

BIBLICABULARY

(A GLOSSARY OF THE GOOD BOOK)

Sure, a lot of Christians act as if a person can just crack the Bible open and suddenly discover “God’s plan” for his or her life. But let’s be honest, right here at the start: the Bible is not that easy. It’s a difficult book. It’s stacked with unfamiliar terms, exotic concepts, and complex systems of thought that germinate in the Old Testament and ooze into the New Testament and—hey, what’s the difference between the two testaments anyway? And while we’re at it, how can you distinguish an epistle from an apostle? The exile from the exodus? A Pharisee from a Sadducee?

How, indeed. Like any collection of sacred documents written in ancient languages over the span of several centuries, the Good Book has a lingo all its own.

For any longtime reader of the Bible—or, perhaps, any longtime

churchgoer—Bibletalk is second nature. Every other Sunday sermon gives a shoutout to concepts like sin and salvation. Hymns and prayers call attention to faith, grace, and the cross. Then there are all those sweaty TV types weeping and yelling about the Holy Spirit and asking for your money.

The indoctrinated don't bat an eye at this stuff, but the rest of us? Might as well be listening to ancient Hebrew. To minimize the mystification, the *Pocket Guide* kicks off here with the *Biblicabulary*, a handy glossary for the scriptural noob. Here are the words you need to know in order to fully enjoy the coming merriment. Strap on your phylacteries, kids, and let's get started.¹

ALTAR

Any commemorative structure—could be as rustic as a pile of rocks or as official as a raised platform made of wood and bronze—where **sacrifices** or prayers are offered to a deity. **Old Testament** guys like Noah and Abraham erect altars as memorials for major events or encounters with God. Later, the altar becomes a central part of Jewish worship as the place where priests fire up handpicked animals as sacrificial offerings to God. In the **Tabernacle**, folks see the altar as no less than the connecting point between God and mankind and a symbol of God's presence.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: Your basic modern-day religious altar—the table, inside a church, from which communion is served. It's usually located below the pulpit. Plop a bloody sheep down on one of these, and, best-case scenario, you'll be asked to leave. Worst case? You'll be accused of Satanism.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it" (Gen. 8:20).

AMEN

A Hebrew exclamation meaning something along the lines of “I agree” or “so be it.” In the Bible, it usually indicates one’s acceptance of a **covenant** or is tacked on to the end of a psalm. In modern usage, it’s what people say to let God (and any human listeners) know they’re finished praying.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE OR THREE: *Dear God, if you let me pass this test, I promise I will never make fun of televangelists again. Not even the ones on TBN. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “‘Cursed is the man who sleeps with his mother-in-law.’ Then all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’” (Deut. 27:23).²

ANGEL

A heavenly being in service to God and occasionally interacting with mankind. Angels rescue Lot from Sodom, send out Jesus’ birth announcements, bust Peter out of jail, and spend a lot of time worshipping God in heaven.³

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH:

David Boreanaz, Michael Landon, Della Reese, that old guy wearing long underwear in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, or major league ballplayers from Anaheim. Seeing how most angels in the Bible scare the bejudas out of people, they probably aren’t the rosy-cheeked, harp-tickling, feather-winged babies we make them out to be.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp” (2 Kings 19:35).

In late 2008, a Google search for “Bible” generated 169,000,000 results. “Holy Bible” got 5,010,000 results. “*Pocket Guide to the Bible*” earned an astonishing 67,100 results.

2. This is a curse everyone can get behind.

3. Genesis 19:15–17; Luke 1:26–37; Acts 12:6–11; Revelation 5:11–12

APOSTLE

One of the twelve men chosen by Jesus to follow him around, who learn from him as he teaches about the kingdom of God. After Jesus' death, the apostles become the leaders of the early Church. Especially once Paul, who receives a dazzling visit from Jesus on the road to Damascus, starts advertising himself as an apostle.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: Aeropostale, a mall-based retailer of casual apparel for teenagers. One sells hoodies. The other wears robes and sandals. It's not hard.

Don't confuse it with **Epistle**, either.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: "He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14).

ARK OF THE COVENANT

A sacred, gold-covered box made of acacia wood. It houses the stone tablets on which God chiseled the Ten Commandments, plus a jar of manna and Aaron's miraculous walking stick. It's kept in the Holy of Holies in the **Tabernacle** and later gets moved to Solomon's **Temple**. Why? Because it's a reminder to the Israelites of God's presence.

ALSO KNOWN AS: Ark of the Testimony, Ark of the Agreement, Ark of the Lord

NOT ALSO KNOWN AS: The Ark of Noah, which holds a bunch of animals rather than stone tablets and is made of gopher wood instead of acacia wood. Also, it's a boat.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: Archeologically inclined Nazis will want to avoid opening the Ark of the Covenant, as it will melt their faces off.⁴

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they rejoiced at the sight” (1 Sam. 6:13).

ATONEMENT

The process of removing or forgiving **sins**, usually through the shedding of **blood** from an animal sacrificed in substitution for humans. After the sacrificial death of **Christ**, the word refers to the restored relationship between God and man.

It works this way: God is holy. People sin. The holiness/sinfulness divide is a significant one. But then Jesus dies as a big-league atoning **sacrifice** in place of humanity, and God offers forgiveness to those who have **faith** in him. The stuff sin screws up? It gets unscrewed. This is pretty much the central idea of Christianity.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “He shall burn all the fat on the altar as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the man’s sin, and he will be forgiven” (Lev. 4:26).

BLOOD

You know what blood is, so quit acting all uninformed. Biblically speaking, blood becomes one of the most important symbolic concepts of the Jewish and Christian faiths. Blood smeared on the doorframe protects the Israelites during the Passover. Priests sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial animal on the **altar**, and the people of God (in the **Old Testament**, at least) are prohibited from eating blood. The blood of an animal—because it represents life—is the necessary ingredient in the process of **atonement**. Which leads to the **New Testament**, in which people gain atonement for their **sins** through the innocent blood shed by **Christ** on the **cross**.⁵

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE OR TWO: At the Last Supper, Jesus tells the **disciples** that the wine represents his blood. But good Southern Baptists know that, though he says “wine,” he really means “grape juice.”

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exod. 12:13).

BRIDE/BRIDEGROOM

A metaphor throughout the Bible in which the relationship between God and his people is compared to the bond between a husband and wife, a bridegroom and his bride. In the **Old Testament**, Hosea lives out the illustration with the prostitute Gomer, his unfaithful skeeze-bride and an all-too-willing object lesson. But the idea doesn't really come of age until Paul spins it in the **New Testament**.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: All the explicit sexual imagery in Song of Solomon. For years, prim and proper believers figured the spicy book had to be some sort of deeply symbolic bride/bridegroom code. But now, most scholars just think it's erotic poetry.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

CANAAN

See **Promised Land**.

CHRIST

The official title for Jesus, and not, as some believe, Jesus' last

name. *Christ* is the **New Testament** (Greek) equivalent of the **Old Testament** (Hebrew) term *Messiah*. It specifically refers to Jesus' role in restoring the broken relationship between God and man.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: Jesus. *Jesus* is the name Mary and Joseph give the child at his **circumcision**, because when an angel appears to you with a pre-selected baby name, you follow that lead. *Jesus* is the name. *Christ* is his title. They're not interchangeable.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: ““But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ”” (Mark 8:29).

CIRCUMCISION

Let's say you're a boy, born to a nice Jewish family around three thousand years ago. You're stumbling around in the hot, dusty desert. Your mom and dad are cranky because the only thing to eat is manna, and they've been lost for forty years. You're just getting used to this outside-the-womb thing—the pooping, sleeping, and whatnot—until you hit the eighth day of your life, and some old bearded dude with a craggy flint knife starts poking around your tallywacker. And—hey! *Ow! There is SO not supposed to be blood down there!* But despite

the unbearable drama, you're not too upset about the sudden violent loss of your foreskin. For one thing, it's only a useless flap of flesh, right? And for another thing, this physical disfigurement sets you apart from your archrivals, the Assyrians and Amalekites and Philistines. When one of them gets an eyeful of your scarred-up

At least ten different abbeys, churches, and/or cities throughout history have laid claim to possessing the Holy Prepuce. That's right: the divine foreskin of Jesus.

penis, they'll see evidence of God's **covenant** with you and your people! Or something like that.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: Back in biblical times, only those males who had experienced circumcision could participate in public worship, which begs the question: who enforced this rule, and how?

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: "You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you" (Gen. 17:11).

COVENANT

Biblically, the agreement between God and humanity to restore their sin-tainted relationship. God promises to bless and protect **Israel** as long as they follow a detailed assortment of holiness

Another blessed foreskin factoid: In the fourteenth century, Saint Catherine of Siena had a famous vision in which Jesus placed his amputated foreskin on her finger as a wedding ring.

codes and regulations. And it's a long, serious list. Good thing the sacrificial death of Jesus in the **New Testament** sets aside the old, rules-based agreement, promising **salvation** by **faith** in **Christ**.

By the way, ancient covenants usually get formalized by an elaborately gross ritual. The

covenanters slice an animal lengthwise and set the two slices opposite each other, separated by a narrow gap.⁶ To enact the covenant, the two parties walk between the bloody, steaming slabs of meat. Symbolically, this reminds them that, should they break the covenant, they'll be cut in half. Lengthwise.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: A coven, which is a gathering of witches. Witches aren't usually too concerned with God's rules

and regulations, although the *Pocket Guide* knows a Goth or two who would really get into the walking-between-two-slices-of-an-animal ritual.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob” (Exod. 2:24).

CROSS, THE

An ancient construction of perpendicular wooden beams for the purpose of criminal torture and execution, which becomes meaningful to believers after Jesus dies on one. Having been flogged to a bloody pulp prior to the crucifixion, victims have their forearms nailed to the horizontal beam. Their feet are then nailed to the vertical beam, allowing enough support to keep the body from collapsing, which ensures several days of suffering before death arrives via suffocation. Crucifixion: not pretty.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: Kanye’s diamond-encrusted platinum cross necklace, while undoubtedly blingy, is about as classy as a rhinestone-studded electric chair swinging from a gold chain.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

DEMON

An evil spirit and minion of Satan. Demons occasionally take up residence in people and influence them in, um, generally negative ways. For instance, backward downstairs spiderwalking. (Though this example, perhaps, owes more to 1970s horror films than the biblical narrative.) Anyway, while Jewish religious leaders keep trying to

exorcise demons with largely ineffective herbal remedies, Jesus just tells the vile creatures to come out. And they obey. In fact, later in the **New Testament**, the **disciples** only have to mention Jesus' name, and demons scamper away, whimpering and farting brimstone with each fiery step.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE OR TWO: Your mom's neck tattoo of that fire-breathing demon is wicked awesome. Though, as a Christian, of course, I disapprove.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: "Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment" (Matt. 17:18).

DEVIL

See **Satan**. At least, look up the entry for "Satan" in chapter 3. You probably don't want to, you, know, actually *see* him.

DISCIPLE

A follower of Jesus **Christ**. Also see **Apostle**.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

EPISTLE

One of the letters in the **New Testament**. The Pauline Epistles are the ones ascribed to the **apostle** Paul and include Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. The rest of the letters are called General Epistles and have various authors. With a few exceptions, epistles are meant to be read aloud—for instance, to the members of the church at Philippi.⁷

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: Apostle. Which is a person. Apostles can write epistles, but not the other way around.

7. The exceptions are Paul's letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Because these are written to individuals, they probably aren't meant to be shared with a bunch of people. Except, you know, everyone who's ever read the Bible.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators” (1 Cor. 5:9, KJV).⁸

ETERNAL LIFE

The unending, joyful existence promised to followers of Jesus, based on the belief that physical death isn’t the end of the concert. Thanks to the **salvation** offered through Jesus’ death and resurrection, there’s still an encore—an everlasting future in heaven. Which, hopefully, will be fully stocked with amusing diversions. Because eternity? Is a loooooong time.

PLEASE USE IT IN A

SENTENCE: While eternal life in the Great Beyond is something to look forward to, perhaps bringing a watch along isn’t the best idea.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“The Bible is a book that has been read more and examined less than any book that ever existed.”

—Thomas Paine
(1737–1809)

EXILE

The seventy-year period around the sixth century BC when the Jewish people are forced to live in Babylon after King Nebuchadnezzar lays siege to Jerusalem, steals its **Temple** treasures, and deports its residents. They don’t return until the God-friendly king Cyrus overthrows Babylon and sends the **Jews** back to Jerusalem to rebuild a place of worship. Also known as the *Babylonian captivity*, the exile and return serve as the backdrop for

8. KJV = King James Version of the Bible. This is the older translation of the Bible that contains all the old-fashioned language, including not-so-modern words like *epistle* and, yes, *fornicators*. See chapters 6 and 7 for more about the King James.

the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: The **Exodus**

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “Jehozadak was deported when the Lord sent Judah and Jerusalem into exile by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar” (1 Chron. 6:15).

EXODUS

God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, which they fall into after their forefather Jacob immigrates there during a famine. Having promised them the fertile land of **Canaan**, God sends a former Egyptian and mush-mouthed shepherd named Moses to deliver them. A few plagues later, they’re off and running. Forty *years* later, they finally enter the **Promised Land**. It’s a long story.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: The Babylonian **Exile**

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Read all about the exodus in the book of, well, Exodus. And also Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

FAITH

From a human standpoint, a belief in and reliance on God. It’s the intellectual and/or emotional acceptance that God exists, apart from any measurable scientific evidence. According to the Bible, it is only through faith in **Christ**, and his **atonement** for the **sins** of humanity on the **cross**, that believers are made righteous. And, according to James 2:14, the best evidence of true faith is a life punctuated by good works. So get crackin’.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: George Michael’s chart-topping 1987 debut album and hit single of the same name. Because, sure, he talks about how important it is to have “faith-uhfaith-uhfaithUH,” but then there’s also that part about how nice it would

be to “touch your body.” And we’re guessing that’s probably *not* a **bride**-of-Christ metaphor.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

FLESH

The natural naughtiness of humanity, and one of Paul’s favorite metaphors. Most references to the flesh are negative, implying the standard disconnect between human nature and godly influence. Often mentioned in contrast with the spirit.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: When Angelina Jolie showed up with her newly adopted AIDS orphan, my spirit empathized with her concern for the hurting children of the world, but my flesh kept staring at her bazongas.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “For it is we who ... glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).

FORNICATION

A good old King James word referring to any sort of voluntary sexual activity outside the confines of marriage. This includes premarital nooky, adultery, and any other illicit sexual behaviors which may or may not have come to national attention during the Clinton administration.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: Just because we did it in the back seat of her Prius doesn’t mean it was fornication, does it?

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thess. 4:3, KJV).

GOSPEL

A modernized old Anglo-Saxon word (*god-spell*), which means “good tidings.” In reference to the Bible, it means “good news.” So, what’s the good news? According to Paul, it’s the idea that God has come up with a plan for **salvation**, freeing us from the need to submit to all the rules and sacrificial regulations of the old-school **Law**. The plan? Jesus **Christ**. Which is why the first four books of the **New Testament**, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—all focusing on the life and teachings of Christ—are collectively known as the Gospels. Also because “the Good Newses” doesn’t really roll off the tongue.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: Gospel music, the genre of sacred folk music associated with African American Protestant churches. Much of gospel music dates back to the a cappella call-and-response days of slavery. And though it definitely has roots in the “good news” about Jesus, you’ll be disappointed if you head into the book of Matthew looking for Mahalia Jackson to show up with a clapping, swaying, stomping choir.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere” (Luke 9:6).

GRACE

The undeserved **salvation** from original **sin**, granted to humanity by God through **Christ**’s sacrificial death and resurrection. Grace is winning the lottery with a ticket you found on the street—it supplies forgiveness, kindness, and mercy to sinners but can’t be earned. It’s free. Though the word itself is only used a few times in the Bible, the idea of grace pops up everywhere—from God’s initial, unmerited selection of Abraham’s descendants to be his

“chosen people” to God’s use of the **apostle** Paul, a notorious persecutor of Christians, as the Church’s first theologian and missionary.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: Grace Jones, the former disco singer, friend of Andy Warhol, *Conan the Destroyer* actress, Bond girl,⁹ and longtime freakshow performance artist with a propensity for dressing up in gorilla suits.

Wait! *Paul ... Grace ... Grace Jones ... Gorilla Suit*. Look at that: only four degrees of separation between the apostle Paul and monkey costumes. Awesome.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

HIGH PRIEST

In the **Old Testament**, the fellow with the equally important and scary job of being the **mediator** between God and the people of **Israel**. A lifetime hereditary office—the biblical line of high priests all descend from Aaron—it’s something like being Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. If the Chief Justice were required to refrain from contact with dead bodies and frequently had to slaughter livestock. Like regular priests, the high priest performs **sacrifices** but also has the responsibility of performing the rituals on the annual Day of **Atonement**, at which point he alone makes amends for the **sins** of the entire nation.

After the Babylonian **exile**, the high priest becomes more of a prestigious political position. The author of Hebrews ties the concept up in a neat little package by referring to Jesus as the ultimate high priest and the mediator of the new **covenant** between God and humanity.¹⁰

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE OR TWO: According

9. She starred as May Day in 1985’s *A View to a Kill*, with Roger Moore.

10. Hebrews 5:5–10

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to Leviticus 21:16–23, the high priest cannot be blind, lame, disfigured, crippled, or hunchbacked and may not have festering sores or damaged testicles. Something to keep in mind if you're considering application.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes” (Lev. 21:10).

HOLY SPIRIT

The third person of the **Trinity**, along with God the Father and Jesus the Son. It is the Holy Spirit who descends on Jesus at his baptism and leads him into the wilderness temptation. Jesus promises his **disciples** they will be comforted by the presence of the Holy Spirit after he has left them, and the Holy Spirit descends on believers en masse on the day of Pentecost. In his **epistles**, Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit guides and empowers Christians, giving them unique abilities to serve the Church, preach the good news, and interpret the Scriptures.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: The Holy Spirit used to be referred to as the “Holy Ghost,” until the cultural meaning of “ghost” changed and the term got too scary.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).

ISRAEL

See **Jews**.

JEWS

The descendants of Jacob, the chosen people of God, and the

primary characters of the **Old Testament** and a good chunk of the **New Testament**. In the Bible, the Jewish people are known for their Hebrew language, their adherence to the Torah (the **Law**), their distinctive ritual of **circumcision**, and their on-again, off-again habit of worshiping false gods—even though the true God keeps blessing them, delivering them, and otherwise protecting them from their enemies on a weekly basis.

ALSO KNOWN AS: The Israelites, **Israel**, the children of Israel, and a “stiff-necked people” (Exod. 32:9).

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too” (Rom. 3:29).

LAW, THE

In general terms, the first five books of the Bible, or the

Pentateuch. In more specific terms, the detailed code of behavior given by God to the people of **Israel** while they camped out around Mount Sinai after leaving Egypt.¹¹ The Law comes in two major categories. The first is prescriptive, or *apodictic*: “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not,” as in the Ten Commandments. The second is *casuistic*: “when a man [does this], he shall [be declared unclean, be bludgeoned with rocks outside the city gates, etc.]”

Contemporary believers generally divide the Law further among moral, civil, and ritual/ceremonial rules. Which means the stuff about not killing your neighbor still holds water today, but no one’s

“Whatever merit there is in anything that I have written is simply due to the fact that when I was a child my mother daily read me a part of the Bible and daily made me learn a part of it by heart.”

—John Ruskin
(1819–1900)

11. There are actually two main collections of Law. The first is given at Sinai (Exodus 19 through Numbers 10:10). The second comes via Moses’ address to the people, recorded in Deuteronomy, toward the end of the whole wilderness escape.

being executed for, say, picking up sticks on the **Sabbath**.¹²

ALSO KNOWN AS: The Torah, Mosaic Law, the Book of the Law, Levitical Law, the Pentateuch

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel” (Deut. 31:9).

LORD’S PRAYER, THE

Our modern term for the prayer Jesus taught the **apostles**. The best-known version of this model prayer (“Our Father which art in heaven ...”) is found in Matthew 6:9–13. A simpler, shorter version appears in Luke 11:2–4.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: My seventh-grade basketball coach used to lead us in the Lord’s Prayer before games, after which he would start screaming and cussing.

MEDIATOR

A go-between. In the **Old Testament**, upon delivering the Ten Commandments and other aspects of the **Law**, Moses acts as a mediator between God (who is holy) and the people of **Israel** (who are very much not). Later, the **high priest** performs the same function by offering **sacrifices** and other sacred rituals. The **New Testament** reveals Jesus to be the final mediator between God and mankind.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: My lawyer recommended a mediator in that nasty workers’ comp dispute, but since Moses wasn’t available, we just dropped it.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

MESSIAH

See **Christ**.

NEW TESTAMENT

One of two major sections of the Bible, originally written in Greek over a period of about one hundred years. The NT begins with the life of **Christ** in the four Gospels and continues through the spread of the early Church in the book of Acts. Paul's **epistles** and a few other letters not written by Paul fill out the rest. It wraps up with the fantastic end-of-the-world imagery of the book of Revelation.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: The **Old Testament**, which is much longer, older, and even more prone to prophetic doomsaying.

OFFERING

See **Sacrifice**.

OLD TESTAMENT

The other major section of the Bible, in addition to the **New Testament**. The books of the Old Testament are the original Hebrew Scriptures, probably written over a thousand-year span. The OT kicks off with the story of creation in Genesis, then follows the cyclical rise and fall of the nation of **Israel**—including the age of the patriarchs, the sojourn in Egypt and the **exodus**, the conquest of the **Promised Land**, the period of the judges, the united kingdom, the divided kingdom, the **exile** to Babylon, and finally, the return to Jerusalem. Plus, you've got Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and a bunch of books by major and minor **prophets**. The last entry in the OT is Malachi.

ALSO KNOWN AS: The *Tanakh*, which is Judaism's term for what Christians call the Old Testament. It's an acronym of the Hebrew names for its three sections: *Torah* (the Pentateuch), *Nevi'im* (the Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (the Writings).

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: The New Testament

PARABLE

A story used by Jesus to illustrate a spiritual point, usually involving everyday objects or situations familiar to his listeners.

The Bible can be read aloud in about seventy hours, if you have the time.

Most of his parables reveal information about the kingdom of God. Famous ones include the parable of the good Samaritan, the parable of the prodigal son, the parable of the sheep and the

goats, and the parable of the disgraced televangelist.

That last one's made up.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: Parable Christian Stores, an association of more than two hundred independently owned retail booksellers that will likely refuse to stock this book if the *Pocket Guide* speaks ill of them. God bless the wide selection, personal service, and exceptional value of Parable retailers. And as long as we're on the subject, God bless Wal-Mart, too.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: "Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable" (Matt. 13:34).

PENTATEUCH

See **The Law**.

PHARISEES

The super-devout members of a strict Jewish sect during the two centuries before and after the birth of **Christ**. A mix of political party, philosophical movement, and religious faction, the Pharisees emerge as the primary opponents of Jesus during his ministry. Jesus gets along well with sinners of all stripes, including drunkards and prostitutes, but the outwardly pious Pharisees are gnats in his ear. He labels them a “brood of vipers.”¹³ They get their phylacteries in a wad because his **disciples** eat with unwashed hands¹⁴ and engage in other questionable activities. But it all works out in the end, as the early Church ends up with a bunch of ex-Pharisees in its pews. Including a guy named Paul.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: Sadducees, another religious/political party within first-century Judaism. The Sadducees are the party of power, boasting **high priests** and other wealthy aristocrats among their members. While they have a lot of theological differences from the Pharisees—primarily involving how to interpret the Torah—the two groups spend most of the Gospels belting out a nice little two-part harmony about not liking Jesus.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean” (Matt. 23:27).

PROMISED LAND

The territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea (part of ancient Palestine) that God promises the Israelites—his chosen people—upon delivering them from Egyptian slavery. It’s

13. Matthew 23:33, at which point Jesus tells them they’ve likely booked a first-class train ride to hell. Smoking section.

14. Mark 7:2. By the way, phylacteries are the small leather cases containing snippets of the Hebrew Scripture, strapped around the foreheads and upper arms of devout Jewish men during prayer. In Matthew 23:5, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of wearing really big phylacteries to draw attention to their piety. Sort of like a codpiece for the hyperspiritual.

where everyone's headed during the **exodus**. Thanks to a few wrong turns, spiritually speaking, it takes four decades to get there. Upon arrival, they deal with the local population of squatters (or, depending on your perspective, residents) by either killing them, driving them out, or enslaving them. Which is rather inconvenient for the people of **Canaan**. But for **Israel**? Sweet deal.¹⁵

ALSO KNOWN AS: Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people Israel and the land you have given us as you promised on oath to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut. 26:15).

PROPHET

A human messenger speaking on behalf of God, for the purpose of (1) calling God's people to repentance for doing something wrong, or (2) predicting future calamity or coming judgment because of all the wrongdoing. Such prophecies make up a sizable chunk of the **Old Testament**, from Isaiah to Malachi. Other biblical big-timers like Samuel and Elijah are identified as prophets.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: *False* prophets, seemingly religious heavyweights who claim to receive visions and messages and other sorts of instructions from God, but who are pretty much full of crap. On account of how the stuff God's apparently telling these guys to do is more or less evil, and that's not how God rolls. Example A: Jim Jones. Example B: David Koresh.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true” (Jer. 28:9).

RABBI

An honorific title usually given to Jewish teachers of the **Law**, but not always restricted to the ordained or formally trained. The **disciples** and others keep addressing Jesus as “rabbi.” Jesus, however, doesn’t always seem too comfortable with the label. Especially when he pops off on the **Pharisees**, who love to be called “rabbi” out in public.¹⁶ Because in first-century Jewish culture, being a rabbi is like being a rock star.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: Rabbits

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed him” (Matt. 26:49).

SABBATH

The seventh day of the Jewish week, established by God when he takes a day of rest after the six days of creation. In the Bible, the Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday evening and lasts until the same time Saturday.

God is serious about this day of rest and goes to great lengths to make sure his people, the Israelites, observe it. There’s the fourth of the Ten Commandments, of course, about remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy. “Keeping it holy” involves a host of strict regulations: No working. No loading stuff onto animals. No preparing or buying food. No fire-building.

And the penalty for breaking the Sabbath? Death. Which is why the **Pharisees** are always getting so distressed about the

In 2005, a British publisher produced *The 100-Minute Bible*, which condenses the Good Book into fifty short summaries of 400 words each. That allows you exactly two minutes per summary and zero time for bathroom breaks, so plan ahead.

16. Matthew 23:6–8

Saturday-afternoon healing parties Jesus keeps throwing.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: It's too bad all those Bible people got executed for working on the Sabbath, because I really need to vacuum this weekend.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: "For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it must be put to death" (Exod. 35:2).

SACRIFICE

The killing of animals (and, occasionally, plants) as an act of worship. Most ancient religions require sacrifices to the gods, and ancient **Israel** is no different. Just two chapters after God creates living plants and animals, Cain and Abel give a few right back to him as a gift. Only more dead than before.¹⁷

Upon leaving Egypt, sacrifices become the focus of Jewish religious life. In fact, God tells Moses the fire on the **altar** is never to go out. Ever. So priests end up performing these elaborate sacrificial rituals every day on behalf of individuals, tribes, and, at times, the entire Israelite community. There are four main types of sacrificial offerings, each differing in how the animal gets toasted/sliced/eaten/bled out: *burnt offerings* (no eating), *peace offerings* (organs burned, good parts eaten by worshipers), *sin offerings* (flesh eaten by priests or burned outside the city), and *guilt offerings* (fat burned, meat eaten by priests). It's bloody and very complicated.

Very necessary, too. God is pleased by Israel's sacrifices. For one thing, it's a way to give back to him in gratitude. It's also key to the process of **blood atonement**. The life of a creature is in its blood, and according to the Levitical code, the shedding of that blood (as a substitute) atones for the **sins** of the worshiper.¹⁸ We're never really told how or why this removes sin and restores a relationship with

God. But it does—especially when God serves up a head-snapping plot twist in the **New Testament**. With the death of Jesus on the **cross**, God offers up the biggest blood sacrifice of all time, putting the whole system out of business for good.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement. Purify the altar by making atonement for it, and anoint it to consecrate it” (Exod. 29:36).

SALVATION

Deliverance from **sin** and its future punishment. The **New Testament** speaks of salvation from at least three perspectives. The first refers to salvation as a past event—a spiritual rescue from sin and death, occurring at the moment of belief in Jesus as the **Christ**.¹⁹ The second implies a process believers experience in the present as they are changed by a restored relationship with God.²⁰ The third is future salvation from God’s wrath (a “Get Out of Hell Free” card) and the ability to participate in the coming eternal kingdom of God (a ticket to heaven).²¹

However you look at it, the big story of the New Testament is that Jesus—the Jewish **Messiah**—offers salvation to *everybody*. **Jews** and non-Jews. Men and women. Moral and immoral. Anyone who believes.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH: The Salvation Army. Stuffing a dollar in the Christmas kettle will only save you from the bell-ringing lady’s wrath. Not God’s.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:9).

19. Romans 10:9. This is the kind of salvation generally referred to by those who would say they’ve been “born again,” a phrase taken from John 3:7. Same goes for the common phrase “accept[ing] Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior,” though it isn’t found anywhere in the Bible.

20. 1 Corinthians 1:18

21. Romans 5:9–10

SIN

Generally speaking, the inability of human beings—whether through outright refusal or a natural condition—to live according to God’s desires. On an individual basis, sin is any thought, action, or word that goes against God and his **Law**. Classical Christian theology holds that sin is universal and pervasive. *Universal*: everyone does it (except Jesus). *Pervasive*: every human activity has the potential to be tainted by sin, from sex to politics to dishwashing—especially if all three are done at the same time. We humans aren’t good at much, but we’ve got sin covered.

According to the Bible, the result of all this sinful lust and evil and selfishness and power-tripping is alienation from God. Which is why God comes up with the whole sacrificial system—then fulfills it through Jesus and his offer of **salvation**—to fix that broken relationship.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE: If “conveying a false impression of the truth” is a good definition of *lying*, and lying is a sin, then how do all those preachers justify wearing toupees?

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

TABERNACLE/TEMPLE

The two structures dedicated to the corporate worship of God by the people of **Israel**, at different stages in their development as a nation. The Tabernacle is a portable tent lugged around the wilderness by the exodus **Jews**. The Temple is a much less portable building constructed in Jerusalem generations later by Solomon. Each contains a courtyard with plenty of **altar** space for all the **sacrifices** and an intriguing inner sanctum known as the Holy of Holies, where the **Ark of the Covenant** resides and

where God himself is said to “dwell” (inasmuch as a deity operating outside of time and space can “dwell” anywhere).

When Nebuchadnezzar crashes Jerusalem’s gates right before the **exile**, he loots all the sacred stuff from the Temple and razes it to the ground. The Temple eventually gets rebuilt—only to be destroyed again in the Roman-Jewish war of AD 70. And so the next rebuilding of the Temple, according to apocalyptic interpretations of the book of Daniel, will occur midway through the Great Tribulation. The Antichrist sets up his headquarters there. So heads up, everyone. Keep an eye out for “666” banners.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED

WITH: Temple University, the famed Philadelphia institution

of higher learning. It definitely has a spacious courtyard, but any animal sacrifices occurring there will absolutely not be tolerated.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: “The craftsmen of Solomon and Hiram and the men of Gebal cut and prepared the timber and stone for the building of the temple” (1 Kings 5:18).

In Matthew, Jesus’ “cleansing of the temple” occurs right after the Triumphal Entry at the end of his ministry (Matt. 21:12–17). In John, he cleanses the Temple after the wedding in Cana, at the beginning of his ministry (John 2:13–22). Biblical literalists insist this indicates he cleansed the Temple twice.

TRINITY

The threefold entity comprised of God the Father, Jesus **Christ** the Son, and the **Holy Spirit**. This doctrine seeks to explain the biblical passages that suggest the idea. Deuteronomy insists that there is only one God.²² Yet each of the three divine persons is also

22. Deuteronomy 6:4—“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

said, at some point in the Bible, to be God.²³ And since they seem to interact with each other—Jesus prays to God, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism, the Spirit intercedes to God on behalf of believers—there must be some actual distinction between them, as opposed to a surfacey difference in the way we humans perceive them. Got it? Riiiiight.

PLEASE USE IT IN A SENTENCE OR TWO: *You* use it in a sentence. The *Pocket Guide*'s still trying to connect the dots here.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Very little in terms of specific references to it. The word “trinity” isn’t mentioned in the Bible, though the doctrine is implicitly understood. It starts to take shape within Church creeds as early as the second century.

23. Several New Testament verses indicate this. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus himself commands his disciples to baptize converts in “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

