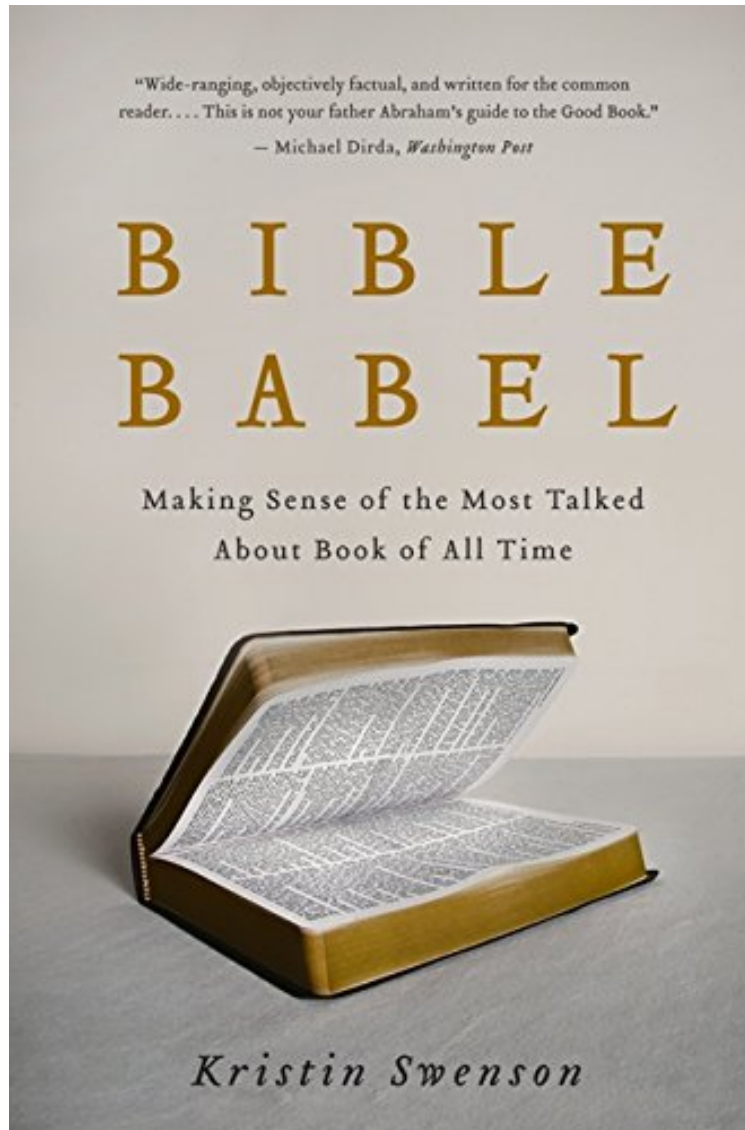


[Download] Bible Babel: Making Sense of the Most Talked About Book of All Time

Bible Babel: Making Sense of the Most Talked About Book of All Time

Kristin Swenson

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Kristin Swenson : Bible Babel: Making Sense of the Most Talked About Book of All Time before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bible Babel: Making Sense of the Most Talked About Book of All Time:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Nice to Finally Learn the Story Behind Bible Stories By D. M.

Prum Growing up, I was part of a church called the Bible Students. We studied the Bible every Sunday and every Wednesday evening. By age six, I knew my Bible stories cold, even the obscure ones. I had heard so much about Old Testament characters—their births, diseases, marriages and battles—I once asked my Italian grandmother if I was an American or an Israelite. Although I knew the stories, I had never given much thought about the history of the Bible. As a child, I pictured a bearded old guy scratching out verses with quill pen on a long piece of parchment. And, as an adult? Well, I still haven't given it much thought. However, thanks to Kristin Swenson and her book, *Bible Babel*, I know lots more about the topic. *Bible Babel* is a comprehensive history of how the Bible came to be. Swenson's writing is lively, engaging and thoroughly accessible to a non-Bible scholar. No dry treatise here. In fact, many parts are laugh-out-loud funny. Before I read the book, I wondered if Swenson would take a position. Would she declare the inerrancy of scripture? On the other hand, would she discuss the Bible with skepticism or perhaps, disdain. In a refreshing way, she is both respectful and impartial. Think about how often you hear Bible verses quoted, or how frequently the Bible is used to justify an action, or how many references to the Bible you can find in novels, poetry, plays and music. Wouldn't it be beneficial to know the history of this influential book? Yes, it would. And for that reason, I highly recommend *Bible Babel*.

23 of 24 people found the following review helpful. Readable, thorough, dispassionate, and for everyone!

By Alan Mazer This is such a good book that I'm surprised there aren't more people reviewing and talking about it, especially after the recent writeup in the *Washington Post*. If people aren't getting into it, I can suggest a couple reasons why. Despite Swenson's very readable style, the book is still formidable reading; it comes in at well over 300 pages, including reference materials at the back that are actually worth reading. There is some humor, but Swenson stops well short of anything approaching disrespect to any faith view. It actually reads very much like a university lecture. Lots of facts, lots of perspective, and just enough humor and personality to keep you awake. A more important reason for its slow start, I would guess, is that it doesn't really give anyone on either end of the belief spectrum (atheist to evangelical) much fodder for their point of view. This is not a book you can recommend to people who think just like you to use in ridiculing the other side. Nor will most people find their perspective wholly represented. She dismisses the use of the word "theory" in referring to evolution with the flippant (and common and incorrect) "gravity is a theory". She notes that Proverbs shares some themes with Egyptian works and assumes that the Egyptian works are primary without footnoting her statement or acknowledging that this topic is still the subject of some debate. She states that the flood story was lifted from the Mesopotamians, again without exploring alternative theories or justifying the position. Yet there is a limit to how much depth you can go into in such a book, and I suspect on the other side that some people will find her too respectful of religious belief. On many hot-topic issues (homosexuality, abortion, for example) she explains both sides from a Biblical perspective, while not arguing for one side or another. In short, she walks a very difficult line here and does it well, describing the views and discoveries of the majority of Biblical scholars at this point in time, but never giving the appearance that she has any sort of axe to grind. I think the most surprising thing to me, reading the book, is that she tacitly makes the case that some of us Bible readers are placing our faith in the wrong thing: Matthew was really written by Matthew the disciple, for example. What does it matter? In the end, the Bible is still an amazing collection of thoughts, history, and theology recorded by people who worship a common God, which has been handed down over millennia and still touches people daily. If nothing else, perhaps Swenson helps us all to look past petty arguments and more at the themes of the Bible itself. And that's a good thing!

"Bible Babel" is arranged topically, with chapters on (for example) women in the Bible, names for God, etc. Some familiarity with the Bible might be helpful, but Swenson covers all of the major themes, characters and concepts. The length of the book doesn't always allow for in-depth discussion, but even long-time readers of the Bible will find food for thought. In short, this is well worth reading for anyone who enjoys scripture, or is just curious about what's in their Bible.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Just What I Needed!

By G. Love I am 65 years old and have never read the bible until now. I recently joined a bible study group and one of the members recommended that I take a look at this book. I borrowed his copy and it is so user friendly :) just what I needed, so I purchased my own copy. Each week before I go to bible study, I read the section in the book that applies to what we will be studying that night. The author really knows her stuff and presents the material in such good form. My only complaint is the cover. Have you every seen an uglier cover? Turns out that the author lives in my hometown, so maybe I will meet her someday and make the suggestion to change the cover. Looks like a kids book.

Why does the film *Magnolia* end in a downpour of frogs? Is the serpent in the Garden of Eden the devil or just a snake? How do people use the Bible to argue different sides of today's most controversial issues? Why did Metallica's bass player name their song *Creeping Death* after watching *The Ten Commandments*? Where does the fish symbol of the Christian faith come from? Who is the lamb with seven horns and seven eyes who opens the seven seals of a cosmic scroll? Without either promoting or undermining specific beliefs, religious studies professor Kristin Swenson offers an intelligent, humorous, highly accessible, engaging, and illuminating guide to the Bible incorporating biblical scholarship with contemporary pop culture references to help readers better understand the most talked about book of all time.

Wide-ranging, objectively factual and written for the common reader. . . . Swenson's book possesses a singularly breezy tone, a kind of Jesus Christ Superstar approach to the sacred. . . . A solid, readable work that doesn't shy away from the tough issues. (Michael Dirda, *Washington Post*) Kristin Swenson offers a confident, well-paced, well-informed, and accessible guide to Bible basics and biblical literacy. The reader may expect some surprises, some confirmation of hunches, and some challenges exactly what ought to arise from serious, sustained treatment. (Walter Brueggemann, author of *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible*) Finally, a book on the Bible for the rest of us! . . . This broadside against our collective biblical illiteracy hits the sweet spot between blind belief and angry atheism. Who said a book on the Good Book can't be brave, smart, and fun? (Stephen Prothero, author of *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know and Doesn't*) Bible Babel is a breath of fresh air. . . . Kristin Swenson's writing is brisk and lively. She has an informed sense of everything relevant to the Bible. . . . She is an engaging corrector of misconceptions and a helpful guide to the common reader. (Robert Alter, author of *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*) Swenson successfully shows why, in spite of all its difficulties, the Bible remains a thought-provoking and infinite source of inspiration and debate for all kinds of people. (Publishers Weekly) Hats off to Kristin Swenson. . . . Ms. Swenson combines meticulous scholarship with an original eye and a sense of fun. She has succeeded in presenting the Bible anew in a highly accessible way. . . . A most welcome achievement. (*Washington Times*)

From the Back Cover Based on the most recent scholarship, Bible Babel is a lively and very readable introduction to the Bible what it is, where it comes from, and what's in it. Why does the film *Magnolia* end in a downpour of frogs? Is the serpent in the Garden of Eden the devil or just a snake? How do people use the Bible to argue different sides of today's most controversial issues? Who is the "queen of heaven"? While watching *The Ten Commandments*, why did Metallica's bass player think, "Whoa, it's like creeping death!" thus naming a hit song? Where does the fish symbol of the Christian faith come from? Is there a "best" translation? Who is the lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, who opens the seven seals of a cosmic scroll? The Bible informs much of our culture, but most people know little about the book itself. In this intelligent yet humorous and highly accessible guide, religious studies professor Kristin Swenson answers the above questions and more as she provides readers with basic biblical literacy. Swenson incorporates contemporary pop references from *Wall-E* to *Battlestar Galactica* to rock music and more with the latest findings of biblical scholarship to offer contextual understanding of the Bible's often complex, ambiguous, and seemingly contradictory texts. Her engaging and illuminating book does not aim to convert readers nor undermine their beliefs, but to offer basic knowledge needed to comprehend arguments and answer vexing questions about the Bible, appreciate artistic and literary references, and interpret the most talked about book of all time for themselves.

About the Author Kristin Swenson teaches religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her books include *Living Through Pain: Psalms and the Search for Wholeness* and *What Is Religious Studies?*