-understanding was interrupted at age fifty with the genealogical discovery of a black ancestor—one drop of African blood. My cultural self-understanding has been affected by socialization in African American communities and by the consciousness raised by multiple visits to South Africa and Palestine/Israel. As a person with race, class, and male privileges in the United States, I have committed my life to social justice and reconciliation. This collision of birthright privilege and experiential transformation informs my interpretation of the Bible.

How to Use The Peoples' Bible

This Bible was developed to help students and readers understand how people from different cultures, from different parts of the world, read and understand the Bible. No single, exclusive way to approach the Bible is proposed here, because there are so many possible ways to interpret its writings. Rather, *The Peoples' Bible* gathers the voices of different interpreters from different social locations as a way of encouraging students and readers to recognize that all Bible interpreters are people whose cultures of origin and social locations influence their scholarship. Similarly, *The Peoples' Bible* encourages students and readers to reflect on how their cultures and social locations continue to shape them as Bible readers and interpreters.

In general, *The Peoples' Bible* is intended to help each reader find his or her own voice in and through the text, and also to hear the voices of others. This is done best when the Bible is read and studied in the midst of socially diverse groups and communities, where a multiplicity of voices can come alive. Many resources in this study Bible encourage this process.

The editors have invited a wide range of scholars to contribute overviews of the major sections of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Apocrypha, and the Second (traditionally, New Testament), and to introduce each book of the Bible. The reader is encouraged to read the relevant section overview and book introduction prior to studying a certain text or an entire book. This helps to set the stage for informed and inclusive interpretation. Text boxes have been placed throughout the books of the bible to draw the reader's attention to particular scriptural passages that offer examples of how culture and interpretation intersect. These can be occasions for individual reflection—*How does this voice resemble my own? How is it different?*—and for group discussion as well: *How have the historical experiences of different peoples shaped the ways we hear the Bible? How do they challenge assumptions we have taken for granted? Does our encounter with the Bible help us recognize the ways we establish our own identities at cultural crossroads today, whether through connection with others or through contrast and conflict?*

A number of articles raise issues or suggest strategies for interpretation that readers may apply to the larger narrative of the Bible, not just to particular texts, books, or sections. Several essays delve deeply into the role of culture in the biblical narratives and how culture affects our present-day view of the Bible. These essays place the reader at a crossroads where the perspectives of Native American, Latina/o, Asian American, and African American cultures meet. They alert us to the nuances of particularity and to the possibilities for conflict and collision, as well as for convergence and community, in the process of interpretation. The impact of culture is also noted in the diversity of views of the biblical God, and in the ways a culturally rooted Jesus of Nazareth was transformed over history to serve processes of cultural domination. Other essays explore the ways traditional forms of interpretation have sanctified exclusivist worldviews; the role played by one or another empire in shaping biblical history and subsequent interpretation; and the tensions present when Christians set about to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures. An article discussing the Bible as an instrument of reconciliation moves from the realm of theory to that of action and activism.

Visual resources have been selected to enhance the reader's experience. Readers will find the maps helpful for relating the biblical stories to actual landscapes. A color art gallery provides angles of vision into the biblical narratives that are sometimes inaccessible through words alone.

Using The Peoples' Bible in the Classroom

Professors of biblical studies or religion who wish to bring multicultural perspectives and the diversity of interpretive options into the classroom will find *The Peoples' Bible* a welcome resource.

- Instructors who have shaped their courses around the histories that produced the biblical writings will want to rely on the section and book introductions, which emphasize the social and historical dynamics behind the text and on articles discussing the Bible as a text of culture, the role of empires, and the biblical characterizations of God.
- Instructors wishing to emphasize the literary character of the biblical writings will also want to use the section and book introductions and the text boxes to direct their students' attention to particular aspects of the text that have caught the ear, and eye, of one or another community.
- Those wishing to teach methods of biblical interpretation may note that *The Peoples' Bible* is a study Bible with a difference. By design, the text of the Bible printed here does not include the headings, marginal notes, or running commentary that in other study Bibles can give the impression that a particular passage has a single, authoritative meaning. Here the section and book introductions are designed to invite students into diverse encounters with the biblical text. Students should think of the writer of each introduction, not as making authoritative pronouncements on the meaning of a text, but as offering to accompany the reader with an informed, but nevertheless personally inflected perspective.
- Teachers who intend to use a survey or introductory textbook in their course will see that the articles in *The Peoples' Bible* recognize the importance of historical- and literary-critical methods. Teachers who intend to assign only this New Revised Standard Version or another version of the Bible for their courses will appreciate the succinct attention these farticles give to the importance of history, identity, and culture in the formation of the biblical writings and in their subsequent interpretation.

Instructors may wish to use specific classroom techniques with *The Peoples' Bible*. For example:

- An instructor may wish to draw attention to the distinctiveness of one or another writer's perspective, asking students: *How does the writer's cultural background, the experience of his or her people, shape his or her reading of the Bible? And how does your reading reflect your sense of social and cultural identity?*
- The text boxes may be used as occasions for classroom conversation: *How does the perspective of the writer draw us into the biblical text? How does the writer open up a new insight into the text? How might the experience of other peoples provide different insights?*
- The images in the art gallery might be used to focus attention in a more intuitive, nonverbal way. *Which images are more familiar? Which less? Which images draw you into a connection with another culture? Which draw you into a different experience of the Bible?*
- The introductory articles might be relied upon to focus students' reading and discussion of the biblical materials. For one or another biblical book, students might be asked: *How are different understandings of God evident in the text? How have the dynamics of the rise and fall of empires shaped the text? Or: Have Christians read this text differently from Jews or others? How might any of us come to read the text differently today?*
- Instructors who wish to incorporate the Bible as a resource in courses on social justice, peace or reconciliation studies, or similar courses in a humanities curriculum might well do something similar. They might rely on the articles on the Bible in cultures and the Bible as an instrument of reconciliation and ask: *How has this text been taken up and wielded as an instrument of harm in conflicts between ethnic groups, between nations, or between social classes? How has the text served as a resource for healing and reconciliation? How might it serve as such today?*

Using The Peoples' Bible in Congregational Settings

Congregational leaders and teachers will find *The Peoples' Bible* a valuable resource for worship, education, and mission. Preachers may find that regular use of *The Peoples' Bible* alerts them to the different ways the Bible—and things said about it from the pulpit—may strike the ears of persons from different backgrounds and social locations. Congregations may wish to adopt *The Peoples' Bible* as their pew bible as a sign of welcome and an occasion for opening their shared life to others at the margins.

Bible teachers in the congregation, working with youth and adults alike, may appreciate the way *The Peoples' Bible* highlights the perspective of the reader and stimulates exploration and question, rather than providing set answers.

Finally, those who seek to call their congregations outward into greater engagement with a divided and troubled world may find in *The Peoples' Bible* a useful spur to mission. Here is a Bible that acknowledges the diversity of ways, hurtful and healing alike, in which different groups and peoples have experienced sacred Scripture. Here is a Bible that challenges the assumption that any one group may possess Scripture as its own, or control its interpretation. Here is a Bible that may invite readers more deeply into an encounter with a God who wishes to be recognized as the creator of *all* the peoples of the earth and to be known as those peoples learn to live with one another in ever greater harmony.

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The Bible as an Instrument of Reconciliation

Curtiss Paul DeYoung

The biblical story commences in an idyllic garden setting in Genesis, with God creating the world and breathing life into the first human couple. The Bible concludes in Revelation in an envisioned future utopian paradise where all of humanity is gathered around the throne of God in perfect unity. Between creation and eternity the biblical story juxtaposes human alienation and God's desire for reconciliation. For us who live in a post-biblical, pre-paradise world, the Bible still remains a powerful source for understanding separation and God's hope for reconciliation.

The Hebrew Scriptures illustrate the story of God's relationship with the entire human family by highlighting a particular relationship between God and the Hebrew people. The narrative emerging from the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures describes the cycle of separation and reunion in the Hebrew peoples' relationship with God. Yet God never gives up on humanity and constantly pursues a relationship with the peoples of the earth.

One of the most powerful stories illustrating God's love for the Hebrew people is found in the writings of the prophet Hosea. Hosea's relentless pursuit of his unfaithful

wife serves as a prophetic parable of God's constant pursuit of a relationship with humanity. This theme of relational reconciliation with God, or atonement (at-one-ment), is found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. There are also many examples of alienation and reconciliation within the human family itself, including Adam and Eve, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Queen Esther (representing the Jews) and King Ahasuerus (the Persians). The Hebrew Scriptures offer insights into the dynamics that produce just relationships among people.

In the New Testament Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth is the model of reconciliation with God and others. The Gospel writers went to great lengths to present Jesus as a radically inclusive person and an exemplar of reconciliation. Their accounts of his birth and upbringing describe a relevant preparation for his reconciling task. Mary gave birth to Jesus in a livestock barn (Luke 2:7). Poor and despised shepherds in Palestine witnessed the event (2:8-20). Rich magi from Asia went to Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus, and the family escaped to the continent of Africa as refugees (Matt 2:1-15). Jesus the Jew was raised in Galilee of the nations (NRSV: "Gentiles," Matt 4:15). While Jesus maintained his own Jewish cultural and religious identity, he was enriched by various cultural elements from many nations.

The ministry of Jesus was also radically inclusive, beginning with his choice of disciples. He selected both a tax collector who collaborated with the Roman Empire and a zealot who called for the violent revolutionary overthrow of Rome (Matt 10:2-4; Luke 6:14-16). Jesus took the unheard of step of including a number of women in the circle of his followers (Matt 27: 55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:2-3). His broad table fellowship reached to individuals outside of his socioeconomic class and ethnic/cultural world. Even at the death of Jesus, an African named Simon of Cyrene carried his cross (Matt 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26) and a Roman centurion uttered words of faith (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39).

In Acts and the apostolic writings Jesus the Christ, by virtue of his death and resurrection, is presented as the mediator between God and humanity, person and person, group and group. The apostle Paul and his circle of disciples were the theologians of reconciliation for the first-century church. The Greek words for "reconciliation" or "reconcile," *katallassō*, *katallagē*, *apokatallassō*, are used only a few times (Rom 5:10, 11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18, 19; Eph 2:16; and Col 1:20, 22), but are a powerful way of

expressing the meaning of the life, death, resurrection, and abiding presence of Jesus Christ. Biblical reconciliation implies friendship with God and each other, radical change and the transformation of a relationship or of a society, and the restoration of harmony.

The biblical discussions are not limited to embracing a loving God in relationship or affirming a good theology of reconciliation. Those of us who read the Bible as Scripture understand biblical reconciliation as a message we must announce and a ministry we must pursue. We are called to become God's "ambassadors" of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5), working as catalysts for inclusive community, peace among nations, social transformation in society, and unity amidst religious diversity. The following biblical resources can empower us in that ambassadorial work.

Reconciliation and Inclusive Community

Congregations in the first century, as described in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Pauline letters, present an inviting possibility for developing a community that is inclusive. The mother church in Jerusalem (Acts 2–6) was a multilingual congregation of Jews from Jerusalem, Galilee, and the broader Roman Empire. The community was also diverse socioeconomically. The faith community in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11, 13; Galatians 2) was founded by Greek-speaking Jewish leaders originating from North Africa and Cyprus. From its beginning the Antioch congregation was multiethnic, including not only Jews raised in different cultural settings but Greeks and others. They had a multicultural and multiracial leadership team and survived a possible schism along ethnic lines through a courageous confrontation by the apostle Paul (Galatians 2). In Acts 13 and subsequent chapters, the author narrates the founding of many other congregations launched on the model of multiethnic inclusiveness found in Antioch. In many first-century congregations, women also emerged as leaders. (See Rom 16:1-15, where Paul mentions thirty-four church leaders, sixteen of whom are women.)

The congregations in the first-century church offer insights for reconciliation and creating inclusive communities through their empowering ministry with the poor, spiritual disciplines, courageous social action, and bilingual, multicultural, and gender-inclusive leadership teams. The New Testament details both the successes and failures of these faith communities in their efforts to be ministers of reconciliation.

Reconciliation and Peace among Nations

The Bible not only portrays the possibility of unity in faith communities; it also offers a vision for peace among nations. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against a nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa 2:4). The author of Revelation saw a time when "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" would be gathered together (Rev 7:9).

One of the most dramatic biblical episodes of two nations reconciling is the reunion of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 32–33). At the surface this seems to be only the reconciliation of two estranged brothers. And it is that. But by the time they met, after years of separation, they were no longer just individuals but growing communities—soon to be nations. The meeting of these leaders of two large tribal groups provides clues to the possibilities of peacemaking among nations in our own day.

Before the meeting, Jacob, the offender, sent gifts ahead to symbolically replace what he had taken from his brother Esau. He surmised, "I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me" (Gen 32:20). Then Jacob spent the night prior to the meeting wrestling with God, purifying his motives, and preparing for the worst. The encounter with God left him wounded and ready to meet his brother with humility and repentance—"I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (32:30). On the appointed day Jacob went ahead of the others and led his nation to meet Esau "bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother" (33:3).

It seems that Esau, the offended, had also met with God. When he saw his brother Jacob he "ran to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (33:4). Jacob came to the meeting with humility and a demonstrated willingness to make reparation. Esau came to the meeting ready to forgive and seek a new future for the relationship. Esau at first refused Jacob's gifts, saying he already had enough. But Jacob insisted, "If I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God (for) God has dealt graciously with me" (33:10-11).

Peace in the world becomes a greater possibility when the leaders of nations embrace the spirit of Jacob and Esau. Too often kings, queens, prime ministers, presidents, and other leaders approach the table of international dialogue with an agenda that is informed by a sense of ethnic or racial superiority, a punitive desire for revenge, self-centered arrogance, and an apparent lack of interest in an inclusive view of humanity or of social justice. These two biblical leaders of emerging nations had such a strong desire for reconciliation they set aside real and rightful feelings of hurt, anger, shame, fear, vengeance, and the like. A biblical framework for peace among nations requires leaders and citizens who emulate the attitudes and actions of Esau and Jacob.

Reconciliation and Social Transformation

Another key component of reconciliation is a focus on social transformation for justice. As noted above, 2 Cor 5:1—6:2 calls us to be ambassadors of reconciliation. "As we work together with [God], we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.' See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" (6:1-2). Paul's quote from Isaiah 49 echoes Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18-19. The language of the "day of salvation" and "the year of the Lord's favor" speaks of the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25)—that great ideal placed in the legal code of the Hebrew people to ensure that social justice defined their community and nationhood. (Unfortunately, there is no record of it ever having been practiced.) In Luke 4, Jesus appeals to this divine intention in his opening sermon. In 2 Corinthians, Paul links the ministry of reconciliation with the prophetic call to social justice. Our reconciliation with God leads to reconciliation with each other. This means on the macro level the creation of a society that practices social justice.

Paul makes the link between social justice and reconciliation even clearer in Galatians 3:28. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." These words were part of a baptismal formula from the earliest days of the first-century church. This creedal statement was used to initiate new members into a reconciling faith that removed socially constructed boundaries and hierarchies and replaced them with relationships and societal interactions based on social justice.

Too often people of faith choose to focus on reconciliation with God but not with others. Others reconcile relationally across human boundaries but do not address the societal issues that created the boundaries. A biblical perspective calls for an integrated approach to reconciliation that includes our relationship with God, our relationship with other people, the dismantling of oppressive social structures that cause division, and the creation of just societies and nations.

Reconciliation and Religious Diversity

The biblical writers focus primarily on the story of the Hebrew people and then of Jesus and the first-century Christians. Therefore, there is little in the Bible that speaks directly to interfaith reconciliation. Given the extreme conflicts in the twentieth century and beyond that involve the three major Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—there is one biblical story that might symbolize the needed reconciliation. Jews and Christians claim Abraham as their father through Isaac, and Muslims claim Abraham through Ishmael. The story in Genesis 25 of Ishmael and Isaac coming together to bury their father could serve as a catalyst for reconciliation among these monotheistic religions. The story is simple. Upon Abraham's death at 175 years, "His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with his wife Sarah" (vv. 9-10). Ishmael, the older son and spiritual ancestor of Islam, joined together with his brother, Isaac, spiritual ancestor of Judaism and Christianity, and they buried their father Abraham in Hebron.

The biblical stories of Ishmael and Isaac reveal a history of favoritism, prejudice, manipulation, rejection, victimization, and mixed blessing. Yet the death of Abraham provided a reason for setting aside problematic histories and convoluted relationships to focus on a shared love and responsibility. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share much in their understanding of faith, the importance of peace and social justice, and God's love for humanity. They also share a problematic history and convoluted relationships. The story of Ishmael and Isaac together burying their father, Abraham, offers a message to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in our day: Set aside histories and present animosities in order to focus on a world that desperately needs the values of compassion, reconciliation, social justice, and peace at the core of your respective faiths.

Reconciliation and Community

Usually the work of reconciliation is complex and multifaceted. Reconciliation issues are often intertwined and not easily separated. The Bible also offers scriptural resources for this reality. Paul's admonition in Gal 3:28 implies that race, gender, and socioeconomic class are all intertwined justice issues and that reconciliation cannot succeed without a strategy to address each that is simultaneous and interlinked.

A good biblical example of the complicated and multifaceted nature of reconciliation is the story of Jesus in conversation with a woman from Samaria by Jacob's well (John 4:4-42). This interchange represented differences in culture, gender, socioeconomic class, status, religion, and more. As the story is read, it becomes evident that Jesus arrived at the encounter unashamed of the differences and well prepared for the nuances of such a conversation. This allowed reconciliation to occur rather than for alienation to fester further. Jesus engages with this Samaritan woman in public. As a Jewish male and itinerant rabbi, Jesus rejected social norms when he spoke publicly to a woman, requested a drink from a Samaritan, and was seen with a person of questionable moral standards. This single act of welcoming the woman from Samaria to a relational encounter meant Jesus had to cross at least three social boundaries. He could not decide to focus only on ethnic reconciliation, or gender inclusion, or moral questions. Jesus had to embrace all of who this woman was and he did it publicly, without any embarrassment or hesitation.

Not only was Jesus bold in a public display of his reconciliation intentions, he was also well prepared for the encounter. Most likely Jesus did not know that he was going to meet a Samaritan woman on this day. What Jesus did know was that his call to be a reconciler would lead him to all kinds of encounters, so he had to prepare himself even before the event. Given the proximity of Samaria, it seems that Jesus was likely familiar with their culture and religion. This is apparent in how he presents himself and his messianic mission to the woman. The Samaritans were seeking a messiah who would reveal truth and restore belief. When Jesus told the woman things about her life that he would have no way of knowing, he was not saying something about her. Rather, Jesus was revealing something about himself. He was informing her that he was the Revealer (*Taheb*), the Messiah. The woman told her neighbors, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can

he?" (John 4:29). Jesus' knowledge of Samaritan culture and religious beliefs hurried the process of reconciliation at Jacob's well that day.

The theme of reconciliation runs throughout the Bible. Reconciliation calls us to inclusive communities, peace among nations, social transformation, and relationships across religions. Jesus said to the woman in Samaria, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John 4:21). Reconciliation calls us to such a time: a future era when neither race, culture, gender, socioeconomic class, religion, nor any other designator will serve as our primary identity or the identity we ascribe to others. Biblical reconciliation propels us to embrace our ultimate identity as humans created in the image of God, that is, as children of God.

The Pentateuch

INTRODUCTION

Frank M. Yamada

THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament (Genesis–Deuteronomy) are generally called the Pentateuch among Christians and some biblical scholars. In Jewish tradition the Five Books of Moses are known as the Torah. The Hebrew word *torah* literally means "teaching" or "instruction" and refers to what is the heart of the Hebrew Scriptures in both content and importance. The story lines within this collection stretch from the creation of the world and humanity to Moses's last speech on the plains of Moab as the Israelites prepare to enter into the land of promise. The Pentateuch, however, contains various forms of literature from many time periods. These five books have played a formative role in the religious beliefs and imagination of many Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions. The Pentateuch has also been one of the primary points of emphasis in modern biblical scholarship. In fact, one can trace the developments in the scholarly study of the Bible by surveying the history of Pentateuchal research. With such well-known stories as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Noah and the flood, the *Akedah* (or "Binding" of Isaac), the exodus, the Ten Commandments, and God's provision of manna in the wilderness, it is no wonder that these texts have inspired generations of people for millennia.

One must distinguish between the narrative arc found within the Pentateuch, beginning with creation and ending on the plains of Moab, and the historical contexts out of which the traditions in these books emerge. Historically, scholars agree that the Pentateuch is a compilation of sources, traditions, folktales, and legal material from different historical

periods. Four primary sources have been identified within Genesis–Deuteronomy. The J and E sources, Yahwist and Elohist respectively, also known as the Epic Tradition, make up the main story line of the Pentateuch narrative. Both sources were written during the Israelite monarchy. Whereas the Yahwist source contains the perspective of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, the Elohist reflects ideas and themes associated with Israel, the Northern Kingdom. The J story line begins in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4b) and extends into Israel's journey through the Sinai wilderness. The D, for Deuteronomic, source is comprised of significant portions of the book of Deuteronomy and was written largely during the time of Josiah's reign (late-seventh century BCE). Finally, the P, for Priestly, document contains mostly cultic, genealogical, and narrative material written by a priestly school or group after the Babylonian exile (587 BCE). Genesis begins with the Priestly account of creation and its well-known phrase, "In the beginning…" (Gen 1:1). Hebrew scholars differ on exactly how that phrase should be translated.

Because of this complex textual process, the resulting five books are a richly diverse collection that includes many different and even conflicting perspectives contained within it. For example, the Priestly account of creation depicts a well-ordered creation, with a sovereign God (*Elohim* in Hebrew) who structures the natural order through divine command. In this first creation story, plants and animals are created before humans, with humans made last as the climax of God's work. Immediately following the P version, the Yahwist's account of creation begins (Gen 2:4b) in a garden. The deity, represented by the divine name ("LORD" in most translations), forms humanity out of the ground. Animals are created *after* the human in response to Adam's need for companionship (Gen 2:18). Both accounts are self-contained creation stories. They provide different points of emphasis and depart from each other in significant ways—different names and images of the deity, different order of creation, and so on. Both accounts, however, are included in the biblical witness without significant editing to blur the variations. Thus the diverse and complex nature of the Pentateuch suggests that the final form of this collection was intended to reflect and keep in tension the various traditions that made up Israel's historical self-understanding. It is important to note, however, that textual versions such as the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint (a Greek translation), and fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls represent different lines of tradition and thus point to other communities with textual traditions of their own.

The basic structure of the Pentateuch follows a narrative progression from creation to the journey of a particular ancestral family that becomes a nation. Here is an outline:

Genesis: Creation to the ancestors
- Genesis 1–11: Stories about creation and early humanity
- Genesis 12–50: Stories about the ancestors

Exodus: Liberation from Egypt to revelation at Sinai
Exodus 1:1—15:21: Exodus from Egypt
Exodus 15:22—40:38: Journeys in the wilderness and revelation at Sinai

Leviticus: Revelation at Sinai continued
Leviticus 1:1—27:34: Laws concerning worship and holiness

Numbers: Wanderings in the wilderness
Numbers 1:1—25:18: The first generation in the wilderness
Numbers 26:1—36:13: The second generation in the wilderness

Deuteronomy: Re-proclamation of the covenant
Deuteronomy 1:1—30:20: Moses re-proclaims the covenant
Deuteronomy 31:1—34:12: Moses's farewell and death

The plot line of the Pentateuch starts universally, beginning with the creation of the world and humanity. Genesis 1–11 contains universal stories about the beginning of human civilization and addresses common themes such as mortality and death (Gen 3, Garden of Eden), violence between human beings (Gen 4, Cain and Abel), God's comprehensive judgment through flood (6–9), and the creation of different languages and cultures (Gen 11, Tower of Babel). In 12–50, the narrative focuses on the particular family line of Abraham and Sarah, from whom God promises to make a great nation (Gen 12:2). This couple's progeny eventually become the tribes of Israel. A persistent theme throughout the ancestral stories is how the divine promise reaches fulfillment in spite of the circumstances and human decisions that threaten it. The theme of barrenness is frequent and appears in the stories of Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel. In each case, God eventually opens the woman's womb. The most significant story that involves an endangerment of the promise is in Genesis 22, where God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, as a burnt offering.

At the end of Genesis, Jacob and his family migrate south to Egypt, where Joseph had found favor in the household of Pharaoh. The book of Exodus begins with how the Israelites fell out of favor with a later pharaoh and were subjugated to slavery. Exodus 1–15 describes how the LORD delivers Israel from their bondage in Egypt. After a series of plagues, the Israelites are released. The climax of Israel's liberation occurs with the event at the sea, where the LORD delivers them miraculously. In the wilderness of Sinai, Moses receives the revelation of God, which will become the basis of Israelite community (Exod 19:1—34:35). The book of Leviticus, an extensive collection of laws with a primary focus on worship, is placed in the middle of the Torah and is set in the context of God's revelation at Sinai. The largest section

Genesis

As the first book in the Hebrew Bible, Genesis speaks to beginnings. It opens with two differing stories on the creation of the universe (1:1—2:4a) and of the earth (2:4b-25). It contains narratives of the first family (3–4), first city (11:1-9), and the beginnings of the Hebrew children (12–50). Scholars have long noted how the creation story in Genesis 1 and the flood stories in chapters 6–9 are patterned on similar stories found in ancient Mesopotamia and how the creation story in Genesis 2 is patterned on creation stories in ancient Egypt. This borrowing from other cultures was common. As 2:10-14 claims, the Garden of Eden extended from Africa (ancient Cush/Ethiopia) to Mesopotamia (Euphrates River). All ancient cultures presented creation as controlled by their god(s) and set in their own backyards. Similarly, the idea of the seas being gathered into "one place" (1:9) is explained by people's knowledge of the Mediterranean. While the story line of Genesis goes from a *universal* story of the beginning (1–5) and rebeginning (6–11) of humanity to a story of a *particular* people, the descendants of Abram/Abraham (12–50), many different nations, cultures, and ethnicities are mentioned and engaged. The Table of Nations (Genesis 10) is an attempt to describe the interrelatedness of nations in the "known world" by depicting them as the descendants of Noah's three sons, Japheth, Ham, and Shem. Within the stories of Abraham's descendants are stories of the beginnings of Israel's neighbors, the Moabites and Ammonites (19:37-8), Ishmaelites (21:17-18), and the Edomites (36:1). In this way there is a claim that these nations were tribally related to Israel just as Lot, Ishmael, and Esau were related to Abraham and Jacob, though they were not from Israel, the line that God favored.

These stories were composed in a society that valued men more than women. The lists of generations in Genesis 4–5 and 29:31—30:24 are lists primarily of men. The promises made by God for a great nation stemming from Abraham are given to men (12:1-3; 15:7-21; 28:13-15). Divine promises to women are about giving birth to sons (16:11-12; 25:23). The women who are important characters in the story, for example Sarah in 21:9-11 and Rebekah in 27:6-9, 46, are all depicted as trying to ensure a social place for their sons. Polygamy was the basic form of family assumed in the stories about the ancestors. God is depicted as male and is referred to as the God of Abraham (24:42), the God of Abraham and Isaac (28:13), or the God of your father (43:23; 46:3) and never the God of your mother(s). Finally, the sign of the covenant for Israel, circumcision, is only given to the men (17:10-12a).

In the society in which these stories were written, it was normal for people to own slaves. Sarai/Sarah has an Egyptian slave, Hagar (16:1). Abraham has a slave, Eliezer (15:2). Laban gives his daughters female slaves as marriage presents (29:24, 29). Potiphar buys Joseph as a slave (39:1). All these slaves are exploited sexually. The women are forced to have sex with the slave master to

produce children (16:2, 4; 30:3-12), and the male slaves have to be circumcised and service their slave masters (17:12; 24:2). As an African American, whose people were enslaved in the United States, I am always concerned about such passages in the Bible that present slave society as acceptable to the people and God of the Book. Bible translators often soften this abuse of slaves by calling these characters "servants" or maids. But such distinctions reflect the translators' embarrassment about the text, not the true social and cultural distinctions of those ancient societies.

Finally, some of the stories found in Genesis have played a major role in supporting political positions. Environmentalists adopt the biblical idea of God calling the creation "good" in Genesis 1. The divine curses on Adam and Eve (3:16-19) have been used to support concepts of men controlling women and their bodies. The so-called "Curse of Ham" (9:26-27)—really a set of curses on Canaan—was used to sanction the enslavement of Africans in Europe and the Americas. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah has been interpreted as a story of homosexuality rather than one of the sexual exploitation of daughters (19:8, 26, 33, 36) and has been used to sanction the oppression of gays and lesbians. The Lord's killing of Onan because he ended sex with Tamar before climax (38:9-10) is used as an argument against masturbation and contraceptives.

The good news about Genesis is that as we read the book, we have much to discuss, especially as it relates to our own lives, views of God, humanity, and the world in which we live. As we continue to interpret this richly diverse collection of texts, we engage interpreters past and present and participate in an ongoing dialogue with ancients and contemporaries who seek to locate their place in the world from "the beginning."

—Randall C. Bailey

1 In the beginning when God created[a] the heavens and the earth, 2the earth was a formless
void and darkness covered the face of the deep,
while a wind from God[b] swept over the face of the
waters. 3Then God said, "Let there be light"; and
there was light. 4And God saw that the light was
good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5God called the light Day, and the darkness
he called Night. And there was evening and there
was morning, the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be a dome in the
midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters
from the waters." 7So God made the dome and
separated the waters that were under the dome
from the waters that were above the dome. And it
was so. 8God called the dome Sky. And there was
evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the waters under the
sky be gathered together into one place, and let
the dry land appear." And it was so. 10God called
the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that

[a] Or *when God began to create* or *In the beginning God created*

[b] Or *while the spirit of God* or *while a mighty wind*

Genesis 1:1-2

The first two depictions of God are masculine—literally, "When beginning, he, God created" (verse 1) *and* feminine—"The Spirit of God, she was brooding"—(verse 2), foreshadowing human creation in the divine image as male and female in 1:27. Most translations of the Bible obscure the gender of God's Spirit, leaving readers with the erroneous impression that the Scriptures use only masculine language when describing God. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God's Spirit is feminine; in the Christian Scriptures, the Spirit is neuter.

— WG

it was good. 11Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. 12The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. 13And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, 15and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. 16God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, 18to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

20 And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." 21So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. 22God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. 25God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind[a] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,[b] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

27 So God created humankind[a] in his image,
in the image of God he created them;[c]
male and female he created them.

28God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." 29God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested

[a] Heb *adam* [b] Syr: Heb *and over all the earth* [c] Heb *him*

Genesis 2

At the beginning of the Hebrew Bible the story of creation tells us that God created one couple who became the parents of all people on earth. The Acts of the Apostles refers to this report in saying: "From one single stock [God] not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but…decreed how long each nation should flourish and what the boundaries of its territory should be (Acts 17:26). This implies two important aspects of biblical faith: first, that all nations stem from one stock (blood) and that in origin humankind is one creation. This conviction excludes any form of racism or ethnic superiority. Second, that existing ethnic diversities are not constitutive for humanness, as they are not rooted in origin but in history. These two aspects mark the essential difference between the biblical image of humankind and the myths of origin of most other peoples.[1]

— Gerhard Hoffmann

from all the work that he had done in creation.

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the LORD[a] God made the earth and the heavens, 5when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; 6but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—7then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground,[b] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 8And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. 11The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; 12and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. 14The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you

Genesis 2:8

The Hebrew geographic term *Eden* is a loanword from the ancient Mesopotamian culture of Sumer, signifying that the tradition of the "garden of God" goes back to that culture. That Eden was considered to be in Mesopotamia is further specified by the four rivers—most notably the Tigris and Euphrates—that flow the length of that once-fertile land (now Iraq). The man and woman pictured here as created by the Lord God and placed in this garden have the Hebrew names *Adam* (the common Hebrew word for "human" and closely related to *adamah*, "earth," from which he was molded) and *Chawwah* or Eve (a word meaning "living" or "mother of life"). While they are depicted as individuals in the narrative, both have names that are clearly generic and representative of earth's first humans. This story of the first humans is not at all interested in ethnicity or race. Not even Israel is favored. Adam and Eve are simply depicted as the earliest human progenitors. And even though Western culture has long imaged them as white, European-looking people, this narrative in Genesis 2 locates them clearly as Middle Eastern.

— DB

[a] Heb YHWH, as in other places where "LORD" is spelled with capital letters (see also Exod 3.14–15 with notes).
[b] Or *formed a man* (Heb *adam*) *of dust from the ground* (Heb *adamah*)

Genesis 1:1-2

The first two depictions of God are masculine—literally, "When beginning, he, God created"—(v. 1) *and* feminine—"The Spirit of God, she was brooding"—(v. 2), foreshadowing human creation in the divine image as male and female in 1:27. Most translations of the Bible obscure the gender of God's Spirit, leaving readers with the erroneous impression that the Scriptures use only masculine language when describing God. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God's Spirit is feminine; in the Christian Scriptures, the Spirit is neuter.

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that he had done. 3So God blessed the seventh
day and hallowed it, because on it God rested
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[a] Heb *adam* [b] Syr: Heb *and over all the earth* [c] Heb *him*

Genesis 2

The biblical story of creation tells us that God created one couple who became the parents of all people on earth. In striking contrast to other creation stories in the ancient Near East, no kings, no thrones, no walled cities appear "in the beginning." Not only do the first people bear no mark of ethnicity—the Bible affirms that all peoples come from a single origin—but they are without nationality. In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul will later declare that God has limited the times and boundaries of all nations (Acts 17:26); all rise and fall in history, and none is eternal. While the royal imagery of other ancient Near Eastern cultures depicted the gods in kingly regalia, seated enthroned and giving commands like monarchs, in Genesis the image of God is borne by two people who stand naked and defenseless in a garden. How fitting that a prominent Israeli human rights organization has chosen the name *B'tselem*—"in the image."

— DB, NE

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man from the dust of the ground,[b] and breathed
into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man be-
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a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the
man whom he had formed. 9Out of the ground
the LORD God made to grow every tree that is
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Havilah, where there is gold; 12and the gold of
that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are
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Genesis 2:8-10

The Hebrew geographic term *Eden* is a loanword from the ancient Mesopotamian culture of Sumer, signifying that the tradition of the "garden of God" owes much to that culture. That Eden was located in what was later called Mesopotamia is implied by the names of two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, that flow the length of that once-fertile land (now Iraq). But another river, the Gihon, "flows around the whole land of Cush" (now Ethiopia), and contemporary archaeological discoveries and linguistic evidence point to eastern Africa as the point where our species began. Eden suddenly appears much larger than a "garden"! The man and woman placed in Eden bear generic names: *Adam* (the common Hebrew word for "human" and closely related to *adamah*, "earth," from which he was molded) and *Chawwah* or Eve (a word meaning "living" or "mother of life"). Even though Western culture has long imaged them as white, European-looking people, the narrative in Genesis 2 clearly identifies them as the ancestors of all human beings.

— DB, NE

[a] Heb YHWH, as in other places where "LORD" is spelled with capital letters (see also Exod 3.14–15 with notes).
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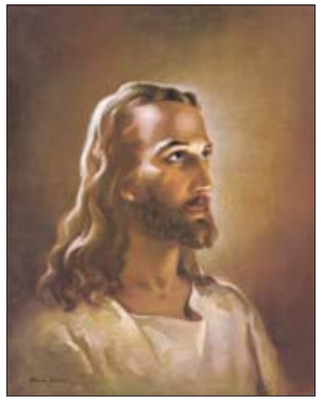


Fig. 16

An Ethnic Jesus. Perhaps the best known and widely reproduced image of Jesus in the twentieth century, with over one billion reproductions mass-marketed around the world, Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* (1940) depicts a serene Jesus with light skin, blue eyes, fair hair, and decidedly northern-European features. When Sallman painted more contemporary versions in the 1960s, he was concerned (as were his critics) that the portrait of Jesus not look too "feminine."[64] For a discussion of this and the following images see the article "Jesus and Cultures."

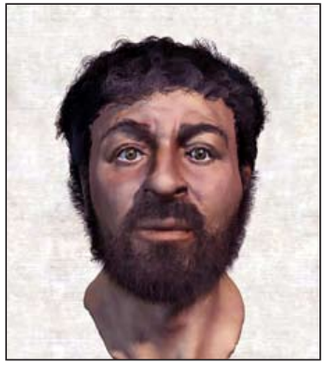


Fig. 17

A Scientific Reconstruction. The December 2002 issue of *Popular Mechanics* offered a portrait of Jesus created by forensic anthropologist Richard Neave, in its article "The Real Face of Jesus." Neave sought to base his image of Jesus on an objective, scientific basis rather than on the cultural predispositions of artists' imaginations. He relied on archaeological discoveries of Galilean skeletons from the first century CE, since according to the Gospels, Jesus' appearance was so similar to that of his disciples that he had to be singled out by Judas Iscariot (Matt. 26:48-50 and parallels).

Fig. 18

Jesus of the People, 1999. Artist Janet McKenzie sought in her portrait to depict a Jesus widely representative of the world's people, especially the poor. The image incorporates symbols from Asian and Native American cultures; the model was an African-American woman. "The essence of the work," McKenzie declared, "is that Jesus is all of us." The portrait won the National Catholic Reporter Jesus 2000 competition; the judge wrote, "this is a haunting image of a peasant Jesus—dark, thick-lipped, looking out on us with ineffable dignity, with sadness but with confidence."

The earliest pictures of Jesus were very different from the images to which we are accustomed today. In a typical portrait from a fresco in the Roman catacomb of St. Priscilla (first to third century CE), Jesus is portrayed as a beardless youth surrounded by sheep. The portrait depicts Jesus as the Good Shepherd of John 8:11, but similar frescos showing Jesus with a lyre may allude as well to the biblical image of David—or to Orpheus, a figure from Greek mythology associated with the afterlife.

Fig. 19

Fig. 20

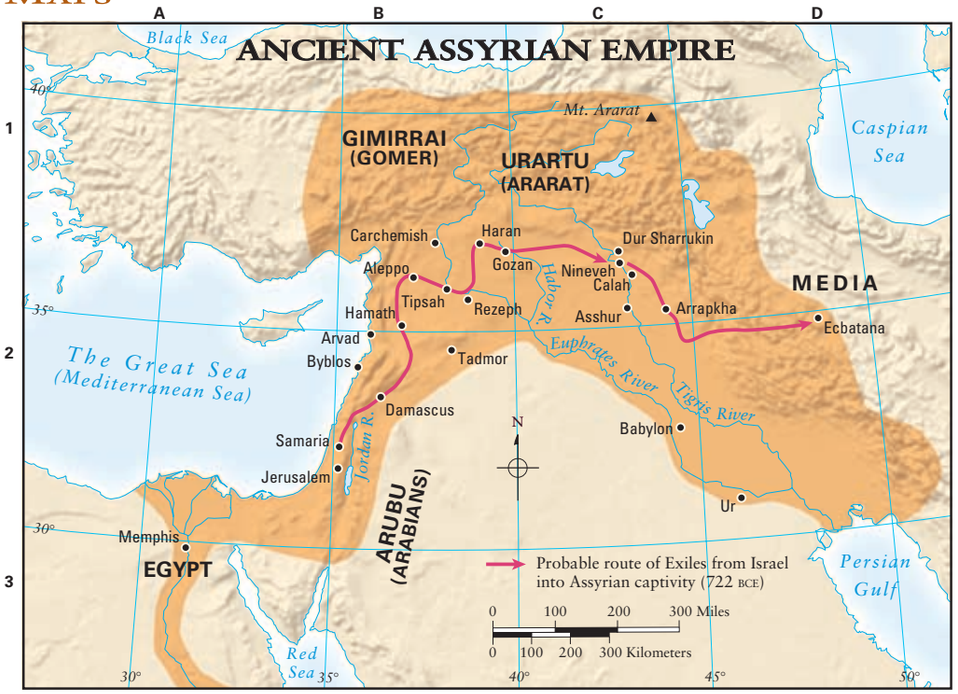
Still beardless, Jesus is depicted in this third-century mosaic in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, driving his chariot across the sky, in the figure of the sun god Apollo.

The style of portrait with which we are more familiar today—a bearded Jesus with long dark hair, parted in the center, seated on a heavenly throne and wielding a scepter as *Pantocrator* ("all-ruler")—first arose in the Christian Byzantine Empire, and reflects the fashion of the Byzantine court; Pantocrator was originally one of the titles of the Roman Emperor. This sixth-century mosaic is from the Church of St. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna.

Fig. 21

Fig. 22

Devon Cunningham's *Black Jesus* (1995) features a Black Christ as the heavenly Pantocrator ("All-Ruler") of Byzantine art. Mural at St. Cecilia's Catholic Church, Detroit.



Map 9

Map 10

Map 11

Map 12