



The Bible: A Biography (Books That Changed the World)

By Karen Armstrong

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As the single work at the heart of Christianity, the world's largest organized religion, the Bible is the spiritual guide for one out of every three people in the world. It is also the world's most widely distributed book and its best-selling, with an estimated six billion copies sold in the last two hundred years. But the Bible is a complex work with a complicated and obscure history. Its contents have changed over the centuries, it has been transformed by translation and, through interpretation, has developed manifold meanings to various religions, denominations, and sects.

In this seminal account, acclaimed historian Karen Armstrong discusses the conception, gestation, life, and afterlife of history's most powerful book. Armstrong analyzes the social and political situation in which oral history turned into written scripture, how this all-pervasive scripture was collected into one work, and how it became accepted as Christianity's sacred text, and how its interpretation changed over time. Armstrong's history of the Bible is a brilliant, captivating book, crucial in an age of declining faith and rising fundamentalism.

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The Bible: A Biography (Books That Changed the World) By Karen Armstrong Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Of all the Books That Changed the World—the recently launched series to which this book belongs—surely the Bible is among the most important. And of all contemporary popularizers of religious history, surely Armstrong is among the bestselling. Who better, then, to recount the history of the Bible in eight short chapters than this former nun and literature professor who relishes huge topics (*The History of God*) and panoramic descriptions (*The Great Transformation*)? Armstrong not only describes how, when and by whom the Bible was written, she also examines some 2,000 years of biblical interpretation by bishops and rabbis, scholars and mystics, pietists and critics, thus opening up a myriad of exegetical approaches and dispelling any fundamentalist notion that only one view can be correct. Readers unfamiliar with ecclesiastical history may feel overwhelmed by dense chapters that read more like annotated lists than narrative—a hazard of trying to cover so much in so little space. (A glossary helps to anchor the bewildered.) At her best when she pauses long enough to expand on a topic, Armstrong offers intriguing insights on, for example, the allegorical method developed by Origen in the third century and the mystical midrash of the Kabbalists in medieval Spain and Provence. (Nov.)

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From [Booklist](#)

For the Books That Changed the World series of brief "biographies" of momentous books, Armstrong accepted the arguably most daunting assignment. What other book has as long a history of influence as the Bible, or has affected more people and societies? The author of the sweeping histories of religion *The Great Transformation* (2006) and *A History of God* (1993) is, of course, up to the task and provides an excellent précis of the writing and compiling of the Bible and the ensuing centuries of biblical interpretation. Armstrong traces the Bible's transformation from a miscellany of texts into scripture, to which the Jesus movement added the Gospel and the other New Testament texts pretty much in tandem with the development of midrash and the Talmud by non-Christian Jews after the 70 CE destruction of the third temple in Jerusalem. She shows both Christian and rabbinic traditions of interpretation subsequently converging upon charity or love as the essence of God. The subjects of the last three chapters—the medieval monastic practice of reading the Bible called *lectio divina*, Martin Luther's doctrine of *sola scriptura*, and intellectual modernity—are each considered for the ways they gave rise to interpretive movements that affected Christianity directly and spurred reactions in Judaism. This is one terrific little book. Olson, Ray

Review

"A fascinating investigation." —*Christian Advance*

"For the Books That Changed the World series . . . Armstrong accepted the arguably most daunting assignment. What other book has as long a history of influence as the Bible, or has affected more people and societies? [Armstrong] is, of course, up to the task and provides an excellent précis of the writing and compiling of the Bible and the ensuing centuries of biblical interpretation. . . . This is one terrific little book." —*Booklist*

"Dispels any notion of religion as a rigidly fixed reading of sacred texts. Spanning millennia, from the scripture's origins in oral stories to the conflicting beliefs, ancient and modern, over its message, her book

will discomfort fundamentalists who believe that the Bible means what it says and says what it means.”

—Rich Barlow, *The Boston Globe*

“One of the merits of Armstrong’s book is that it points to the modern origin of literalist interpretations of Scripture, and then revisits the preceding centuries of Biblical scholarship to bring its considerable diversity to the notice of modern readers.” —Edward Norman, *Literary Review*

“Vintage Armstrong: sweeping, bold, incisive, and insightful. In eight chapters it covers the history of the writing, canonizing, and reading of the Bible... Her choice of topics is impeccable ... and her brief, 23-page discussion on the rise of the Talmud is masterful.” —P.L. Redditt, *Choice*

“A handy, erudite primer on the Holy Books.” —*The Jerusalem Report*

“A whirlwind tour through biblical studies. . . Armstrong’s analysis of the freedom previous generations (however far removed) felt with adapting, editing, redacting and re-writing the texts to suit contemporary purposes will undoubtedly remind savvy readers of all the current uses to which these same texts are being put.” —Kel Munger, *Sacramento News & Review*

“[Armstrong] shows how the highly disparate writings that now compose the Jewish and Christian scriptures came together and examines the very different methods of interpretation used over the centuries. Her book’s great strength is the way she unfolds the Jewish and Christian histories of formation and interpretation in parallel with one another.” —Richard Harries, *The Guardian* “A learned but accessible history of the Bible’s origins and genesis. Armstrong goes behind the authorized versions preached by the churches to recreate the order – and the political and social circumstances – in which the books of the Old and New testaments were first written down, amended, and then endlessly reinterpreted and recast... Armstrong’s great achievement, however, is that, as well as leaving you with a clearer, more historically accurate picture as to what precisely the Bible is (and isn’t), she also makes you want to go back and read it again with fresh eyes.” —Peter Stanford, *The Independent* (UK)

“[Armstrong] has never written on such a broad scale, or with as much passion . . . [her] concern that religion should no longer be used to promote violence animates her measured, lucid prose and vivifies her summary of the development of the Bible and its interpretation.”

—Bruce Chilton, *New York Sun*

“Karen Armstrong preaches the gospel truth in *The Bible*, explaining how the spiritual guide for one out of three people on the planet came into being and evolved over the centuries”

—Elissa Schappell, *Vanity Fair*

“[A] richly interwoven and often surprising history.” —Michael Alec Rose, *Bookpage*

“While there are countless guides to reading the Bible, noted academic Karen Armstrong looks at the history of the book with a keen historian’s eye. . . Armstrong condenses into a manageable volume the many ideas and traditions that influenced the creation of the Good Book.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“This is one terrific little book.” —*Booklist*

“[A] spending series.” —Bill Ward, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

“[Armstrong] does an exceptional job of balancing and interweaving Jewish and Christian approaches to

scripture.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“Of all the ‘Books that Changed the World’ surely the Bible is among the most important. And of all contemporary popularizers of religious history, surely Armstrong is among the bestselling. Who better, then, to recount the history of the Bible in eight short chapters than this former nun and literature professor who relishes huge topics and panoramic descriptions? Armstrong not only describes how, when and by whom the Bible was written, she also examines some 2,000 years of biblical interpretation.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“Armstrong judiciously summarizes centuries of history and writes with remarkable insight.”
—*Christian Science Sentinel*

"Armstrong is at her best when explaining how today's focus on the Bible as a literal, static text runs counter to a longstanding interpretative tradition that viewed study of the good book as 'an activity for attaining transcendence.'" —Andrea McQuillin, *Shambhala Sun*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Cindy Searcy:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their own spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open as well as read a book eligible The Bible: A Biography (Books That Changed the World)? Maybe it is to be best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time with the favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have some other opinion?

Diana Brunswick:

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Latonya Sams:

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