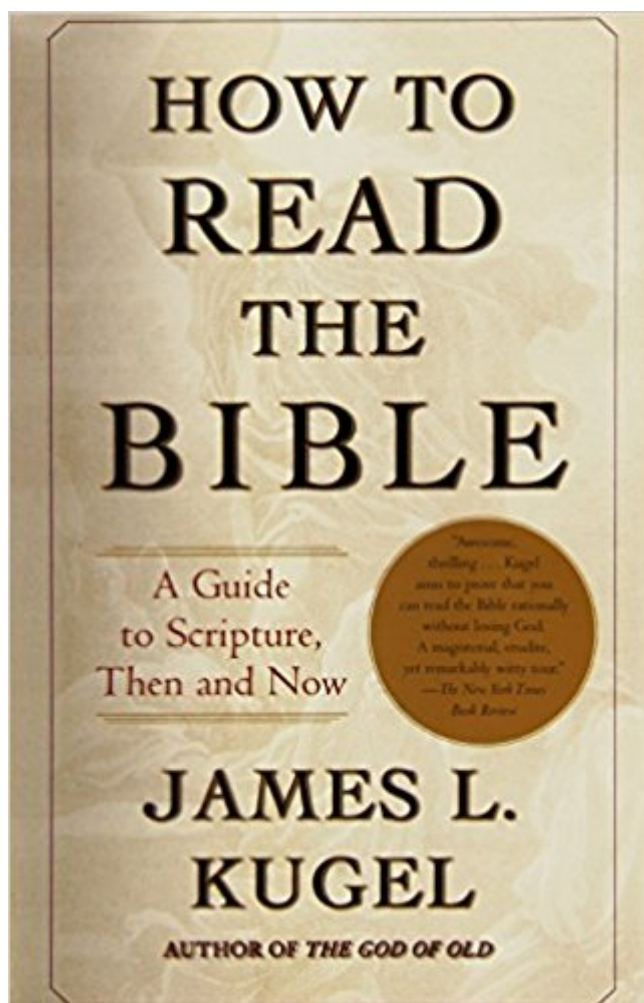


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# How To Read The Bible: A Guide To Scripture, Then And Now



## Synopsis

As soon as it appeared, *How to Read the Bible* was recognized as a masterwork, *“awesome, thrilling”* (The New York Times), *“wonderfully interesting, extremely well presented”* (The Washington Post), and *“a tour de force...a stunning narrative”* (Publishers Weekly). Now in its tenth year of publication, the book remains the clearest, most inviting and readable guide to the Hebrew Bible around *and a profound meditation on the effect that modern biblical scholarship has had on traditional belief*. Moving chapter by chapter, Harvard professor James Kugel covers the Bible’s most significant stories—the Creation of the world, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and his wives, Moses and the exodus, David’s mighty kingdom, plus the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets, and on to the Babylonian conquest and the eventual return to Zion. Throughout, Kugel contrasts the way modern scholars understand these events with the way Christians and Jews have traditionally understood them. The latter is not, Kugel shows, a naïve reading; rather, it is the product of a school of sophisticated interpreters who flourished toward the end of the biblical period. These highly ideological readers sought to put their own spin on texts that had been around for centuries, utterly transforming them in the process. Their interpretations became what the Bible meant for centuries and centuries until modern scholarship came along. The question that this book ultimately asks is: What now? As one reviewer wrote, Kugel’s answer provides *“a contemporary model of how to read Sacred Scripture amidst the oppositional pulls of modern scholarship and tradition.”*

## Book Information

Paperback: 848 pages

Publisher: Free Press; Reprint edition (October 21, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0743235878

ISBN-13: 978-0743235877

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 103 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #13,293 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in *Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Old Testament > Biography* #7 in *Books > Christian Books*

## Customer Reviews

Kugel's tour de force of biblical scholarship juxtaposes two different ways of reading the Bible: the ancient biblical interpretations, ranging from the Book of Jubilees to Augustine, that he explored in *The Bible as It Was*, and the modern historical approach that challenges the historical veracity of scripture and seeks instead to find its writers' original sources and purposes. It can be a jarring journey for those schooled in traditional views, but what emerges is a fresh, even strange, and very rich view of everything from the Garden of Eden to Isaiah's dream vision of God. Refreshingly undogmatic and often witty, Kugel brings an intimate knowledge of the Hebrew Bible to illuminate small points as well as large. He discusses who the ancient Israelites were; the resemblances between YHWH and Canaanite gods; the unique role of the prophet in Ancient Near Eastern religions; the nature of ancient wisdom literature; and what the Bible means when it calls Solomon the wisest of men. The result is a stunning narrative of the evolution of ancient Israel, of its God and of the entire Hebrew Bible, contrasted with ancient interpretations that aimed to uncover hidden meanings and moral lessons. So, for example, for the ancients, the story of Cain and Abel is a tale of good versus evil. For the moderns, it was originally a story of origin, about the relation between ancient Israelites and the fierce Kenites to their south. While Kugel is a traditional Jew, he sees the modern approach as compelling, so the dilemma is whether a person of faith can read scripture in both the old way and the new. Drawing on Judaism's nonfundamentalist approach, Kugel's proposed answer is that the original purpose of the texts and their lack of historical accuracy matters less than their underlying message: to serve God. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Kugel intends his book as a tour through the Hebrew Bible based on an introductory course he taught at Harvard University for more than 20 years. His first aim is to acquaint readers with the contents of the Bible itself, and he points out that by the end of his introductory course, readers will have met all the major biblical figures: Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Miriam, Aaron, and Solomon, to name just a few. The book also covers all the major events, from the story of Adam and Eve to the Exodus from Egypt, the Babylonian exile, and Israel's eventual return to its homeland. The book not only focuses on what the text says but on the larger question of what a

modern reader is to make of it. Geared to both the specialist and the general reader, this is an indispensable guide to a complex subject. Cohen, George --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A great summary of all that scholars have learned about real history versus Biblical history. This is also a well written summary of biblical scholarship and an invaluable tool for better understanding the Old Testament. I have read this book several times and now keep it in my Kindle library. It also sheds some needed light on Israel's territorial claims and the length of time that Israel and Judah existed as Jewish homelands. If you think every word of the Bible is literally true, you are in for a rude shock. I recommend this book highly, and regard it as necessary reading for any serious individual who wants to better understand the Old Testament.

What a refreshing and invaluable book! Kugel is a magnificent explicator who succeeds in making the historical and religious stew of the "Old Testament" come alive in all its complexity. Only quibble is with the publisher (Free Press, a division of Simon and Schuster): my edition of the book (2007 paperback) is lacking a whole "signature" of pages, from pp. 263 through 294. Be sure to check that your copy includes those pages.

As a nonbeliever, I was fascinated by the depth of scholarly research and the unorthodox conclusions. The presentation is charming, almost loving in its devotion to getting the facts on the table.

As an Orthodox Jew, I've always been interested in the Bible and its interpretation. I am beginning my Master's studies in Jewish studies and I wanted a good overview of academic interpretations of the Bible. A Jewish studies professor suggested this book and it turns out to be exactly what I need, a broad yet detailed overview of the Hebrew Bible and its academic interpretation. This book is also a great read. I'm often quite busy, but look forward to the time I get to spend reading it.

Helpful

A wonderful overview of scholarship on the Bible as a religious document and as an historical document. Beautifully written, and often with a wry humor. I've been waiting for this book for a long time. Easy five-star rating.

As the other reviewer's have said, this is a really eye-opening book. I used to be Christian, but this book really intellectually pulled me over the fence with its myriad of (at what I thought were) shocking revelations about the faith. The content presented in this book is really interesting, and the Bible is explained in ways that I (and probably most people) have never thought of before. If you're a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim, be intellectually honest with yourself and challenge your faith with what is presented in this book. I should say, though, that perhaps the most interesting element of all this is that the author, despite knowing all the shocking secrets, inconsistencies, and horrors of the Bible, is an orthodox Jew. Clearly getting the knowledge doesn't make or break your faith--what it does is probably clarify how much faith you had in the first place. Good luck.

This book covers the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh) and is perhaps better appreciated by those who are familiar with the 'Old Testament.' In a highly accessible fashion, however, it delves into the history, the ancient interpretations, and the modern scholarship around the books of this Bible. Kugel has done his readers a great favor by organizing the materials in his chapters systematically and logically, but this book is anything but dry. His narrative, often humorous style holds the reader's attention: it may be the only scholarly book that I could describe as a 'page-turner.'

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