UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE AS A SCRIPTURE IN HISTORY, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

JAMES W. WATTS

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Preface

Biblical studies is an ancient and flourishing field. Scholars put great effort into explaining the language, meaning, and history of biblical books down to their tiniest detail. They have done so for more than 2000 years and continue to do so today. The published literature on the Bible is vast, and keeps growing.

Yet little of this research focuses on how the Bible functions as a scripture. Biblical scholarship remains focused on *interpretation*, that is, on how people have understood the meaning of the Bible's words and utilized them in various ways. Much less research focuses on how people express those words in religious and secular contexts, and even less on how they make use of the physical books of Jewish and Christian scriptures: Torah scrolls, tanaks, gospels, and bibles.[1]

I think biblical scholars should give more attention to the Bible's function as Jewish and Christian scripture, because that is what attracts people's attention in the first place. Were it not for the Bible's contemporary prestige and influence, the field of biblical studies would be a minor part of the study of ancient Middle Eastern literature rather than a subject of popular and scholarly interest around the world.

Comparing the Bible's scriptural function with the scriptures of other religions reveals similar strategies for using sacred texts across cultures, even when the literary contents and theological meaning of the books differ dramatically. This book therefore positions biblical studies within research on religions generally, rather than just within the study of Judaism and Christianity.[2] It illustrates the insights that come from studying the Bible as a scripture in comparison with other religious scriptures, such as the Qur'an, the Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, the Buddhist sutras, and the Sikhs' Guru Granth Sahib.

This book takes a comparative approach to show that the Bible functions culturally and socially in many ways like scriptures in other religious traditions. I do not discount the importance of theological interpretation of the Bible for Jewish and Christian audiences.[3] I simply think that a comparative analysis allows us to understand its influence and function in ways that theological interpretation does not.

This book also demonstrates how research on the Bible's scriptural function can integrate studies of its origins with its cultural history. The

results illuminate its contemporary interpretation and ritual function in the academy, in synagogues, in churches, and in the wider culture, as well as its origins in ancient Israel and early Christianity.

This book's innovative approach to teaching about the Bible therefore presents an unusual sequence of topics for an introduction to biblical studies. It introduces readers to the contents of the Bible and also to its material forms and uses. It summarizes the history of liturgical recitations and manipulations of the Bible, as well as the history of its interpretation.

This book is organized around those parts of the Bible that have played the most central roles in the rituals, liturgies, art, and interpretations of Jewish and Christian congregations, namely, the Torah, the Gospels, and the modern pandect Bible. The fact that the nouns, "Torah" and "Gospel," and the adjective, "biblical," still get used not only for books, but also to describe a faithful way of life, points to the centrality of these scriptures in Jewish and Christian religious experience.

My discussion of the iconic, expressive, and semantic dimensions of the Torah and the Gospels starts with their use since becoming scripture before addressing questions about their origins in ancient Israel and in ancient Christianity. This sequence grounds discussion of the Bible's different dimensions in better attested periods of its history. It has the pedagogical advantage of showing readers how congregations have socialized people to focus on the original meaning of the Bible's text, before turning to discussions of those origins.

The arrangement – Torah, Gospels, Bible – includes other biblical literature as well, so this book introduces the entirety of the Jewish and Christian canons. Like the religious traditions but unlike most other surveys of biblical literature, this book describes other biblical literature within the ritual and interpretive contexts of the Torah and the Gospels. So I also discuss the historical (Sections 2.2 and 3.3), prophetic (Sections 5.4 and 6.4.2), wisdom (Sections 6.1, and 6.4.4), and poetic literature (Sections 5.3 and 6.4.3) of the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha. I survey apocalyptic literature in the context of earlier and later religious projections of the future (Section 6.3), and I also include a brief introduction to Rabbinic Judaism (Section 6.5.2).

The Torah Part is therefore the longest in the book because it includes the entire Hebrew Bible and surveys the history of ancient Israel. Many of these topics are necessary background for the discussion of early Christianity in the next Part as well. Part 2 on the Gospels begins by summarizing the story of Jesus and introduces Paul's letters (Section 7.2) before turning to the rhetoric and ritualization of the Gospels themselves. It includes a brief history of Christian doctrines of the atonement (Section 11.1), and introduces

the non-canonical gospels about Jesus (Section 11.2). This book lists the different contents of various biblical canons near the beginning (Section 1.3) and closes with a discussion of canonization and scripturalization.

The arrangement – Torah, Gospels, Bible – also has the pedagogical advantage of saving discussion of many of the Bible's "hot-button" issues to the end. Only after readers have been exposed to the scope of the Bible's contents and its cultural history do they reach modern debates over creation and evolution around Genesis 1–2, race and gender around Genesis 3 and 9, and the influence of biblical law (Chapter 14).

Further discussion of this distinctive approach to teaching biblical studies can be found in my other textbook, *Understanding the Pentateuch as a Scripture*.[4] Both books introduce innovative ways of thinking about biblical literature as well as surveying established conclusions in the field. That combination might seem strange for introductory textbooks. In the field of biblical studies, however, an "introduction" has long served to provide a critical evaluation of the state of the field. It shows how biblical studies should go forward as well as summarizing where the field has been. This book follows in that tradition by demonstrating how the study of the Bible can be re-envisioned from a religious studies perspective on comparative scriptures. It demonstrates that research on the Bible's scriptural function can integrate investigations of its origins with its cultural history and ritual use up to the present day.

I hope this book will be read with interest by people in many different settings. It has, however, been organized with classroom instruction in mind, as a textbook in courses about Jewish and Christian scriptures. I have included many images and quotations of ancient texts for illustration. Key names, phrases, and technical terms are underlined where they are defined or described. Quotations from ancient texts appear in *italics* to distinguish them from modern commentary. A list of abbreviations for the names of biblical books appears on pp. 10–11 (Box 1.4). Text boxes define key ideas and give examples referred to in the immediate context. The Table of Contents therefore provides detailed lists of boxes and figures as well as chapter subheadings to aid in constructing a course syllabus. A sample syllabus can be found at https://surface.syr.edu/rel/106/.

The literature on the Bible that this book presupposes is vast. The endnotes cite sources of direct quotations. I have also included references in the endnotes to a very small number of English-language publications where instructors can find more detailed discussions of particular issues and fuller bibliographies. Some of these texts could serve as further reading assignments to supplement the summaries in this book.

CITED WORKS AND FURTHER READING

1 In this book, the terms Torah, Tanak, Gospels, and Bible are capitalized when they are used as titles of specific collections of scriptures or to refer to the idealized ideas of scripture in Jewish and Christian communities. Plural nouns that refer to physical books are lower case – torahs, tanaks, gospels, bibles – because they refer to multiple manifestations of scriptures and, in the case of gospels and bibles, may refer to several different collections (see Box 1.4, Sections 10.1, 10.7, 14.2.7, 14.2.8).

2 This approach was advocated years ago by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (1971): 131–140, reprinted in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (ed. Miriam Levering, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 18–28. See also his essay, "Scripture as Form and Concept: Their Emergence for the Western World," in *Rethinking Scripture*, 29–57; and William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

3 As exemplified, for example, by the canonical approach of Brevard S. Childs. See his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979); and *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984).

4 For my discussion contextualizing this approach within broader trends in biblical studies, see James W. Watts, *Understanding the Pentateuch as a Scripture* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), xvii–xx.

Acknowledgments

This book culminates and summarizes much of my previous research on iconic books, comparative scriptures, and the Bible. It therefore includes many ideas and arguments that I have published previously in articles and books. References to those works appear where appropriate in the list of "Cited Works and Further Readings" at the end of each chapter. Many paragraphs of this book have been reproduced from my other textbook, *Understanding the Pentateuch as a Scripture*.

English quotations of biblical verses are my own translations unless labelled NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) or CEB (Common English Bible). Photographs are my own unless otherwise noted.

Scripture and Ritual

Scholars of religions struggle to define the word <u>scripture</u>. Religious communities tend to describe their scriptures as holy or sacred, as inspired by God, and as authoritative for their beliefs and practices. They also tend to describe their own scriptures as unique, unlike any other books or texts on earth. Religious communities therefore often resist classifying their sacred texts as belonging to the same category as the scriptures of other religions.

Those who study multiple religions notice, however, that many traditions venerate some texts as sacred and distinguish them from all other texts. Scholars of religion have therefore filled the category <u>scripture</u> with books from many religions. They often distinguish "book religions" from traditions that do not venerate sacred texts. Already in the Middle Ages, Muslim theologians described Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as "religions of the book." In the nineteenth century, Oxford University Press published 50 volumes of English translations of *The Sacred Books of the East*. The editor, Max Müller, wanted to expose Westerners to the scriptures of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Now textbook anthologies, such as Robert Van Voorst's *Anthology of World Scriptures*, make excerpts available from the scriptures of all these religions.

However, reading these various scriptures together shows that their contents have little in common. They contain stories, laws, oracles, moral

> **Box 1.1   The nature of scriptures**
>
> William Graham observed: "A text becomes 'scripture' in living, subjective relationship to persons and to historical tradition. No text, written, oral, or both, is sacred or authoritative in isolation from a community. A text is only 'scripture' insofar as a group of persons perceives it to be sacred or holy, powerful and meaningful, possessed of an exalted authority, and in some fashion transcendent of, and hence distinct from, other speech and writing. . . . The 'scriptural' characteristics of a text belong not to the text itself but to its role in a community. 'Scripture' is not a literary genre but a religio-historical one."

principles, philosophical speculation, practical advice, prayers, hymns, spells, and much more. No one genre of literature describes them all. Scripture, then, is not a literary category. Instead, what these texts have in common is that religious communities venerate them (Box 1.1).[1]

Veneration of scriptures takes the form of public and private rituals of various kinds. Rituals draw people's attention to specific practices and ideas. They focus attention on the ritual activity itself in order to make participants more aware of their own relationship to what it represents. Studies of ritual (see Box 1.2) have revealed the central role that rituals play in human societies at every level.

Rituals, however, have a bad reputation. People associate ritual with unreality, with superstition, and with magic, which they contrast with rational, practical, and effective actions. Though this attitude feels modern, it is actually rooted in ancient religious polemics. Christians contrasted "empty rituals" and superstition with knowledge and "true faith." Protestants used the term "ritual" to attack Catholic ceremonies during the Reformation, medieval Christians used it to disparage Jews, and ancient Christians used it to criticize and suppress pagan sacrifices.

In contrast to the reputation of rituals, scriptures have been venerated as containers of knowledge and truth. Reading has been cast as the opposite of ritualizing. It can therefore sound very odd to hear reading and writing described as rituals in some circumstances. The concept of ritualized books is so strange that scholars have done little research on this phenomenon, in contrast to the massive amount of scholarship on the interpretation of books and religions.

Nevertheless, the display, reading, and interpretation of scriptures play obvious roles in the worship services – the rituals – of Jews and Christians, as well as of Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, and many other religious groups. In fact, ritualizing scriptures clearly encourages people to

Box 1.2   Ritual theories

Throughout the twentieth century, many anthropologists and scholars of religion have studied rituals and how they work. They have increasingly focused not on distinguishing rituals from non-rituals, which can be hard to do, but rather on the activity of performing rituals or ritualizing, which can take place at almost any time and place.

"Ritualization is a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful." (Catherine Bell)

Ritualizing requires participants and audience to pay attention to what is being done, how it is being done, and who is doing it. Ritualizing involves doing ordinary activities, such as eating, entering a room, or reading a book, in a formal and regulated way.

"Ritual relies for its power on the fact that it is concerned with quite ordinary activities placed within an extraordinary setting, that what it describes and displays is, in principle, possible for every occurrence of these acts." (Jonathan Z. Smith)

By performing rituals and witnessing them, people identify themselves with the values represented in the rituals.

"By performing a [ritual] the participants accept, and indicate to themselves and to others that they accept whatever is encoded in the canon of that order." (Roy Rappaport)

So rituals identify (index) participants with the institutions and traditions that promote and perform those rituals.[2]

believe that these books are authoritative and inspired texts that establish the truth and legitimacy of the religious tradition. By setting aside the polemical history of debates over ritual, we can better understand how ritualizing books promotes religious ideas and practices, and secular ones too.

Rituals make participants pay attention to people, objects, and actions that they otherwise take for granted. Ritualized meals, for example, draw attention to the food itself, how it is prepared, and what it means: the unleavened bread of a Passover seder, the bread and wine of Communion, the tea of a tea ceremony. Ritual processions require attention to the manner and order

in which people enter and leave a room. Ceremonies that mark life transitions focus attention on particular people: the bride and groom at a wedding, the graduates at a college commencement, or the recently deceased at a funeral.

Ritualizing scriptures therefore draws attention to the books themselves – their verbal contents, and also the sound of their words and their physical form and appearance. Scriptures get ritualized in three distinct ways that correspond to the three dimensions of texts.

1.1   THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF WRITTEN TEXTS

Every written text consists of three aspects or dimensions (see Figure 1.1). We usually focus on its meaning, the significance of its words and what they tell us. This interpretive act engages a text's semantic dimension.

Before we can understand the meaning of writing, we must turn the visual signs into words. The text must be read aloud or enunciated in our heads. This oral or mental presentation engages a text's expressive dimension.
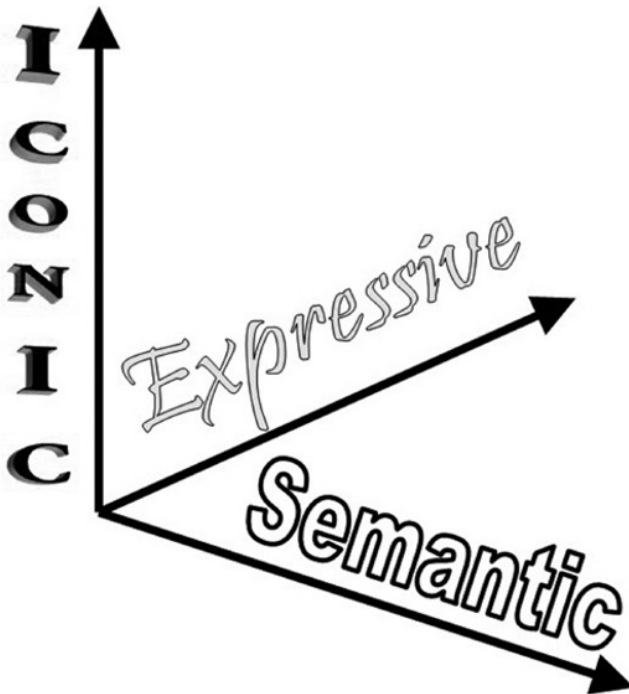
FIGURE 1.1   The three dimensions of texts.

But before we can even present a text orally, we must recognize it as a written text. We have to interpret visual marks as written language (letters or signs), not as art or natural patterns, or we must recognize the shape of an object as likely to contain writing (an envelope, a scroll, or a book, for example). This act of recognition engages a text's <u>iconic dimension</u>.

We usually do not pay attention to the three different dimensions of texts. Consider this book that you are now reading. You instantly recognize its shape as a book that probably contains written text. You recognize its Roman letters and (if you are reading this) you turn them into English words without thinking much about what you are doing. I hope that you also understand the meaning of these sentences without too much difficulty.

We pay attention to the individual dimensions of texts only if we have difficulty – if we have trouble figuring out their meaning (the semantic dimension), if we cannot read smudged type or illegible handwriting (the expressive dimension), or if we cannot decide whether marks on paper represent written words or art or random patterns (the iconic dimension). Otherwise, the three dimensions of texts are trivial features of the experience of reading and we usually ignore them.

When texts get ritualized, however, the three dimensions become important, because texts can be ritualized in each of the dimensions.

The <u>semantic dimension</u> of interpretation can be <u>ritualized</u> by delivering lectures and sermons, by staging debates, and by writing interpretive commentaries on texts. For example, laws and national constitutions get ritualized regularly in the semantic dimension by oral and written interpretations that multiply and grow more elaborate over time. They serve the ritual function of drawing attention to the laws and they index the readers' and listeners' responsibilities under those laws.

The <u>expressive dimension</u> of texts can be <u>ritualized</u> by private and public readings and recitations. Religious worship services often focus on reading selections of sacred texts. People may memorize the text. Oral performances may be standardized as chants or set to music as songs. Theatrical scripts, for example, are designed for public presentations in ritual spaces (theaters). They expect audiences and actors to behave in conventional ways that call attention to the play being performed.

The <u>iconic dimension</u> of texts can be <u>ritualized</u> by changing how a book looks and by handling it in special ways. The text can be written in distinctive scripts or printed in unusual fonts. Its pages can be decorated and illustrated. Its binding or container can be embellished with art and valuable materials. For example, publishers produce collector's editions in leather bindings and gilt edges so buyers can show visually that they find a particular book valuable. Texts can also be displayed prominently

on shelves or tables, held up for people to see, and carried in elaborate processions. Rare books frequently get displayed in museums, in libraries, and even in private homes.

Only written texts can be ritualized in these three dimensions. A <u>visual symbol</u> such as a cross or a flag can be ritualized in the iconic dimension: it can be displayed, elaborated in art, and paraded in processions. Visual symbols can also be ritualized in the semantic dimension: their meanings can be explained and debated, sometimes at great length. But crosses and flags cannot be ritualized in the expressive dimension: they contain no written words that can be presented as mental or oral language. On the other hand, an <u>oral epic</u> can be ritualized by retelling it or even staging it. Its interpretation can also be explained and debated at length. But there is no physical object to display or decorate. Therefore, oral epics and other oral traditions can be ritualized in the expressive and semantic dimensions, but not in the iconic dimension, while visual symbols can be ritualized in the iconic and semantic dimensions, but not in the expressive dimension. Only written texts can be ritualized in all three dimensions.

1.2   RITUALIZING SCRIPTURES IN THREE DIMENSIONS

Most texts do not get ritualized much in any dimension, and those that do usually get ritualized in only one or two dimensions. A distinctive feature of religious <u>scriptures</u> is that they get <u>ritualized in all three dimensions</u>.

Religious traditions that emphasize scriptures give prominent attention to their semantic interpretation. They include Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Taoists, Hindus, and Jains, as well as Jews, Samaritans, and Christians. All of them sponsor speakers and literature that interpret their scriptures, and give their best interpreters positions of respect and influence. Most of them encourage all their followers to study the scriptures and their interpretations. <u>Ritualizing the semantic dimension</u> tends to increase the <u>authority</u> of scriptures and the authority of people who can interpret them convincingly. These religions therefore give respect and influence to scholars, priests, preachers, rabbis, imams, or sages who are learned in the scriptures and their interpretation.

These traditions also highlight the oral presentation of scriptures, to the point that reading or reciting scripture is a key component of their worship services. They often require that scriptures be presented orally in distinctive ways, with particular pronunciations or with prescribed chants. Verses of scriptures frequently get sung to melodies, with or without instrumental accompaniments. Some scriptures that contain vivid stories get performed theatrically. Traditions of enacting scriptural stories are thousands of years old in Europe

and India. Now they frequently appear on television and in films. There is even older evidence for artistic traditions of illustrating scriptural stories and calligraphy that elaborates the written texts artistically. All these media can be used to present the words and contents of scriptures. <u>Ritualizing their expressive dimension</u> in these ways draws people's attention to the scriptures and inspires those who hear and see the performances. They often regard <u>inspiration</u> as characteristic of scripture.

Religious traditions that emphasize scripture also ritualize the physical form of their scriptures. The script or type-face may take distinctive forms and be arranged in unusual ways. The pages may be decorated and their contents may be illustrated. The cover or binding of the book may take a stereotypical form so that people easily recognize it as that scripture, or it may be bound in expensive materials. People display scriptures in their congregations, sanctuaries, and homes. They carry them in the form of complete books or as miniature amulets. They wave them in rituals of worship or preaching, of celebration or protest. In all these ways, the visual appearance of scriptures distinguishes them from other books and emphasizes their importance. <u>Ritualizing their iconic dimension</u> in these ways draws attention and <u>legitimizes</u> the religious tradition that venerates them and the people who possess and handle them.

Ritualization plays an important role in making some texts seem more authoritative than others. Regular and repeated interpretation of the same book makes its contents seem more important for how to think and act. But the reverse is also true: displaying a book of instructions makes rituals seem more legitimate. The visible presence of authoritative books counters doubts about the competence or honesty of the person leading the rituals (Box 1.3).[3]

In fact, people in the ancient Middle East first began regarding some texts as <u>normative</u>, that is, as authoritative for how to behave, when those texts described how to conduct rituals. Kings and priests and magicians from Babylon to Egypt consulted ritual texts to tell them, for example, where to build temples, when to make offerings to the gods, and how to cast curses. But the famous law code of Hammurabi and other royal law codes were not consulted for how to conduct criminal trials, which were based on custom instead. <u>Textual authority</u> developed first around <u>ritual texts</u>.

The same pattern can be observed in the developing authority of biblical books. Many claim inspiration from God, most obviously books like Isaiah and Jeremiah that state that God gave the prophets these messages. The first Jewish scripture did not consist of prophetic books, however, but of the Torah/Pentateuch. Genesis 1 does not begin with any explicit claim of inspiration or even of authorship. The Pentateuch does contain laws spoken by God to Moses. But what differentiates it most from other biblical books is that ritual instructions lie at its center in Exodus 25–40, Leviticus, and

> **Box 1.3   The rhetorical effects of ritualizing scriptures**
>
> Ritualizing each of a scripture's three dimensions makes the book's message more persuasive to those who venerate it. Theories of <u>rhetoric</u>, that is, of persuasion, help us understand how this works. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) described three factors necessary to make a speech persuasive. The words (*logos*) of the speech must, of course, make a convincing argument. The speech, however, must also appeal to the audience's assumptions and feelings (*pathos*). And the speaker must project an attractive and trustworthy character (*ethos*).
>
> Scriptures are not speeches, but ritualizing their three dimensions increases their persuasive appeal in these same ways: interpreting them increases the <u>authority</u> (*logos*) of their contents and their interpreters, expressing their words and contents <u>inspires</u> audiences (*pathos*), and displaying and decorating them <u>legitimizes</u> (*ethos*) the communities and traditions that venerate them.[4]

parts of Numbers. Stories of the Torah's growing authority in the Second Temple period emphasize that it first dictated ritual behavior, especially how to celebrate the annual festivals of Passover and *Sukkot* (Booths). Only centuries later did its laws begin to apply in criminal courts and civil society.

As Jewish and Christian communities increasingly focused on ritualizing their scriptures, the Torah or the Gospels or later the one-volume Bible began to represent the religions. The scrolls and books of scripture became visual symbols of each religion. The sounds of scriptural verses inspired devotion to the religious tradition. And interpreting their significance for directing people's personal and communal lives led people to try to embody their scriptures in themselves. The centrality of scripture to Jewish and Christian religious experience continues to be expressed by associating the words, "Torah" or "Gospel" or "biblical," with the religions' essential teachings. These words describe not just books, but also living faithfully as Jews or Christians. In these communities, Torah, Gospel, or Bible symbolizes the ideal way of life. So the three parts of this book are organized around the parts of scriptures that, to Jews and Christians, represent the highest religious ideals.

1.3   JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

Jews and Christians share parts of their scriptures. The Jewish scriptures consist of 24 books divided into 3 parts: the 5 books of the <u>*Torah*</u> "instructions or laws," the 8 books of the *Nebi'im* "prophets," and the 11 books of the

Kethubim "writings." A common name for this collection, the *Tanak*, is an acronym from the first letter of each section.

Protestant Christians accept exactly the same literary material as part of their scripture and call it the <u>Old Testament</u>. But the Old Testament books appear in a different order and some are divided into two or more books. So the Protestant Old Testament consists of 39 books. Yet its contents are the same as the Jewish Tanak. (For a neutral designation of the collection of books that Jews and Christians both regard as scripture, scholars now usually call it the <u>Hebrew Bible</u>.)

Ancient Christians, however, accepted more Jewish books in their Old Testament than did Jewish rabbis. These books and additions to biblical books written by Jews in the Second Temple period were segregated into a third section of the Bible, the <u>Apocrypha</u>, by Protestant Reformers in the sixteenth century. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians continue to reproduce them as part of their Old Testament, but sometimes call these additional materials the <u>Deuterocanon</u>.

Christians of all kinds also accept into their scripture 27 uniquely Christian books, which they call the <u>New Testament</u>. The list of books accepted by each tradition is called a <u>canon</u>, which is traditional Christian terminology for the contents of scripture (see Box 1.4).

Another religious tradition accepts some of this material as their scripture. The <u>Samaritans</u> now number fewer than 1000 people, but 2000 years ago they were a large and vibrant community. They accept only the five books of the Torah as their scripture.

For ancient and medieval Jews and Christians, "scripture" was not a single book but a collection of books. Therefore, they did not standardize the sequence of scriptural books until the invention of printing made single-volume, <u>pandect</u> bibles affordable, starting in the fifteenth century.[5]

1.4 MANUSCRIPTS AND PRINTING

From the invention of writing more than 5000 years ago to the invention of printing with movable type more than 500 years ago, all written texts were written by hand. Scribes copied and re-copied texts to publish them and preserve them. We can still read ancient literature because of their efforts.

Scribes have used a wide variety of materials to write with and write on. In ancient Mesopotamia in the Middle East, scribes wrote mostly in wet clay with a pointed reed. The clay was then dried in the sun or fired in a kiln to produce <u>cuneiform tablets</u>. Because fired clay is a very durable material, more routine texts have survived from Mesopotamia than from any other ancient civilization.

Box 1.4   Canons of biblical scriptures

Samaritan	Jewish	Catholic/ Orthodox Christian	Protestant Christian	Abbreviations of biblical books
	Tanak	*Old Testament*	*Old Testament*	
Torah	*Torah*	*Pentateuch*	*Pentateuch*	
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Gen.
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exod.
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Lev.
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Num.
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deut.
	Nevi'im	*Histories*	*Histories*	
	(Prophets)	Joshua	Joshua	Josh.
	Joshua	Judges	Judges	Judg.
	Judges	Ruth	Ruth	Ruth
	Samuel	1 & 2 Samuel	1 & 2 Samuel	Sam.
	Kings	1 & 2 Kings	1 & 2 Kings	Kgs.
	Isaiah	1 & 2 Chronicles	1 & 2 Chronicles	Chr.
	Jeremiah	Ezra	Ezra	Ezra
	Ezekiel	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Neh.
	The Twelve	Tobit	Esther	Esth.
	Prophets	Judith		
		Esther	*Poetry*	
	Ketubim	1 & 2	Job	Job
	(Writings)	Maccabees	Psalms	Pss.
	Psalms		Proverbs	Prov.
	Proverbs	*Poetry*	Ecclesiastes	Eccl.
	Job	Job	Song of Songs/	Cant.
	Song of Songs	Psalms	Canticles	
	Ruth	Proverbs		
	Lamentations	Ecclesiastes	*Prophets*	
	Ecclesiastes	Song of Songs	Isaiah	Isa.
	Esther	Wisdom of	Jeremiah	Jer.
	Daniel	Solomon	Lamentations	Lam.
	Ezra-	Sirach/	Ezekiel	Ezek.
	Nehemiah	Ecclesiasticus	Daniel	Dan.
	Chronicles		Hosea	Hos.
		Prophets	Joel	Joel
		Isaiah	Amos	Amos
		Jeremiah	Micah	Mic.
		Lamentations	Nahum	Nah.
		Baruch	Habakkuk	Hab.
		Ezekiel	Zephaniah	Zeph.
		Daniel	Haggai	Hag.
		Hosea		
		Joel		

Amos	Zechariah	Zech.
Obadiah	Jonah	Obad. Jon.
Micah	Malachi	Mal.
Nahum		
Habakkuk	**_Apocrypha_**	
Zephaniah	1 & 2 Esdras	1/2 Esdr.
Haggai	Tobit	Tob.
Zechariah	Judith	Jud.
Malachi	Additions to Esther	Add. Est.
	Wisdom of Solomon	Wis. Sol.
Orthodox canons	Ecclesiasticus	Sir.
usually include:	(Sirach)	
1 & 2 Esdras	Baruch	Bar.
Prayer of	Letter of Jeremiah	Let. Jer.
Manasseh	Additions to Daniel	Add. Dan.
3 Maccabees	Prayer of Manasseh	Pr. Man.
4 Maccabees	1 & 2 Maccabees	Macc.
New Testament	**_New Testament_**	
Gospels & Acts	_Gospels & Acts_	
Matthew	Matthew	Matt.
Mark	Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke	Luke
John	John	John
Acts of the	Acts of the Apostles	Acts
Apostles		
Letters	_Letters_	
Romans	Romans	Rom.
1 & 2 Corinthians	1 & 2 Corinthians	Cor.
Galatians	Galatians	Gal.
Ephesians	Ephesians	Eph.
Philippians	Philippians	Phil.
Colossians	Colossians	Col.
1 & 2	1 & 2 Thessalonians	Thess.
Thessalonians	1 & 2 Timothy	Tim.
1 & 2 Timothy	Titus	Tit.
Titus	Philemon	Philem.
Philemon	Hebrews	Heb.
Hebrews	James	Jam.
James	1 & 2 Peter	Pet.
1 & 2 Peter	1, 2, 3 John	123 John
1, 2, 3 John	Jude	Jude
Jude		
Apocalypse	_Apocalypse_	
Revelation of	Revelation of John	Rev.
John		

In ancient Egypt, scribes wrote in ink using reed pens mostly on <u>papyrus</u>. The papyrus plant grows in the delta of the Nile River. Egyptians produced a medium for writing by splitting papyrus reeds, soaking them, and then pressing them together at right angles. Papyrus is much less durable than clay, so what has survived comes mostly from sealed containers in tombs.

The scribes of ancient Israel, like those writing alphabetical scripts in Phoenicia and Syria, wrote in ink mostly on specially prepared leather called <u>parchment</u>. Parchment scrolls are somewhat more durable than papyrus, which they also used. But the oldest surviving texts of the Hebrew Bible date only from the third-to-second centuries BCE.

<u>Paper</u>, which is made from rags or wood pulp, was invented in China by 105 CE. It did not reach the Middle East until the eighth century and Europe only in the twelfth century. The introduction of paper provided a cheaper material medium that enabled written documents to become increasingly common.

That was especially the case after the invention of <u>printing</u>. Buddhists in Korea, Japan, and Tibet printed sutras (Buddhist scriptures) from the eighth century CE on. They carved mirror images of entire pages into wood blocks (see Figure 1.2). Dipped in ink, wood blocks could produce many copies of a page before wearing out. Chinese and Korean printers experimented with movable type as early as the eleventh century.

Wood-block printing came to Europe in the early fifteenth century. By 1456 in Mainz, Germany, Johannes Gutenberg had invented a printing press with movable metal type. His first commercial product was a printed Latin Bible. By the end of the fifteenth century, printing presses were found throughout Europe. They printed books of all kinds on paper, including many copies of Jewish and Christian scriptures.

Printing technology not only made copies of the Bible cheaper and more common. It also made it easier to reproduce elaborate page formats. In Italy in the early sixteenth century, a printer produced a Jewish Tanak that included the

FIGURE 1.2   Korean wood block and a page printed with it of a Chinese Buddhist sutra. In the Korean National Museum.