

LUTHERAN STUDY BIBLE

An Introduction

Lutherans share with other Christians this foundational understanding: the Bible is the word of God, and through it, God speaks to us. The Bible shapes our lives individually and together as the church of Christ. The “Confession of Faith” in the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) states:

This church accepts the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life. (2.03)

We are a gifted church with talented and influential teaching theologians and biblical scholars. This study Bible brings together the gifts and insights of more than fifty of these theologians and scholars for the sake of all who seek to study, read, and reflect on God’s word. Like other study Bibles, the notes utilize the best of modern biblical scholarship. To these are added Lutheran perspectives and articles that make *Lutheran Study Bible* truly unique. Drawing on the rich catechetical tradition of Martin Luther, this study Bible brings together scriptural insights with theological reflection on foundational teachings important to Lutherans and relevant for all.

The NRSV Updated Edition

The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVue, 2021) of the Bible carries forward the work of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, 1989) with meticulous research, rigorous review, and faithful accuracy. Since the publication of the NRSV, new discoveries of ancient manuscripts and further research have led to new insights and understandings of the writings and of the cultures of the time. For more information on the update process and the types of changes made, see “Preface to the NRSV Updated Edition,” pages xxxiii–xxxvii.

What to Look for in This Bible

In addition to the NRSVue scripture text, this second edition of *Lutheran Study Bible* reflects reviews, revisions, and updates of the introductions, study notes, articles, charts, illustrations, diagrams, and maps that appeared in the 2009 *Lutheran Study Bible*.

Two new articles were created for this Bible. “Interpreting the Bible and Jewish-Christian Relations” (pp. 1484–1490) looks at problematic texts and provides help in reading scripture faithfully and respectfully. “The Greatest Story: To Be Continued” (pp. 1491–1492) is an inspiring essay that calls readers to make the biblical story “go viral.”

We invite you to use the following features of *Lutheran Study Bible* to support your individual Bible reading, study, and reflection, as well as for group study ranging from confirmation to various adult learning settings.

Introductions

Major sections and the books of the Bible begin with summary introductions. Here you will discover historical and contextual background, as well as insights into key themes and messages. Use these introductions as helpful guides to the sections and books of the Bible.

Study notes and questions

Three types of study notes, as well as faith reflection questions, accompany each book of the Bible. These notes and questions appear in the margin near the corresponding Bible text. They are designated by the following icons.



World of the Bible notes explore people, places, events, and artifacts mentioned in the Bible. These notes may also describe why a particular book might have been written and what literary form it takes.



Bible Concepts notes focus on ideas and theological insights. Here you will find connections between how such concepts are expressed in different books and how Old Testament themes influence the New Testament.



Lutheran Perspectives notes begin with a key question that connects a Bible verse or passage with Lutheran theological perspectives, teachings, or practices. The icon for these notes draws from Luther's seal. The cross within a heart symbolizes faith in Christ. (See p. 1987 for more on Luther's seal.)



Faith Reflection questions encourage individuals and groups to think about and discuss the meaning of Bible texts or study notes.

Articles

Many articles appear near the beginning and end of this Bible, and between the Old and New Testaments. Pages xvii–xxx include a detailed introduction to the Bible, a chart describing the various canons of Hebrew Scripture/Old Testament, and a three-page Bible history timeline.

The “Reading and Interpreting the Bible” section (pp. 1469–1510) focuses on how Lutherans and others may read, interpret, and study the Bible, and provides helpful resources for personal Bible reading and study as well. This section includes the new articles “Interpreting the Bible and Jewish-Christian Relations” and “The Greatest Story: To Be Continued.”

The final section of articles (pp. 1973–1988) highlights Martin Luther and the Bible and provides a helpful view of Luther's Small Catechism.

Charts, illustrations, diagrams, and maps

Throughout the study Bible, charts, illustrations, and diagrams provide meaningful insights into what is introduced in the scripture text. Fifteen full-color maps (pp. 1989–2004) and occasional spot maps also help you follow the action.

Subject guide

The subject guide (pp. 1951–1970) provides a listing of key Bible terms and cross-references.

A Word about Dates

In this study Bible, dates are designated by BCE (before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era). These correspond to the traditional dating convention of BC (“before Christ”) and AD (*anno domine*, “in the year of our Lord”). A monk named Dionysius Exiguus invented this traditional system in Rome in 525, based on his work on calculating the date of Easter. While the system attempted to mark Jesus’ birth as the transition point in history, it was later discovered that the calculation of Jesus’ birth year was incorrect. It is now believed that Jesus was more likely born in about 4 BCE.

We recognize that some readers may prefer the traditional dating abbreviations, which call attention to the importance of Christ’s incarnation and center human history around that event. We also recognize that we share history with people of many faiths, including Jewish siblings with whom we share sacred scripture. Therefore, we have chosen to follow the lead of many Bibles and scholars today by using the BCE and CE dating abbreviations.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for our large group of contributors (see pp. ix–xi). Their willingness to participate in this project and share their knowledge and insights has been inspiring and invaluable. We also thank the Board of Consultants for helping to shape the original design of the project and for supporting our efforts to bring you *Lutheran Study Bible, Second Edition*, with the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition.



The Great Commission by contemporary Chinese artist He Qi.

Using this Bible

Lutheran Study Bible is designed as a core resource for confirmation study and various adult learning activities. Here are some additional ways to use this Bible:

- Use the study notes for guidance as you read. Consider writing your reflections and questions in a journal.
- Adopt a plan for daily Bible reading. See pages 1497–1510.
- Discuss the Faith Reflection questions with friends or family members.
- Read and think about the Lutheran Perspectives notes. Use them to learn or review important Lutheran teachings and practices. If you are new to the Lutheran faith, you may find these notes particularly helpful.
- Choose some articles to discuss in a youth group or adult forum.

The Bible is an exciting and challenging book. We hope *Lutheran Study Bible* will be a valuable guide and companion for you on a lifelong journey with scripture. The Bible comes alive and does its work of renewing and changing lives when we read and study it, talk about it, and share it with one another. As we become better acquainted with scripture, God's life-giving, renewing word, we become better equipped to live out our Christian faith for the sake of the world.

INTRODUCTION

to the Bible

What Is the Bible?

The Bible is a book or, more accurately, a collection of books. In fact, the word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *biblia* (BIB-lee-ah), which means “books.” But reading the Bible isn’t like reading a history book, a rule book, or a self-help book of wise sayings. Why not? Because the Bible is also holy. It contains the sacred scripture for both the Jewish and Christian faiths. What makes it holy or sacred? It is not holy because we say so; it is holy because God speaks through the Bible.

The Bible is also called the word of God because it is God’s word for humankind, and through it God acts to change lives. Many Lutherans describe the Bible as follows:

The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God’s Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God’s revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world. (“Confession of Faith,” Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2.02c)

This confession statement means several things. It means that the Bible is God’s word, but human beings were inspired by God’s Spirit to write the words. The Spirit speaks through the words to create and sustain faith and to encourage people of faith to be active in serving in the world. Finally, Lutheran Christians see the Bible as centered on Jesus Christ and how he reveals God’s word for the world. In fact, the Bible itself speaks of the Word who became flesh and lived among us (John 1:1, 14). Above all for Christians, the Bible communicates the grace of God in Jesus Christ. As we speak and hear the words printed in the Bible, Christ is made alive for us. The church’s confession also describes the Bible as “the authoritative source and norm of [the church’s] proclamation, faith, and life” (“Confession of Faith,” 2.03). That means the Bible guides our thinking about matters of faith and life. So Lutherans begin with what the Bible does. Trying to discover who wrote the Bible is important. Exploring the process of how the Bible came to be is useful. But even more important is the way the Bible reveals God’s power. Its message can change lives.

A book of faith

The Bible can be described as a book of faith. What does that mean? First, the Bible comes *from faith*. The Bible is a product of communities of faith who gathered the writings of authors inspired by God and regarded them as having authority as sacred scriptures. Second, we are invited to read and study and listen to the Bible *in faith*. That means we approach the Bible with open minds and hearts. It connects us with all the people of faith—today and in the past. Finally, the Bible is written primarily *for faith*. The

great story of God's love and the promises of new life found in the Bible are meant to be heard and shared. The Bible creates individuals and communities of faith for a purpose—so that the good news of God's love will be shared in both words and actions.

Handed down from generation to generation

The stories found in the books of the Bible were handed down from generation to generation, first by word of mouth. Then the stories were written down into books and finally collected into a “canon” (a list of writings) that we now recognize as the Bible. These books were first written on scrolls made of dried animal skins or crude paper made of reeds. Portions of these books date as far back as the thirteenth century BCE and others as late as the second century CE. The books of the Bible are varied in many ways. The diversity of the literature reflects the number of authors who contributed to the Bible and the wide range of times in which they wrote. Together the books of the Bible give witness to God and God's relationship to humanity. For more, see “What Is in the Bible?” (pp. XXI–XXIII).

Inspired by God

Although the Bible was written down by human hands, God inspired the writings of the Bible: “all scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16). Christians may disagree on what this means, because the Bible does not explain how this inspiration occurred. Some believe the Bible's words were communicated directly by God to its authors and the authors wrote them down as if listening to a recording. Others argue that the *message* of the Bible is what God inspired but the actual *words* were the work of the authors. Still others believe the authors themselves, but not necessarily the specific words, were inspired by God. As stated above, the church's “Confession of Faith” says it this way: “Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, [the scriptures] record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ.” During the sixteenth century, Martin Luther described the key center of the entire scripture when he said of the Bible: “Here you will find the swaddling cloths and manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds. Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them” (LW 35:236). Luther's point is that the Bible is not to be worshiped in and of itself. Instead, he argued that the Bible is the place where Christ is revealed. So the Bible is both human and divine. As a human book, it was written in languages spoken by ordinary people who had different styles, passions, and experiences. In the Bible's stories, songs, prophecies, poems, and narratives we encounter the “dear treasure,” the living Christ. We are introduced to Jesus, who came into the world to reveal God and to save humans from sin and death, and who now lives and reigns forever. The biblical authors wrote inspired stories of faith meant to create new realities in the lives of their readers through encounters with God. The Old Testament authors gave witness to this new reality in the stories of God's continual faithfulness to the people of Israel. For the New Testament authors, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ shaped this new reality.

Reading and interpreting the Bible

Because the Bible is authoritative for faith and daily life, it requires careful reading and interpretation. It is an ancient book written by people who lived in very different times and places than we do. This makes reading the Bible today both challenging and exciting. Some portions have a more literal meaning. That is, they are meant to be read and understood as the original readers would have understood them. Other portions contain images, metaphors, and stories that convey important truths, but they are to be understood not as literal happenings. When “the trees of the forest sing for joy” (Ps 96:12), we know this didn't literally happen, but it is a metaphor used by the writer to express great joy. Because it was written so long ago and in cultures unfamiliar to us, along with careful reading of the Bible's words, we also read with its