

How to Use *The Peoples' Bible*

This Bible was developed to help students and readers understand how people from different cultures, from different parts of the world, read and understand the Bible. No single, exclusive way to approach the Bible is proposed here because there are so many possible ways to interpret its writings. Rather, *The Peoples' Bible* gathers the voices of different interpreters from different social locations as a way of encouraging students and readers to recognize that *all* Bible interpreters are people whose cultures of origin and social locations influence their scholarship. Similarly, *The Peoples' Bible* encourages students and readers to reflect on how *their* cultures and social locations continue to shape them as Bible readers and interpreters.

In general, *The Peoples' Bible* is intended to help each reader find his or her own voice in and through the text, and also to hear the voices of others. This is done best when the Bible is read and studied in the midst of socially diverse groups and communities, where a multiplicity of voices can come alive. Many resources in this study Bible encourage this process.

The editors have invited a wide range of scholars to contribute overviews of the major sections of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Apocrypha, and the Second (traditionally, New) Testament, and to introduce each book of the Bible. The reader is encouraged to read the relevant section overview and book introduction prior to studying a certain text or an entire book. This helps to set the stage for informed and inclusive interpretation. Study notes have been placed throughout the books of the Bible to draw the reader's attention to particular scriptural passages that offer examples of how culture and interpretation intersect. These can be occasions for individual reflection—*How does this voice resemble my own? How is it different?*—and for group discussion as well: *How have the historical experiences of different peoples shaped the ways we hear the Bible? How do they challenge assumptions we have taken for granted? Does our encounter with the Bible help us recognize the ways we establish our own identities at cultural crossroads today, whether through connection with others or through contrast and conflict?*

A number of articles raise issues or suggest strategies for interpretation that readers may apply to the larger narrative of the Bible, not just to particular texts, books, or sections. Several essays delve deeply into the role of culture in the biblical narratives and how culture affects our present-day view of the Bible. These essays place the reader at a crossroads where the perspectives of Native American, Latina/o, Asian American, and African American cultures meet. They alert us to the nuances of particularity and to the possibilities for conflict and collision, as well as for convergence and community, in the process



of interpretation. The impact of culture is also noted in the diversity of views of the biblical God and in the ways a culturally rooted Jesus of Nazareth was transformed over history to serve processes of cultural domination. Other essays explore the ways traditional forms of interpretation have sanctified exclusivist worldviews; the role played by one or another empire in shaping biblical history and subsequent interpretation; and the tensions present when Christians set about to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures. An article discussing the Bible as an instrument of reconciliation moves from the realm of theory to that of action and activism.

Visual resources have been selected to enhance the reader's experience. Readers will find the maps helpful for relating the biblical stories to actual landscapes. A color art gallery provides angles of vision into the biblical narratives that are sometimes inaccessible through words alone.

Using *The Peoples' Bible* in the Classroom

Professors of biblical studies or religion who wish to bring multicultural perspectives and the diversity of interpretive options into the classroom will find *The Peoples' Bible* a welcome resource. Some possibilities include the following:

Instructors who have shaped their courses around the histories that produced the biblical writings will want to rely on the section and book introductions, which emphasize the social and historical dynamics behind the text, and on articles discussing the Bible as a text of culture, the role of empires, and the biblical representations of God.

Instructors wishing to emphasize the literary character of the biblical writings will also want to use the section and book introductions and the study notes to direct their students' attention to particular aspects of the text that have caught the ear, and eye, of one or another community.

Those wishing to teach methods of biblical interpretation may note that *The Peoples' Bible* is a study Bible with a difference. By design, the text of the Bible printed here does not include the headings, marginal notes, or running commentary that in other study Bibles can give the impression that a particular passage has a single, authoritative meaning. Here the section and book introductions are designed to invite students into diverse encounters with the biblical text. Students should think of the writer of each introduction, not as making authoritative pronouncements on the meaning of a text, but as offering to accompany the reader with an informed but nevertheless personally inflected perspective.



Teachers who intend to use a survey or introductory textbook in their course will see that the articles at the beginning of *The Peoples' Bible* recognize the importance of historical- and literary-critical methods. Teachers who intend to assign only a classroom Bible will appreciate the succinct attention these articles give to the importance of history, identity, and culture in the formation of the biblical writings and in their subsequent interpretation.

Instructors may wish to use specific classroom techniques with *The Peoples' Bible*. For example:

An instructor may wish to draw attention to the distinctiveness of one or another writer's perspective, asking students: How does the writer's cultural background, the experience of his or her people, shape his or her reading of the Bible? How does your reading reflect your own sense of social and cultural identity?

The study notes may be used as occasions for classroom conversation: How does the perspective of the writer draw us into the biblical text? How does the writer open up a new insight into the text? How might the experience of other peoples provide different insights?

The images in the art gallery might be used to focus attention in a more intuitive, nonverbal way. Which images are more familiar? Which less? Which images draw you into a connection with another culture? Which draw you into the Bible so that you experience it in a new way?

The introductory articles might be relied upon to focus students' reading and discussion of the biblical materials. For one or another biblical book, students might be asked: How are different understandings of God evident in the text? How have the dynamics of the rise and fall of empires shaped the text? Or: Have Christians read this text differently from Jews or others? How might any of us come to read the text differently today?

Instructors who wish to incorporate the Bible as a resource in courses on social justice, peace or reconciliation studies, or similar courses in a humanities curriculum might well do something similar. They might rely on the articles on the Bible in cultures and the Bible as an instrument of reconciliation and ask: How has this text been taken up and wielded as an instrument of harm in conflicts between ethnic groups, between nations, or between social classes? How has the text served as a resource for healing and reconciliation? How might it serve as such today?



Using *The Peoples' Bible* in Congregational Settings

Congregational leaders and teachers will find *The Peoples' Bible* a valuable resource for worship, education, and mission. Preachers may find that regular use of *The Peoples' Bible* alerts them to the different ways the Bible—and things said about it from the pulpit—may strike the ears of persons from different backgrounds and social locations. Congregations may wish to adopt *The Peoples' Bible* as their pew Bible as a sign of welcome and an occasion for opening their shared life to others at the margins.

Bible teachers in the congregation, working with youth and adults alike, may appreciate the way *The Peoples' Bible* highlights the perspective of the reader and stimulates exploration and question, rather than providing set answers.

Finally, those who seek to call their congregations outward into greater engagement with a divided and troubled world may find in *The Peoples' Bible* a useful spur to mission. Here is a Bible that acknowledges the diversity of ways, hurtful and healing alike, in which different groups and peoples have experienced sacred Scripture. Here is a Bible that challenges the assumption that any one group may possess Scripture as its own or control its interpretation. Here is a Bible that may invite readers more deeply into an encounter with a God who desires to be recognized as the creator of *all* the peoples of the earth and to be known as the reconciler of *all* peoples who learn to live together in community with one another in ever greater harmony.

Additional resources for this volume can be found online at www.fortresspress.com/peoplesbible.