

# A Concise Dictionary of the Bible and Its Reception

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# Introduction

What people believe the Bible means has often been more significant than what it originally meant. The tradition that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, for example, is more relevant to understanding its structure, meaning, and authority than the fact that he did not. The virgin (Gk. *parthenos*) in Matthew's version of the Immanuel prophecy (1:23) has had infinitely more impact on Western culture than the young woman (Heb. *'almah*) of the original Isaiah (7:14). The famous soprano aria in Handel's *Messiah* beginning "I know that my Redeemer liveth" has inspired and enchanted millions mainly because it has very little to do with the original passage in Job, which is very difficult and probably had nothing to do with life after death (Job 19:25); and the timeless beauty of Leonardo's *Last Supper* or a Raphael *Madonna* is due, partly, to the obvious cultural and topographical anachronisms. It can also be fascinating and valuable to reconstruct what the world was like in the ancient Near East, and how the teachings and prophecies of the Bible were originally understood by their earliest listeners or readers. Nor need such research be the exclusive preserve of archaeologists and historical critics. Postcolonial commentators, for instance, have sought to recover the original Asiatic face of Jesus, long submerged under white Eurocentric prejudice, and liberation theologians

have identified important parallels between eighth-century B.C.E. Israel and contemporary worlds of peasant poverty and social injustice.

The study of postbiblical readings and artistic representations is known as reception history or *Wirkungsgeschichte*, that is, the history of the effect the Bible has had on its readers. It involves research into how the Bible was used by great thinkers like Augustine, Maimonides, Luther, Milton, Blake, and Kierkegaard, and what role it has played in the history of Judaism and Christianity, as well as in other aspects of human culture from Gnosticism to the Enlightenment, from the Renaissance to Rastafarianism. It also involves collecting and analyzing the many meanings that each text has had in different contexts, in a way that often gives us new insights into the language and imagery of the Bible. What better way to appreciate the dynamics of the extraordinary story of the Akedah (Gen. 22), for example, or the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) than by comparing and contrasting some of the ways in which they have been interpreted in literature and art?

The value of such research seems obvious, and yet until recently little room was left for it in biblical commentaries and dictionaries. Art historians and literary critics, as well as theologians, church historians, and others, discuss, as

a matter of course and in some cases somewhat reluctantly, the biblical allusions in works that they study. But modern biblical specialists have focused on ancient history and the quest for the original meaning of the text to the exclusion of its fascinating and often profoundly significant afterlives. The situation began to change in 1990 with the publication of Richard Coggins and Leslie Houlden's pioneering interdisciplinary *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (rev. ed. 2003), which has articles on the Bible in art, the Bible in music, Marxist interpretation, the metaphysical poets, and the like. In the following year a valuable little book was published, *The Bible and Its Readers* (ed. Wim Beuken, Sean Freyne, and Anton Weiler), and in 1992 came another interdisciplinary reference book, David Jeffrey's *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. Now as we enter the third millennium, biblical scholars are regularly publishing works on reception history like Yvonne Sherwood's *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (2000), and Judith Kovacs and Chris Rowland's study, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (2004) for the new Blackwell Bible Commentary Series. It is against this background that the present *Concise Dictionary of the Bible and Its Reception*, the product of half a century of *wirkungsgeschichtliche* biblical research, was conceived.

The Bible on its own is an enormous field, creating the need for multivolume dictionaries and encyclopedias, and I am well aware that the task of producing a one-volume dictionary to cover both the Bible and its reception would seem nearly impossible. But to quote the late Robert Carroll, "That's no reason for giving up." It just means that the result cannot be as perfect or as comprehensive as one would have liked, but I am confident that, for the most part, I have allowed the Bible and a very large and representative selection of its readers—poets, preachers, painters, sculptors, and musicians—to speak for themselves in a convenient and readable form. I have tried to

include at least a brief discussion of everything important and relevant. What that means depends to some extent on who I am, what I have devoted my life to, and where I am at the moment, and I make no apology for any bias there may be toward Scottish Presbyterianism, the Hebrew Bible, and Renaissance Italy. But I have made every effort to allow the individual voices of other readers, ancient, medieval, and modern, worldwide, to be heard as clearly and as accurately as possible.

All the articles on the *Bible* are written with the emphasis on reception history, although important historical-critical issues are also referred to. The books of the Bible, the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and some other texts (*Gospel of Thomas*, Qur'an) have their own entries, as do most of the main biblical characters, images, and events, all with reference to their role in Judaism, Christianity, and, where relevant, Islam, as well as in literature, music, art, film, and elsewhere. Some famous passages like the Akedah and the Sermon on the Mount have their own entries, as have many liturgical texts like the Kaddish, Dies Irae, and Magnificat. There are articles on relevant ancient languages (Arabic, Greek, Hebrew), cities (Babylon, Jerusalem, Rome), the versions (Septuagint, Vulgate, Authorized Version), types of Bible (Children's Bibles, Curious Bibles, Family Bibles), and also on book production, literacy, manuscripts, Masoretes, and the like. Scholarly tools and approaches (form criticism, oral tradition, reader response, semantics, structuralism, textual criticism) have their own entries as have many important biblical scholars (Jerome, Rashi, Calvin, Gunkel, Bultmann).

The other part of the project, *its reception*, involved identifying individuals and areas where the Bible has played a significant role. There are entries on preachers (Charles Spurgeon, Martin Luther King), hymn writers (John Newton, Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley), poets (Judah Halevi, Milton, Blake), philosophers (Maimonides, Kierkegaard, Der-

rida), and other individuals rather less obvious like Virgil and Seneca; and on major religious traditions (Jewish interpretation, Muslim interpretation, Orthodox interpretation) as well as minor (Anabaptists, the Baha'i Faith, Christian Science). Other topics include geographical areas (African interpretation, Asian interpretation, North American interpretation), chronological periods (Patristic interpretation, Medieval interpretation, Reformation), and philosophical or other movements (atheism, existentialism, hasidism, mysticism, romanticism, womanism, Zionism). There is ample discussion of matters like ethics, law, medicine, politics, popular culture, preaching, and war and peace, both in separate entries and in the articles on biblical books and themes. Much of the dictionary is devoted to literature and the arts, and in most cases there is one general survey article and separate articles on representative examples: for instance, one general article on art and architecture, and separate entries on selected artists (Blake, Chagall, Doré, Michelangelo, Rouault, Titian), as well as special cases such as Byzantine art, catacombs, Chartres Cathedral, and the Sistine Chapel. The same applies to literature, music, and drama.

An important feature of the dictionary is the lavish use of biblical references in almost every article, with an index at the end to enable readers to trace the afterlives of a particular verse or passage through the dictionary. Numerous cross-references are intended to make the work more homogeneous and user-friendly, and a good many brief definitions are included (aretalogy, catena, calque, glosolalia, *quadriga*), although even there

some reception history is included where appropriate. Many Hebrew and Greek terms are provided in transliteration (Heb. *mishkan*, "tabernacle"; Gk. *doxa*, "glory"), as are the usual Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic equivalents in the case of proper names common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: thus Abraham (Heb. *Avraham*; Arab. *Ibrahim*), Jerusalem (Heb. *Yerushalayim*, Arab. *Al-Quds*), Jesus (Heb. *Yeshua*; Gk. *Iesous*, Arab. *'Isa*), Solomon (Heb. *Shlomo*; Arab. *Suleiman*). A brief bibliography contains a selection of well-known and widely used dictionaries, encyclopedias, and the like, and some useful Web sites, for further reference. Quotations are from the RSV (1973) unless otherwise indicated.

It has been a pleasure to work on this project, and I hope that its readers will find it helpful, informative, and enjoyable. I am grateful to Philip Law and Donald McKim of Westminster John Knox for their patience, enthusiasm, and helpful advice and to the production team, especially Dan Braden. Of the many friends, colleagues, and relatives to whom I gladly record my gratitude for help and encouragement along the way, I will mention only my two professors, Norman Porteous and James Barr, who at New College Edinburgh in 1959 infected me with a passion for the Hebrew Bible from which I have never recovered and to whose memory I dedicate this volume; and, in another special category, my two sons, Alexander and Joseph, for their undeserved support and comments—not only on musical matters and popular culture.

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# Abbreviations

Akk.	Akkadian
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>
Arab.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
AV	(King James) Authorized Version
Egyp.	Egyptian
ET	English translation
Gk.	Greek
Heb.	Hebrew
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Version
Lat.	Latin
LXX	Septuagint
ms(s)	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Tg	Targum
Ugar.	Ugaritic
Vg	Vulgate

## APOCRYPHA AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

Esd.	Esdras
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
Jdt.	Judith
Macc.	Maccabees
Sir.	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
<i>T. Ab.</i>	<i>Testament of Abraham</i>
<i>T. Asher</i>	<i>Testament of Asher</i>
<i>T. Gad</i>	<i>Testament of Gad</i>
<i>T. Job</i>	<i>Testament of Job</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
Tob.	Tobit
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

## RABBINIC LITERATURE

References to the Mishnah (*m.*) and Palestinian Talmud (Yerushalmi) (*y.*) are in the form *Sanhedrin* 10:1 (tractate title, chapter, paragraph).  
References to the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli) (*b.*) are in the form *Hagigah* 14b (tractate title, page number).  
References to *Midrash Rabbah* are in the form *Gen. Rab.* 60.3 (book title, *Rabbah*, chapter, paragraph).

**Aaron** (Heb. *Aharon*; Arab. *Haroun*). Brother of \*Moses and \*Miriam, Aaron plays a significant role in the story of the exodus (cf. Mic. 6:4). He stands by Moses in most of his dealings with the \*pharaoh and in the battle against the Amalekites. At \*Sinai he and his sons are anointed priests of the \*tabernacle, and, like the high priest in the \*temple at Jerusalem, who traced his ancestry back to Aaron, he is given unique authority to enter the Holy of Holies once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Aaron courageously makes atonement for his people when they are threatened by destruction after Korah's rebellion (Num. 16). There was rivalry between the two brothers (Num. 12), and in the story of the \*golden calf Aaron is represented as setting up an alternative cult (Exod. 32). Universally interpreted as synonymous with utter corruption and idolatry (e.g., Deut. 9:16, 21; Ps. 106:19; Acts 7:41), the story probably reflects opposition between rival Israelite hierarchies, the one later based in Jerusalem and the other at Bethel or Samaria in the north (cf. 1 Kgs. 12:25–33; Hos. 4:5–6; Mic. 1:6–7).

Tradition raised Aaron to a level equal to that of Moses (Mic. 6:4; Sir. 45:6); indeed, for \*Hillel he represented peace and love in language never applied to Moses (*m. Abot* 1:12). The image in Ps. 133 of "precious oil" running down Aaron's beard onto his breastplate, where the twelve tribes of Israel were represented, was interpreted as referring to his role as peacemaker. From NT times, like \*Melchizedek, Aaron points toward Christ the great High Priest (Heb. 5:4; 7:11). For George \*Herbert and others his vestments symbolized the inner spiritual qualities required of a priest, while for \*Calvin "Aaron and his sons" smacked more of Roman apostolic succession. In Christian iconography Aaron's rod, which miraculously bore fruit (Num. 17), prefigures the virgin birth, while in D. H. Lawrence's novel *Aaron's Rod* (1922) the same biblical symbol is applied to sexual and artistic liberation. Arnold Schönberg's unfinished opera *Moses und Aron*

(1930–32) provides a rare opportunity for the characters of Aaron and his brother to be developed in a powerful and dramatic way.

**Abel** (Heb. *Hebel*; Arab. *Habil*). Brother of \*Cain, the first martyr (1 *Enoch* 22:7; Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:51) and paragon of faith (Heb. 11:4). He is also the first righteous man (cf. 1 John 3:12), and one ancient Jewish text represents him as seated on a throne judging all creation, because the righteous should be judged by a righteous man, not by God (*T. Ab.* 13). Patristic and medieval Christian interpretations follow the same line, as does \*Milton, who associates him with Christ. In Christian \*liturgy and iconography his offering, which was acceptable to God (Gen. 4:4), along with those of \*Abraham and \*Melchizedek, is a type of the eucharistic sacrifice. The rabbis speculated on the reasons for Abel's murder, the murder weapon, and problems associated with his burial, while "the voice of Abel's blood crying from the ground" has prompted many writers, including \*Coleridge, \*Byron, and Shelley, to focus on the psychology of guilt.

**Abraham** (or Abram; Heb. *Avraham*; Arab. *Ibrahim*). The first of the three patriarchs, Abraham, \*Isaac, and \*Jacob, spiritual ancestor of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He was called by God to leave his family in Ur of the Chaldeans and journey to \*Canaan, where he and his family were buried. God's \*covenant (or "promise"; cf. Luke 1:55, 73) with Abraham, according to which their descendants would settle there and spread throughout the world bringing blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12), was sealed by the rite of \*circumcision that he instituted (Gen. 17). Of the many stories told of him in Gen. 11–25, by far the most familiar and widely used in the traditions of all three world religions is the \*Akedah. But the biblical accounts of his relationship with

## 2 Abравanel, Isaac

his wife \*Sarah, his concubine \*Hagar, and his nephew \*Lot, his visit to Salem (\*Jerusalem) in the days of \*Melchizedek, and his intercession for the doomed people of \*Sodom, all play a significant role too.

For Christians from Paul (Rom. 4) to \*Luther and \*Kierkegaard, Abraham is the archetype of the man of faith. In the \*Qur'an he is the "Friend of God," a man of pure faith (Arab. *hanif*), the first to submit completely to his will and thus the first Muslim (3:60; 4:124). In Jewish prayer God is addressed as the "Shield of Abraham" (Gen. 15:1) in the first blessing of the \*Amidah; and in the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, "Abraham's bosom" signifies the peaceful repose of the righteous after death (Luke 16:19–21; see \*Lazarus 2). In music Abraham appears in the refrain at the end of the \*Dies Irae, *Quam olim Abrahae promissisti*, "As you once promised to Abraham," as well as in the \*Magnificat, the \*Benedictus, and an 18th-century English hymn beginning "The God of Abraham praise." In addition to many paintings of Sarah, Hagar, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Akedah, the visit of the three angels to Abraham (Gen. 18) has been a favorite subject for artists, including \*Ghiberti, \*Raphael, \*Rembrandt, \*Turner, and \*Chagall.

In the light of modern archaeology scholars have sought to reveal historical events and conditions behind the biblical narrative. The names of some of the characters in the story, such as Amraphel and Tidal in Gen. 14, have been compared to names occurring in ancient Babylonian and Hittite texts of the 18th century B.C.E., while some of the legal practices recounted in the narrative, such as marriage customs, seem to be mirrored in legal documents found at Nuzi, \*Mari, and other cities from about the same period. Abraham's connections with centers of Davidic influence such as Hebron (Gen. 23) and Jerusalem (Gen. 14:18–20; 22) probably reflect conditions centuries later, and it is more than likely

that his unique role in biblical tradition was strengthened and modified as the beliefs and practices of Israel took shape over a period of many centuries.

**Abraham, Testament of.** See \**Testament of Abraham*.

**Abравanel, Isaac** (1437–1508). Jewish statesman and exegete. Born in Lisbon, he was forced to leave home with all the other Jews in 1496 and died in Venice. He wrote commentaries on the \*Pentateuch, the Prophets, and \*Daniel. Despite anti-Christian \*apologetic in much of his work and the fact that his commentary on \*Isaiah was placed on the Index, he was influenced by Christian writers including \*Jerome, \*Augustine, and \*Thomas Aquinas, and his works were translated into Latin and widely consulted by non-Jewish Renaissance scholars.

**Absalom.** \*David's third son, who rebelled against his father and died, hanging by his hair from a tree, while trying to escape from his pursuers (2 Sam. 13–18). According to ancient Jewish tradition, the crime against his father was so serious that he was one of the few Jews who have no share in the world to come. The church fathers used him as an illustration of human sinfulness, while medieval writers for the most part marveled at Absalom's physical beauty and the appropriateness of the mode of his death. Political interpretations of the story, like those of Cranmer, \*Tyndale, and \*Dryden, were common in 16th- and 17th-century England. David's grief on hearing the news of his son's death, expressed so poignantly in the verse "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son my son!" (2 Sam. 18:33 AV), has moved many modern writers, including Walter Scott, Thomas Hardy, and Alan Paton in his *Cry, the Beloved*



*Country* (1948). \*Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) makes clever use of other parts of the biblical story as well, including Absalom's killing of his half-brother Amnon for raping his sister Tamar.

**Acrostic.** In an acrostic poem the first letters of each line make up some kind of recognizable sequence. In a number of examples in the Hebrew Bible the sequence is alphabetical. These include nine \*Psalms (e.g., 34; 111; 119), the poem "In praise of the virtuous woman" at the end of \*Proverbs (31:10–31), and most of \*Lamentations (Lam. 1–4). The function in some cases was no doubt to display the writer's literary expertise or to facilitate memorizing, but in other contexts it was probably intended to suggest that everything, from A to Z, had been said on the subject of the poem.

**Acts of Andrew.** An apocryphal work, probably from the 3rd century, recounting the travels of the apostle and his imprisonment and martyrdom in Patras in Greece. It survives only in fragments, but an extended epitome is given by Gregory of Tours (6th century). See \*Andrew.

**Acts of John.** An apocryphal work, known already to Clement of Alexandria, which contains the apostle's memories of Jesus, including his own detailed account of the \*transfiguration and the \*passion, as well as some information about his later life and martyrdom in Ephesus. It also contains the beautiful "Hymn of Jesus" arranged for chorus and orchestra by Gustav Holst (1917).

**Acts of Paul.** An apocryphal work comprising the *Martyrdom of Paul*, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, and the *Third Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*. Written probably in the 2nd century, it adds many details to the biblical sources that

have been influential in Christian literature and the iconography of Paul. These include the description of Paul as "bald and bandy-legged," references to the role of Nero, and a remarkable account of the virgin \*Thecla's conversion on hearing him preach, and her miraculous survival, first when thrown to wild beasts and then when her mother tries to have her burned on a pyre.

**Acts of Peter.** An apocryphal 2nd-century Greek text containing a popular account of the martyrdom of Peter, in which the famous *Quo Vadis?* scene appears for the first time, as well as the description of Peter's crucifixion upside down.

**Acts of Pilate.** An apocryphal work appearing in some mss as the first half of the \**Gospel of Nicodemus*. Written probably in the 5th or 6th century, it tells of the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus, adding to the canonical account such details as the bowing of the Roman standards to Jesus and the names of Pilate's wife (Procla) (cf. Matt. 27:19) and the two robbers crucified with him (Gestas and Demas).

**Acts of the Apostles.** \*Luke's account of the origin and growth of the church from the final parting of Jesus from his disciples in Jerusalem (\*Ascension) and the coming of the Holy Spirit at \*Pentecost, to the arrival of \*Paul in \*Rome. Most of the first half of Acts is set in \*Jerusalem and recounts the role of \*Peter and \*John in the regrouping of the disciples, the martyrdom of \*Stephen, the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus, the martyrdom of \*James, and the imprisonment and miraculous release of Peter. The second half is devoted to the missionary journeys of \*Paul to Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome accompanied by Barnabas, John, Simeon, Silas, Timothy, and others, perhaps including Luke

## 4 Acts of Thomas

himself (Col. 4:14). After \*Irenaeus, who cites Acts frequently as evidence for the unity of the apostolic tradition, the first writers to focus on Acts as Scripture were \*Ephrem and John \*Chrysostom (c. 400), who defends its importance for what it says about the Holy Spirit, followed later by \*Bede and \*Rabanus Maurus. Not until the 12th century is Acts treated in the same way as the other books of the Bible, and not until the Reformation do full-scale commentaries, like those of \*Calvin and \*Grotius, become common. \*Luther described Acts as a commentary on Paul's letters, proving with historical examples that justification is by faith alone.

\*Historical criticism in the 18th and 19th centuries cast doubts on the historicity of Luke's account of Christian origins, and questions raised about the author's political and theological aims. F. C. \*Baur argued that it was an attempt to reconcile two conflicting elements in the early church, a Judaizing party represented by Peter and a pro-Gentile lobby led by Paul. Others argued that it was primarily addressed to the Roman authorities, designed to convince them that Christianity was not going to cause any trouble. Twentieth-century theologians like \*Bultmann saw in Luke-Acts a shift from an early eschatological \*kerygma about the imminent end of the world to a continuation of the biblical narrative of God's mighty acts, while social scientists look for evidence in Acts for the earliest stages in community organization and growth.

Dissident or minority groups within the church have found in Acts scriptural authority for an egalitarian form of Christianity ("having all things in common," 2:44), women priests (21:9), house churches (12:12-18; 16:11-15), and the charismatic movement. A number of imaginative apocryphal works are modeled on the biblical book: \*Acts of Paul and Thecla, \*Acts of Peter, \*Acts of Thomas, and \*Acts of Pilate, some of which contain interesting material cited by feminists and others as evidence for alternative forms of early Christianity.

The most complete representation of Acts in art, including scenes showing the stoning of Stephen, the death of Ananias, and the conversion of Paul, is the series of ten tapestries designed by \*Raphael for the \*Sistine Chapel and now in the Vatican Picture Gallery. Many passages from Acts are set to music in Mendelssohn's oratorio *Paul* (1836) and \*Elgar's *The Apostles* (1902-3).

**Acts of Thomas.** A 3rd-century gnostic work, probably originally composed in Edessa in \*Syriac, that contains an account of some of the legends about \*Thomas (Mar Thoma), including his journey to India, and the beautiful Hymn of the Pearl (108-13). It also recommends poverty, chastity, and even celibacy in marriage.

**Adam.** The first human being, created out of the soil of the earth (Heb. *adamah*) according to Gen. 2. In Hebrew *adam* is the collective noun for "human beings, humankind," male and female (Gen. 1:26-27), so that *ben adam* ("son of man") means "a human being, a person." It is also a proper name, "Adam," and when "man" (*ishi*) and "woman" (*isha*) are formed later in the story, this becomes the name of the first male ancestor of the human race, consort of \*Eve. The Greeks interpreted the four letters of his name in Greek as referring to the four points of the compass. The biblical story of his behavior in the garden of \*Eden, first obedient to God's will, then independent of it, provided Christians from Paul on with a scriptural model of fallen humanity, paving the way for the coming of Christ as the "second Adam" to redeem them (1 Cor. 15:22). The concept of two Adams, an earthly, human one and a heavenly, ideal or primeval one, is well known in Jewish tradition too, starting with \*Philo and culminating in traditions about the shining heavenly garments of Adam and Eve, and the mystical notion of the "Perfect Man." In Jewish tradition the angels

advise God to refrain from putting human beings into the world because of the evil that is bound to result. The church fathers speculated on how Adam's sin was transmitted to the rest of the human race, while later speculation focused on whether he was a historical character, and whether he had a navel. The image of Adam in Christian literature and iconography is often one of weakness and sorrow, as in the 15th-century Easter hymn "Adam lay y-bounden" and \*Piero della Francesca's *Legend of the True Cross* in Arezzo, although better known is \*Michelangelo's painting of the creation story where the fingers of God and Adam are almost touching. See \**Life of Adam and Eve*.

**Adam and Eve, Books of.** See \**Life of Adam and Eve*.

**Adam, Testament of.** See \**Testament of Adam*.

**Advent.** The ecclesiastical season of approximately three weeks (four Sundays) leading up to \*Christmas. Advent lectionaries focus on the second coming of Christ (\*Parousia) (Matt. 3:1–12; 24:37–44; Rom. 13:11–14) and the day of judgment (Isa. 2:1–5, 2 Pet. 3:8–14) as well as generally on the dawn of a messianic age in which the language of \*Isaiah predominates (Isa. 9:2–7, 11:1–9; 35:1–10; 40:1–11; 54:1–10). There are also many musical settings of verses from Isaiah, notably the "O Antiphons" popularized in the hymn "O Come, O Come Immanuel," and the popular medieval chant *Rorate coeli* (Isa. 45:8), originally interpreted as referring to the virgin birth and still current in a modern version beginning "Rain down justice."

**Aetiology.** An explanation of why things are as they are. Many biblical stories, especially in the book of \*Genesis,

contain aetiological elements explaining, for example, the origin of words like *isha*, "woman" (Gen. 2:23), or names like Isaac (17:17–19) and Bethel (28:17–19). Others describe the origin of natural phenomena like the rainbow (9:12–17), ancient customs like the \*Passover rituals (Exod. 13), and territorial claims such as the right of Abraham's descendants to settle in the promised land (Gen. 15:18–21). Technically the function of such aetiologies is to answer questions about ancient tradition (e.g., "What mean these stones?" Josh. 4:21 AV), but frequently they function as a literary device designed to make a political or theological claim. The identification of a narrative as primarily aetiological, from the appearance of such phrases as "to this day," may imply that it does not recount historical fact, but this does not apply in every case.

### African American interpretation.

Forcibly imported from a predominantly oral culture into one that was in almost every respect alien to them, the African slaves in America at first had little direct contact with the Bible. It was not until the appearance of the evangelical preachers of the late 18th century that they began to learn about it and make it their own. They found it easy to identify with the Hebrew slaves and their hope that one day they would cross over the Jordan to the promised land, and to believe in a Savior who showed how suffering and death can lead to new life. Their distinctive retelling and appropriation of the biblical stories can be seen in spirituals like "Go down, Moses," "Joshua fit the battle of Jericho," "Balm in Gilead," and "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" as well as in much of 19th- and 20th-century American literature from the poetry of the black slave Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753–85) and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987).

The Bible provided the language and imagery of the rhetoric that was even-

## 6 African interpretation

tually, under the leadership of twentieth-century political activists like Martin Luther \*King Jr., to win black Americans equal rights. Favorite texts included the eighth-century prophets' calls for social justice (e.g., Amos 5:21–24) and passages declaring that "all are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26–28; Acts 10:34–36). More recently the existence in many parts of the United States of predominantly black congregations, however, many of them Pentecostal and mostly led by academically well qualified preachers and pastors, may mean the end of distinctive African American interpretations of the Bible, for so long dominated by racial and socioeconomic questions, and an approach in most respects indistinguishable from that of many white American Christians. See \*African interpretation; \*North American interpretation; \*Slavery; \*Womanism.

**African interpretation.** An approach to biblical interpretation that reassesses the role of Africa in the Bible and Christianity, and challenges the white Greco-Roman tradition that has been superimposed on Western Christianity for much of its history. There has been some discussion of whether the term "Africa" is itself a European construct bringing together disparate cultures, and to what extent diaspora African interpretations, especially from America and the West Indies, are included. An increasing number of publications such as *The Bible in Africa* (ed. Gerald West and Musa Dube, 2000) demonstrate a growing consensus among African scholars and general readers of the Bible. The European setting of the biblical stories, as portrayed in Christian iconography down the centuries and more recently in film, is questioned on the grounds that Europe plays a very minor role in the biblical account of Christian origins and the chief biblical characters were Afro-Asians, not white Europeans. Some of the church fathers were Africans, including \*Tertullian and \*Augustine of Hippo, but they wrote in

Latin and did not deliberately address the indigenous population.

Afrocentric readings of the text focus on references to Africa throughout the Bible, from the location of the garden of \*Eden (Gen. 2:13) and African involvement in the exodus story (Num. 12:1), to the Holy Family's journey to Egypt (Matt. 2:13–20), Simon of Cyrene, the African who helped Jesus in the \*Passion Narrative (Matt. 27:32), and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8). Special significance is perceived in Ps. 68:31 ("let Ethiopia hasten to stretch out her hands to God"), and other passages where Africa has a share in some of the great prophetic visions of the Bible (Isa. 11:11; 18:1–2). Modern definitions of "black" that include people of African and Asian origin extend the number of blacks in the Bible from a few individuals like \*Nimrod the son of Cush, the \*Queen of Sheba, and the prophet \*Zephaniah (1:1) to almost everyone, including Jesus. This is also reflected in black Madonna icons familiar in parts of North Africa and Eastern Europe. A striking example of the influence of African interpretation on some modern translations of the Bible can be seen in the \*Song of Songs where the traditional "I am black but comely" (AV) has become "I am black and beautiful (NRSV) (1:5). The role of divination in some African cultures has also contributed to African readings of Scripture, and political readings of the Bible are naturally popular in postcolonial Africa. See \*Rastafarianism.

**Aggadah** (Heb. "story, anecdote"). Aggadah (or haggadah) and \*halakkah are the two chief categories of material in rabbinic exegetical literature. Aggadah consists of stories and legends on all manner of topics, historical, astronomical, medical, etc., often containing profound philosophical and ethical insights on which most of the theology of rabbinic Judaism is based. Much of this type of material is contained in \*midrash and has an exegetical function, but aggadah also accounts for a large

proportion of the \*Talmud as well. Only a small proportion of the midrash is halakic. Typical examples of aggadah would be stories about the angels trying to persuade God not to create humankind and not to give Israel the Torah, or about the patriarchs studying Talmud, or the child who was destroyed by fire because he was found reading the first chapter of \*Ezekiel, or the four rabbis who entered paradise. The \*Passover Haggadah contains aggadic material filling out the story of the exodus.

**Agnus Dei** (Lat. "O Lamb of God [that takest away the sins of the world]"). The first words of an ancient Christian prayer derived from John 1:29 (cf. Isa. 53:7), the fifth and final part of the Roman \*Mass since the 7th century. It also plays a role in other liturgies as an independent anthem and there is a well-known setting for eight-part choir by Samuel Barber (1967).

**Ahikar** (or Ahiqar; Arab. *Loqman*). "The Story of Ahikar" is an Aramaic text found in a 6th–5th-century B.C.E. papyrus at \*Elephantine, and surviving also in a number of translations, especially Syriac, Arabic, and Armenian. It tells how Ahikar, a wise political leader in the government of the Assyrian king \*Sennacherib (cf. Tob. 14:10), is condemned to death on forged evidence but survives in hiding to be ultimately reinstated by the king with great honor. The story is similar to that of \*Tobit, and his "Teachings" or "Parables," which make up a significant part of the book, have parallels in the Bible (Ps. 141:4; 2 Tim. 4:17) and the Qur'an (31:17).

**Akedah (or Aqedah)**. Of all the biblical traditions about \*Abraham, \*Isaac, and \*Jacob, "the binding (Heb. *akedah*) of Isaac" is the most influential (Gen. 22). It was originally perhaps an aetiological legend explaining the change of ritual practice from human \*sacrifice to animal

sacrifice, and claiming ancient patriarchal authority for the site of Solomon's temple at Jerusalem. But in its canonical \*context, and as it is interpreted in many later contexts as well, it is interpreted as the supreme test of Abraham's faith. At an early stage in the history of its interpretation the focus shifted from Abraham to his victim: the fate of Isaac who survived was contrasted with that of the martyrs who did not, or according to some, like the poets Ephraim of Bonn (1132–1200), writing at the time of a crusader massacre, and the war poet Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), Isaac actually died (Gen. 22:4). Both Abraham's meritorious act and the atoning "blood of Isaac" or "the ashes of Isaac" figure in Jewish prayer (see Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, 1967).

Christian \*typology identified Isaac with Christ, the wood on his back, for example, foreshadowing Christ bearing the cross on his way to Calvary. In art the image of Abraham preparing to slay his son with a knife appears, in widely differing versions, from early \*synagogue decoration (\*Dura Europos, 3rd century; Beth Alpha, 6th century) and the Renaissance artists \*Ghiberti, \*Raphael, \*Caravaggio, and \*Rembrandt, down to \*Blake and \*Chagall. There is a reference to the Akedah in the Qur'an (37:101–7), though interpreters locate the event at Mecca and identify the son as Ishmael rather than Isaac. Modern interpreters have seen it is a parable of the agony of a man forced to choose between religious faith and ethics (\*Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*), or used it as a vehicle for protest against war (Wilfred Owen; \*Britten, *War Requiem*). In some post-Holocaust readings, such as that of the Israeli poet Amir Gilboa (1917–84) and the Oscar-winning film *La Vita è bella* (*Life Is Beautiful*, 1997), it is the father who dies, not the son.

**Akiba (or Aqiba)** (c. 50–132 C.E.). Great Jewish rabbi in the period from the destruction of the \*temple in 70 C.E. to the

Bar Kokhba Revolt, when it is said he died a martyr's death with the words of the \*Shema on his lips (Deut. 6:4) (*b. Berakot* 61b). There are references to a "Mishnah of Rabbi Akiba" (*m. Sanhedrin* 3:4), and among the many sayings attributed to him are that "the tradition (*masora*) is a fence round the Torah (*m. Abot* 3:14), "all is foreseen but freedom of choice is given" (*Abot* 3:16), and "all the world is not worth the day on which the \*Song of Songs was written" (*m. Yadayim* 3:5). Of the "four who entered paradise" on a mystical journey (cf. 2 Cor. 12), he alone returned unscathed (*b. Hagigah* 14b).

**Albright, William Foxwell** (1891–1971). Semitic philologist and biblical archaeologist. Son of a Methodist missionary, Albright taught himself Hebrew and Assyrian at an early age and won a scholarship to study Modern Hebrew and Arabic in Palestine, where he became director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. He excavated a number of important sites, including Tell Beit Mirsim and Bethel. His overriding concern was to use archaeological evidence to throw light on the origin and meaning of the Bible. His influence on specialists and the general public alike was immense, both through his teaching at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, where his former students include John Bright, Frank Moore Cross, T. O. Lambdin, Raymond \*Brown, and a host of other illustrious biblical scholars, and through his publications, of which the most widely read are *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (1940) and *The Archaeology of Palestine* (1949).

**Alexandria** (modern Iskenderun). Founded by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.E. on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt, Alexandria soon became a major center of Greek learning. Under the Ptolemies a famous library and an inter-

national research center known as the "Museum" were established there, and the first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the \*Septuagint, was produced for use in the large Greek-speaking Jewish community. Alexandria was the second city in the Roman Empire after \*Rome. Alexandrian scholarship influenced Jewish writers, especially \*Philo, and both Christian and rabbinic exegetical methods. Under the leadership of \*Clement, \*Origen, and \*Cyril, distinctive Alexandrian traditions of biblical interpretation emerged, characterized by the belief that texts have other senses beside their \*literal meaning and the regular, some would say excessive, use of allegory and \*typology. See \*Allegorical interpretation.

**All Saints' Day.** The feast celebrating all the Christian saints, observed in the East on the first Sunday after Pentecost, and in the West since the 8th century on November 1. Many families also count their own loved ones among the saints in heaven and lay flowers on their graves. Scripture passages prescribed to be read on All Saints' Day include a hymn from \*Sirach (44:1, 10–15), the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1–12), John's vision of "a great multitude that no one can number . . . clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands" (Rev. 7:9), and a promise that the faithful too will one day see God as he is (1 John 3:1–3). Among the most popular hymns for the day are "For all the saints who from their labours rest," set to music by \*Vaughan Williams, and John \*Newton's "Glorious things of thee are spoken," based on Ps. 87 and Isa. 33:20–21, and normally sung to \*Haydn's "Austrian melody." In many countries, especially in the English-speaking world, All Saints' Day is preceded by a pagan celebration with little direct connection known as Halloween ("All Hallows Eve").

**Allegorical interpretation.** A method of interpretation by which

meanings other than the \*literal meaning of a text are sought. It was applied, especially to ancient or sacred texts, throughout the Hellenistic world, and provided a means whereby interpreters could find deeper spiritual or moral meanings in such texts, while at the same time making them relevant to their own situation. The method also provided a means of solving problems with the literal meaning of many passages of Scripture, for instance, descriptions of God in human form, and laws without any obvious rational explanation. One of its commonest uses was in \*apologetic or polemical discourse, often directed by Christians against Jews and gnostics. Despite the widespread use of allegory in the rabbinic exegetical literature, Christian writers frequently accuse Jews of seeing only the literal or surface meaning of Scripture and being incapable of grasping its deeper, allegorical truth. It is true that the rabbis, like the Antiochene fathers, were more cautious in their use of allegory and had a greater respect for the literal meaning of the text than \*Philo, but their rejection of Christian interpretations of Scripture arose more from its christological content than its allegorical method.

It was developed most extensively among the scholars of \*Alexandria, notably Philo and \*Origen, so that an Alexandrian school of allegorical interpretation evolved to be challenged by more literal and historical approaches to biblical exegesis practiced elsewhere, particularly at \*Antioch from the 4th century.

There are some allegories in the Bible (Ezek. 17:2; 24:3 RSV), and some passages have been regularly interpreted allegorically, notably "the allegory of old age" (Eccl. 12:1-7) and the \*Song of Songs, interpreted by the rabbis as an allegory of God's love for Israel, and by Christians, notably \*Bernard of Clairvaux, as an allegory of Christ's love for his church. An early Christian example, used to give scriptural authority to the method, is Paul's allegorical interpretation of the story of the sons of \*Sarah and

\*Hagar in Gal. 4:21-31, according to which Hagar stands for the \*Sinai \*covenant, \*law, and \*slavery, while Sarah is \*Jerusalem above and freedom: "So then," Paul concludes, "we are not children of the slave, but of the free woman." Elsewhere Paul draws a distinction between the letter of Scripture and the spirit (Rom. 2:29; 2 Cor. 3:6). Origen identifies three levels of meaning corresponding to the body, soul, and spirit of a human being: the obvious literal meaning of the text (its body), its moral application to everyday life (its soul), and its hidden, theological meaning (its spirit).

In the Latin West, particularly under the influence of \*Jerome and \*Isidore, allegory comes to be understood as the dominant method whereby believers can arrive at the true, mystical meaning of Scripture. Medieval scholars like \*Nicholas of Lyra, influenced perhaps by Jewish exegetical methods, further refined the method and distinguished four levels of meaning: the literal meaning and three deeper, nonliteral senses known as allegorical, moral, and anagogical, the last being concerned to find future or mystical insights in the text. The influence of this approach to understanding Scripture can be seen in the conventional structure of sermons, meditations, and other literature throughout the Middle Ages.

The Reformers and humanists, and the succeeding two centuries of \*higher critics, biblical archaeologists, and Semitic philologists, rejected allegorical interpretation as arbitrary, artificial, and farfetched, confident that the literal meaning of the text and the author's intention were sufficient goals for biblical exegesis. More recently disillusionment with the historical-critical quest for a single original meaning, along with a new appreciation of the fact that texts can and do have more than one meaning, has led to a reassessment of the value of allegorical interpretations, ancient, medieval, and modern. Origen's concern was to make sense of the ancient texts to which

## 10 Alleluia

he devoted his life but which seemed to him to be at times superficial, irrational, or irrelevant, and in this he provided subsequent biblical scholarship with a model only now perhaps fully appreciated.

**Alleluia.** Latin form of Heb. *hal-luluyah*, "Praise the Lord." Apart from the \*Psalms, where it appears 20 times (104–6; 110–18; 134–35; 145–50), it occurs in the Bible only in Tobit (13:22) and Revelation (19:1, 3, 4, 6), where it is sung by the saints in heaven. It is always sung at masses, especially before the reading of the Gospel, except during Lent in the Western tradition. See \*Hallel.

**Allusion.** One of the most striking features of biblical literature, however diverse its contents and literary genres, is the frequent occurrence of allusions, where one text apparently refers indirectly to another. This was already noted and exploited by the ancient exegetes: one of the chief rabbinic principles of interpretation (*middot*) was to interpret one passage by reference to another. In modern times strict historical-critical criteria for establishing the date and authorship of texts precluded this exegetical method in many cases, on the grounds that an author could not have been aware of texts written after his death: Isa. 1:10 (8th century B.C.E.) cannot be explained by reference to Ezek. 16:49 (6th century B.C.E.). More recent literary approaches, less concerned with date and authorship and taking the text of the Hebrew Bible as a single literary corpus, are rediscovering allusiveness as a vital hermeneutical tool. Deliberate allusions to the OT in the NT, as well as exact \*quotations, have the additional function of highlighting the sense of continuity and fulfillment in the Christian Bible.

**Alpha and Omega** (Gk. *A* and *Ω*). The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, used as a name for God: "I am

Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22:13; cf. 1:8; Isa. 44:1; 48:12). They are frequent in Christian art from the 3rd century, often combined with the monogram \*Chi-Rho and the \*Tau cross (see *Taw*). A Latin version of the name appears in the 14th-century Christmas carol "In dulci jubilo": *Matris in gremio / Alpha es et O*, "on a mother's lap, you are Alpha and O." In Jewish tradition the three letters of the Hebrew word *'emet*, "Truth," one of the names of God, are the first (*aleph*), middle (*mem*), and last (*taw*) in the alphabet, and have been interpreted in a similar way.

**Alphabet.** The alphabetical script from which the Hebrew, Greek, and Roman writing systems derive was invented in the mid-2nd millennium B.C.E. and is first documented in inscriptions from the \*Sinai peninsula. It was almost certainly a development from a small selection of Egyptian \*hieroglyphics, and is a far simpler and more efficient writing system than both it and the equally widespread \*cuneiform system invented in Mesopotamia. An alphabetical text from \*Ugarit of the 14th century B.C.E. seems to prove that the order of the letters was fixed from the beginning so that the 22 Hebrew letters and 24 Greek letters could also function as numerals (*aleph/alpha* = 1; *beth/beta* = 2; *yodh/iota* = 10; etc.). The total numerical value of words and names could then be calculated (see \*Gematria) and alphabetical \*acrostics designed. The tradition that God created the world by using letters of the alphabet arose partly from a belief in its divine origin and partly from its significance as a symbol of cosmic order.

**Ambrose** (c. 339–397). Bishop of Milan and, with \*Jerome, \*Augustine, and \*Gregory the Great, one of the four Doctors of the Latin Church. He had a good knowledge of Greek language and literature, typical of the aristocratic elite of his day, and his biblical interpretation