



the Peoples' *Companion* *to the* **BIBLE**

EDITED BY

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Questions 1–4 address your own sense of your religious background and identity. Questions 5–8 concern the standards in whatever religious community may have influenced the way you look at the Bible now. (If your views have not been shaped by a particular religion, are there particular individuals or groups that *have* influenced your thinking?) Questions 9–17 have to do with other aspects of your background and identity that may or may not be related to your religious self-understanding.

1. *Your personal religious background.* How do you describe your religious background? Have you grown up in a religious community? How do you describe yourself now in terms of religious affiliation? Have you grown closer to or farther from a religious community?
2. *Your family religious history.* What was the characteristic view of the Bible in your childhood home? Have you stayed in touch with that point of view, or do you now see the Bible differently? If there have been major changes in the way you see the Bible, how did these happen? How do you feel now about any differences within your family regarding the Bible?
3. *Your life experience.* Have you experienced a crisis in your life in which the Bible played a role? Did you come to a deeper or a different understanding of the Bible through that crisis? How do you describe the lasting effect on your understanding of the Bible?
4. *Your spirituality.* What has been your experience of the role of the Bible in your own spiritual awareness, your sense of a spiritual path, or your spiritual practice? Have particular themes or images in the Bible been important for your spiritual awareness?
5. *Your religious community.* If you identify yourself now with a particular religious community, how would you describe the way the Bible is understood and read (if it is) in that community? What is the cultural or racial makeup of your religious community? Is a diversity of people an important value in your religious community? Does this affect the way the Bible is understood?
6. *Authoritative standards.* In that religious community, what are the “norms” or standards outside the Bible that are recognized as bearing authority on the way the Bible is read or heard? Is there a “founder,” an authoritative organization or group, a creed or set of beliefs, a set of authoritative customs, a type of personal experience, a particular social commitment, or some other principle?

7. *Customary exposure to the Bible.* Describe the ways you have been or now are ordinarily exposed to the Bible. Such exposures might include worship services, group Bible studies or discussions, classes, friends and roommates, family members, radio, TV, Internet, or your own private reading. How do these exposures influence the way you read or hear the Bible?
8. *Your own "philosophy" regarding the Bible.* What is your own "working" approach to the Bible—how do you honestly think about it? Is that different from the way your religious community or the authoritative standards of your community regard it?
9. *Your ethnicity and/or race.* How do you identify yourself ethnically or racially? How does your own ethnic history, racial group, culture, and identity influence the way you read or hear the Bible?
10. *Your gender.* How do your gender and the way your culture perceives your gender influence the way you read or hear the Bible?
11. *Your class.* How do you describe yourself in relation to class? How does your class location or background influence the way you read or hear the Bible? (This is a tough question, especially in the United States, since the dominant attitude is that economic classes don't exist or are unimportant in U.S. society. It may help in answering this question to think in terms of your work experience; your inherited wealth; your income; your education to date, and your expectations for further education; your social and career expectations; and so on. You can ask these questions about yourself, about your parents, your grandparents, the people you hang with, your neighborhood, or your religious community.)
12. *Your education and professional aspirations.* How do your education so far and your educational and professional aspirations influence the way you read or hear the Bible? If you have some specific education or training in other fields (for example, your major in college), how does that influence your perception of the Bible?
13. *Your community's priorities.* How do the values, the welfare, and the survival needs of your community influence the way you read or hear the Bible? (This also may be a difficult question in the United States, since much of the dominant culture focuses strongly on the individual rather than on membership in a community. If you have trouble identifying "your community," that, too, is valuable information for reflection!)

14. *Your explicit political position.* How does your avowed political position influence the way you read or hear the Bible? (This can mean a lot more than which political party you identify with, if any. It can mean how much you feel the impact from the larger society or the government on your own life, or how much responsibility you take for society and government, and may also involve any political position you think is characteristic of your religious community.)
15. *Your implicit political stance.* Even if you do not think of yourself as very political, how does your being *not* political influence the way you read or hear the Bible? How about the religious community with which you identify (if any): Does that community claim to be “not political”? How does that influence the way the Bible is read or heard in that community?
16. *The media to which you are exposed.* Specifically, which books have you used when you have read the Bible (if you have)? Which books have influenced the way you think about the Bible? What movies, music, plays, or other cultural media come to mind when you think about the Bible?
17. *Preachers, teachers, leaders, and scholars in your life.* Are there particular individuals who are professionally trained and professionally involved in interpreting the Bible—clergy or professors of biblical studies or religion, for example—who have had an important influence on your thinking? How do they regard the Bible; how does their perception influence the way you read or hear the Bible? Do you perceive a difference between important leaders in your life and scholars of the Bible? How do you relate to that difference?
18. *How would you rank the factors you’ve just described?* Which are more important, which are less important? Are some foundational or pivotal or even nonnegotiable for you? Are there other factors that are important to the way you read the Bible that you haven’t discussed here?
19. *What have you learned about yourself?* Are you surprised by any of the factors you’ve described; have you identified influences on the way you read or hear the Bible that you hadn’t much thought about before now?
20. *What next?* Do you have any different sense of yourself as a Bible reader now that you’ve taken this inventory? Are there some aspects of the way you perceive the Bible about which you want to learn more? Are there some aspects that you’d like to change? If so, in what ways, and why?

