

What do Christians believe?

Faith Literacy Bitesize

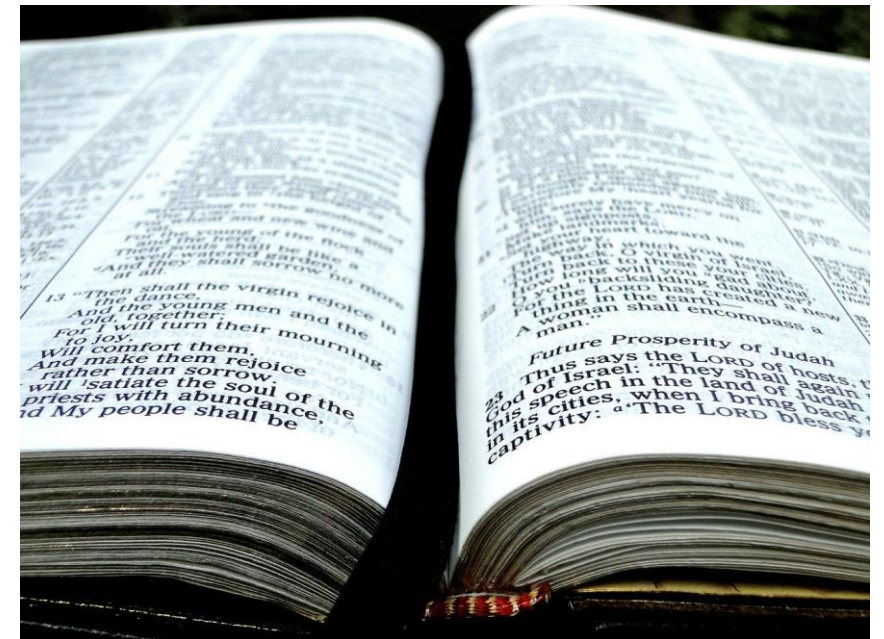
Session 2

Contents

- What is a Christian?
- What is the Bible?
- What are the core Christian beliefs?
- What are some common practices?
- Questions to discuss in groups

What is a Christian? Practicing vs Cultural Christianity

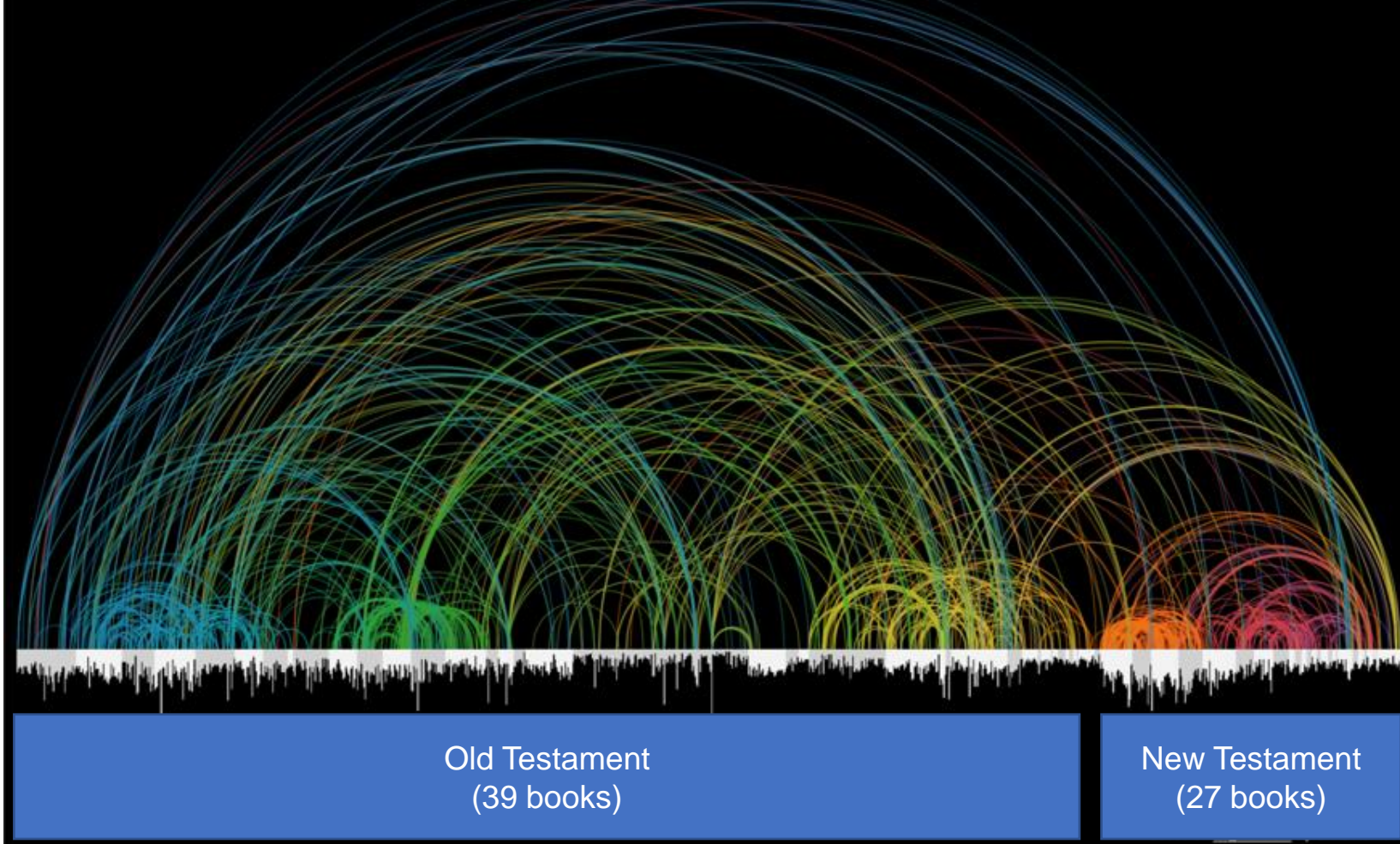
- A Christian could be thought of as a 'follower of Christ'. However, the degree to which they 'follow' Jesus Christ's teaching, and what they believe the most important aspects of this are, can vary widely.
- Many people in the UK **identify** as Christian for cultural or moral reasons, but this identity may have little impact on their day-to-day **practices or beliefs**.
- In a 2017 survey commissioned by the Church of England and partners, of those who identified as Christian (across all denominations) around **60% stated that they never read the Bible - and one in three said they never attend church**.
- Other Christians will aim to **base their whole lives** on what the Bible says, or what the church teaches.
- But even many 'active' Christians do not know in detail what the Bible teaches on certain topics, as it is a large collection of books with the meaning of certain passages being conditioned by passages elsewhere in the Bible...



The Bible is a complex collection of books, written over 1500 years

Christians believe the whole Bible is the story of God's redemption plan, through Jesus

<https://viz.bible/remaking-influential-cross-reference-visualization/>
Original work by Chris Harrison



This visualisation shows more than 63,000 cross references between the books of the Bible.

The bars along the bottom indicate the length of each chapter in the Bible.

The colours indicate the distance between the cross references.

You can see how the meaning of a passage can be conditioned by the text in other passages.

What do most Christians believe?

- Christians believe that Jesus is “the Christ” (the Messiah) promised in the Old Testament.
- Jesus stated that he “came to fulfil, not to abolish” the Old Testament law and prophets.
- Jesus claimed to be God and could therefore speak and act as only God could.
- The Bible sets out the foundational beliefs of the early church (e.g. in 1 Corinthians 15, but also elsewhere).
 - God is **one essence** but **three persons** (the Trinity). God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - Jesus is one of the three persons. He is **one person** but has **two natures** (He is fully God and fully Man).
 - God is **holy** (pure), so our own fallen nature therefore separates us from being in **relationship** with Him.
 - But Jesus came down to earth in human form, lived the perfect life and **paid the price** for our misdeeds, so that we could be **reconciled** to God. This offer of reconciliation is open to **anyone**, at any time.
 - In paying this price, Jesus was **crucified** in Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate, buried and three days later rose to new life. These events are believed to be in accordance with **prophecy** in the Jewish scriptures (Old Testament).
 - The **Holy Spirit** was then sent to dwell in each member of the church, to guide Christians to live faithfully.
- These core beliefs are not all held by Jehovah’s Witnesses (who do not think that Jesus is God / there is no Trinity) or by Mormons (who have an additional book apart from the Bible with beliefs that depart from the above).

What are some common Christian practices?

There are not as many set rules around practice as in some other religions.

Accordingly practices can vary quite widely but commonly include:

Study of the Bible

Serving others' needs

Fasting / observing Lent

Personal prayer time

Meeting together with
other Christians for
worship

Celebrating Easter
and Christmas

Holy Communion
(Bread and wine)

Teaching / telling
others about Jesus

Baptism

Keeping Sunday special

Questions for discussion

- 1) Did this talk miss out anything you think is important?
- 2) To what extent do you think that the UK is still **influenced** by Christian values, even if the number of people regularly attending church is not as high as it used to be?
- 3) What sorts of **open questions** could you ask a Christian at work to find out more about their own beliefs and practices? (e.g. Have you always been a Christian? Do you