



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Know Your Bible Quiz - Answers

How well do you know your Bible? Here are a few Melting Pot style questions to test your knowledge, to separate out the Bible stories from the popular tradition – have fun. Quotes are from the Good News Bible.

1 Who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament?

The Pentateuch, commonly referred to as the 'books of Moses', he was not the author (it includes an account of his death!), but it is about the Moses tradition. There is no scholarly consensus, but is now recognised as being compiled from a range of sources, during a period as wide as 1000-330 BCE. The bulk of the work is thought to have been done following the return to Israel after the Babylonian exile about 500BCE.

2 In the creation parable, what kind of forbidden fruit did Adam and Eve eat?

In classical Western European art and literature, this fruit is often depicted as an apple. Some scholars think that this trend originates from the Latin translation of the Bible, where the words for 'apple' and 'evil' are very similar. The Hebrew word is simply "fruit", and in GNB the wording is the fruit of the tree "that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad" (Genesis 2:17), emphasising the allegory concerning humanity's sentience and exploring our role in the creation story.

3 In the Genesis creation parable, what was created first: animals or humankind?

The first creation parable (Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a) has man created on the sixth day (Genesis 1:27) following the creation of "all kinds of animal life" (Genesis 1:24). However, in the second creation story (Genesis 2:4b-23), man is created before anything else (Genesis 2:7), finishing with woman created from Adam's rib. Typically, the two stories get merged into one narrative, although they are very different and from different traditions.

4 In the Noah story, how many of each animal went into the ark?

Everyone remembers the "two by two" from children's songs, and indeed this is found in Genesis 6:19-20 with "a male and a female of every kind". However, the Noah story, just like the creation story, has been compiled from a variety of sources, and you will find Noah is instructed to take "seven pairs of each kind of ritually clean animals" (Genesis 7:2) and "seven pairs of each kind of bird" (Genesis 7:3).

5 In the story of the Commandments, how many were written on the tablets of stone? Can you list them?

It's the *ten* commandments isn't it? After all, you've seen the movie! The number is not mentioned in the text and there are three accounts of the tablets of the commandments in the Old Testament. In Exodus 20:1-17, you get ten if some of the additional description is packaged together – in brief (my paraphrase):

I am the Lord your God – worship no other
No idols – no bowing down
No misuse of God’s name
Keep the sabbath holy
Respect your father and mother
No murder
No Adultery
No stealing
No false witness
No coveting (this last one is addressed to men only)

In the version of the story found in Deuteronomy 5:1-22, the first commandment appears to be split in two, giving eleven. In Exodus 34:1-28, where Moses goes for a second set of tablets, having broken the first (Exodus 32:19), we find a very different set of perhaps ten commandments (v10-27) which includes “do not cook a young sheep or goat in its mother’s milk” (v26)! Overall, there are 613 commandments in the Pentateuch.

6 In the Jonah story, what was it that swallowed Jonah?

Now everyone knows that Jonah was swallowed by a whale – but the wording is a “large fish” (Jonah 1:17). In the Hebrew text this creature changes gender throughout the story! It might be worth noting the “three days and nights” are often linked in to Jesus time in the tomb, but someone can’t count . . . see question 16.

7 Who wrote Matthew’s Gospel?

Simply because the obvious other Matthew is one of Jesus’ disciples, that is an easy connection to make, but the truth is that no one knows, other than it is unlikely to be Matthew the tax-collector apostle. It is more likely a second-generation Christian writing about 60 to 70CE to a Jewish audience. No authorship is included in the text, and it is widely thought that the title ‘according to Matthew’ was a late addition.

8 In Matthew’s birth parable, how many wise men travelled from the East? Can you name them?

Tradition has three ‘magi’ or ‘kings’ or ‘wise men’ travelling from the East, but Matthew tells of “some men who studied the stars” (Matthew 2:1-12) bringing “gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh” – which sounds like three gifts. The names Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar can be traced to a Greek document written about 500CE where they are thought to represent kings of India, Persia and Arabia.

9 According to the gospel story, how did Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem?

In Matthew’s parable, Mary and Joseph already live in Bethlehem, and end up in Nazareth after a circuitous route via Egypt – all part of the parallel story of Jesus as the new Moses. Luke though has a problem, and he invents a rather fanciful census to get Mary and Joseph down from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Tradition has Mary on a donkey – but there is no information about how the 90 mile journey was undertaken.

10 How many disciples were there? Can you name them?

The twelve chosen from all of the followers, named as disciples, are listed in Mark 3:13-19, Matthew 10:1-4 and Luke 6:12-16, and later called apostles, are: Simon (Peter), James and John (sons of Zebedee or ‘men of thunder’), Andrew (Simon Peter’s brother in Luke), Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew (the tax-collector in Matthew), Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the Patriot) and Judas Iscariot. However, Luke in Acts 1:12-13, lists a different twelve, with Judas (son of James) in place of Thaddaeus – perhaps the same person with an alternative name, or a replacement, or . . . and don’t forget Matthias who replaced Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:26).

11 In the story when Jesus fed a large crowd, how many men were present?

The 'feeding of the 5000' is the only miracle story recounted in all four gospels, but there are differences! Mark 6:30-40, Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-14 all agree on 5000 men. However, Mark 8:1-10 recounts a similar story, but with 4000 people; Matthew 15:32-39 counts 4000 men. The same story remembered differently?

12 In that story, who supplied the food?

The "five loaves and two small fishes" are in the possession of the disciples in the first three accounts, and it is only John who introduces the generous boy (John 6:9) – the version we all seem to know. The second pair of stories have seven loaves and a few small fish, with a different amount of 'leftovers' from the 5000 version.

13 What was Mary of Magdala's profession?

The only reference to Mary Magdalene, apart from her role in some of the resurrection stories, is found in Luke 8:2 noting she was "cured of evil spirits and diseases". That's it. In the previous passage (Luke 7:36-39), the story of a "sinner" washing Jesus' feet with her tears and drying them with her hair has been merged to generate a tradition of 'Mary the prostitute' – but it is not in the Bible.

14 What did Judas Iscariot do with his 'thirty pieces of silver'?

Acts 1:18 tells he bought a field (where he fell and died – the "field of blood" (Acts 1:19)), but Matthew 27:5 recounts Judas "threw the coins down in the Temple".

15 How did Judas die?

Tradition has him hanging himself from a tree in the field he bought with the money given him by the chief priest (Matthew 26:14-15) for betraying Jesus. Matthew 27:5 records "he went and hanged himself", but Luke recounts "and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18). Take your pick. Tradition has mixed up the two versions, not helped by Lloyd Webber (and others).

16 In the resurrection story, for how many days was Jesus in the tomb?

Luke 24:46 has the resurrected Jesus explaining scripture saying he would suffer and "rise from death three days later", but it doesn't take much maths to see that Friday evening to Sunday morning is about 36 hours, ie one and a half days. Even so, Sunday from Friday would be the 'second day' unless, like the Chinese who count from zero, you include the Friday as the first day. This account is when Jesus appears to the disciples following the Emmaus Road story – but there is no Old Testament text from which this is taken! The resurrection stories are all different and often contradictory – tradition has sought to remove those difficulties by melding parts of each to give a (partially) coherent narrative.

17 Which of the following did Jesus speak on the cross?

- a Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**
- b Verily, I say unto you today, thou shalt be with me in paradise**
- c My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?**
- d It is finished.**
- e Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.**

Well – all of them, depending on which resurrection story you read! Luke includes a, b and e (23:34, 23:43 and 23:46), both Mark (15:34) and Matthew (27:46) have c, whilst John (19:30) has d. Again, it depends on what the author wanted Jesus to say within their particular resurrection story.

18 Following the resurrection, where were the disciples to go?

Should they stay in Jerusalem or go back to Galilee? Mark 16:7 and Matthew 28:7 has Jesus telling his disciples he is "going to Galilee ahead of you". Luke 24:36-53 clearly has the disciples still in Jerusalem, followed by the Pentecost story in Acts. John has both: following the Thomas story in Jerusalem, we next find some of the disciples on the shores of Lake Tiberius (previously Lake Galilee) where Peter is forgiven and commissioned to be the leader of the church (politics again – not James, Jesus' brother, who led the church in Jerusalem!). Again, we have to take the accounts as stories and not as records of historicity.

19 When the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples, who was missing?

Everyone knows the 'doubting Thomas' story as recounted in John 20:24-29. And he never did receive the Holy Spirit in that account. However, Matthew and Luke recount the appearance of Jesus to "the eleven" (Judas Iscariot was not there), but no mention of the Holy Spirit. Mark 16:14-18 has a similar story to Matthew and Luke, commissioning the disciples, but this was in the text added to the original at a later date. However, Luke does record the event in Acts 2:1-4 (Pentecost) when "all the believers were gathered". If you check out Acts 1:13 this clearly includes Thomas, and Judas' replacement Matthias (Acts 1:26), and many others. One reason put forward for John's version is a power struggle in the early church, with 'John Christians' seeking to discredit 'Thomas Christians' who therefore didn't have the authority of the Holy Spirit.

20 On the Damascus Road, was there a light or a voice or both?

There are three versions of this story of the 'Damascus Road experience', all found in Acts. Saul, later Paul, saw a light and heard a voice in each of them. However, his companions had differing experiences it seems. In 9:1-9 they heard a voice, but in 22:6-11 and 26:12-18 they saw the light but heard no voice. It was Paul who clearly had the experience.

Postscript

How you read this amazing collection of books known as the Bible is likely to determine aspects of your 'faith'. What is pretty clear is that very few of the books are actual records of fact, however badly remembered.

This is not helped by our 21st century perspective in terms of how we read information – expecting accurate recording of actual events, or complete works of fiction. This was not the world view at the times these books were written.

The authors all had a message to convey, and the story wasn't going to be spoiled by taking factual detail into account!

What I suggest though, is that it must be difficult for those who do read the Bible as if written in a modern, factual way, to hold together all the inconsistencies and remain confident in 'the word of God' as a literal document. Good luck to them.

Many thanks to Robin for some OT detail included in the answers above.