

The Twible

Advance Praise

“*The Twible* adapts the Old Testament to the light-hearted quipping familiar in everyday Tweets.”

—*The Guardian*, UK

“*The Twible* is the most entertaining version of my dad’s book I’ve read in the last two millennia!”

—Jesus Christ†

“*Twible* is the best example I have ever seen of the reverence of irreverence. Only those who love deeply and securely can bring this kind of humor to the telling of the family’s stories. Don’t read it, unless you are prepared to fall in love with them again.”

—Phyllis Tickle, author of *The Divine Hours* and *The Great Emergence*

“I wouldn’t object if *Twibles* were in every hotel room. If they’re using this book, I look forward to the next time Christians attempt to proselytize me.”

—Hemant Mehta, The Friendly Atheist blogger; author of *The Young Atheist’s Survival Guide*

“Forget about reading the Bible in a year. Now you can read it in an hour, thanks to the subversive, somewhat disturbed, mind of Jana Riess. She tweets you through all 1,189 chapters of the Bible, and manages to capture the main point—and often the general weirdness factor—of each chapter. After reading this book, whether you are new to the Bible or a seasoned veteran, you will agree that this woman needs help. But along the way, you’ll also get a fresh, funny, and profound take on the Bible you never knew or thought you knew.”

—Peter Enns, author of *Genesis for Normal People* and *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say about Human Origins*

“The perfect (surreptitious) iPad or Tablet companion for draggy Sunday (or Saturday) morning services. Caution: Not to be used for congregational Scripture reading.”

—Mark I. Pinsky, author of *The Gospel According to the Simpsons*

“Whatever you think of Twitter, there can be no speedier or funnier way to read through the Bible than with Riess’s *Twible* providing spot-on interpretation chapter by chapter. On a jet stream of solid scholarship, it’ll keep you thinking long after the hashtags have burned away.”

—Kristin Swenson, author of *Bible Babel: Making Sense of the Most Talked-about Book of All Time*

“*The Twible* is an indelible book that reads like an oddly religious comedy but has the impact of a brilliant jingle that sticks in your brain to the point of madness. Read it and drive yourself pleasantly nuts.”

—Frank Schaeffer, author of *And God Said, “Billy!”*

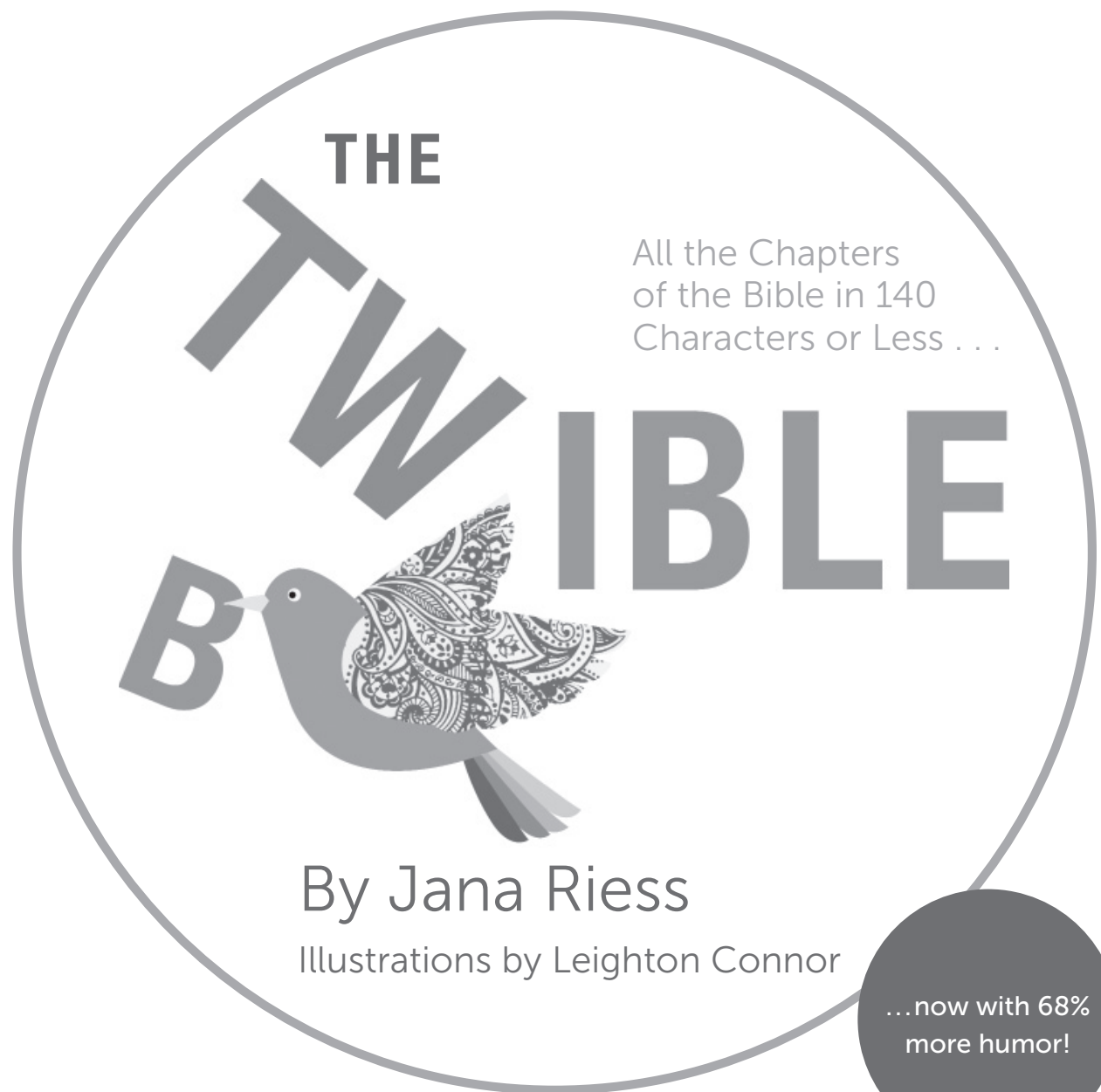
“This is brilliant stuff—hilariously accurate summaries of complex material. I love *The Twible*. I will keep it next to all my stodgy commentaries, not just for a laugh, but because it is imperative, I believe, to approach the Bible with a sense of humor if we hope to understand it. Riess is a very funny, charmingly masterful guide. Everyone should have *The Twible* next to the Bible. It will help you get through the sometimes dense and hoary text—laughing.”

—Debbie Blue, pastor; author of *Consider the Birds: A Provocative Guide to the Birds of the Bible*

“This is absolutely the funniest and most fun Bible ‘translation’ ever. Yet, throughout the ensuing hilarity there is a wisdom here that challenges and provokes. It’s hard to get around the fact that while you are having a blast reading Riess’s laugh-out-loud redaction of the scriptures, you are often left reflecting on the Biblical verses from a new, and slightly skewed, angle. Like the court jester who exposes the king to troubling and potent truths clothed as cunning jests, this book forced me to reexamine and reinterpret my mundane habits of viewing the text, sometimes in startling ways that both delighted and vexed me out of my safe and comfortable familiarity. Don’t miss *The Twible*.”

—Steven L. Peck, author of *A Short Stay in Hell* and *The Scholar of Moab*

† This is not actually the Jesus of the New Testament. He was busy and could not be reached for comment. This is that other guy.



THE

TWIBBLE

B



All the Chapters
of the Bible in 140
Characters or Less ...

IBBLE

By Jana Riess

Illustrations by Leighton Connor

...now with 68%
more humor!

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ISBN 978-0-9897747-0-3

1st edition

Published by Jana Riess

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Book design by Paraclete Press

Cover design by Paraclete Press

Illustrations by Leighton Connor

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In memory of my beloved mother, Phyllis Riess,

1941-2013



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(Or, Every Book of the Bible Explained in Seven Words or Less. Go.)

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Introduction

I love the Bible.

I tell you this now just in case you begin to wonder about my feelings down the road, when you see me railing at God for slaughtering all the Midianites or pointing out how King David's family put the fun in dysfunctional. I have issues with the Bible, sure, but always in the context of a lover's quarrel. And I'm fond enough of the Bible to know that it can take a good-natured joke. Or, in the case of this book, 1,189 of them.

Here's how it started. In the fall of 2009, on a trip to Southern California (the birthplace of more than one bizarre religious idea), I consulted the Bible in my hotel nightstand for a single piece of information. Flipping through its pages I was then struck, Old Testament lightning-style, by how many parts of the Bible I had never read. I could not at that time have told you what an ephod was, or why the Books of Chronicles omit kingly tabloid headlines that were so salacious when the same stories were told in 2 Samuel. And the Book of Habakkuk? No idea.

So I decided to try an experiment: I would work my way through the entire Bible, summarizing a chapter a day on Twitter in 140 characters or less but with humorous commentary. And I would do this *Twible* (rhymes with Bible) project in community. Like many people of faith, I had tried before to read the Bible cover to cover, without success. But through social media I discovered a reading community of people who wanted to know more about the Bible, but could never get very far on their own. Apparently it takes a virtual village to get some people to read the Bible, myself included.

I've learned a great deal I never knew about the Good Book, including the following important facts that are highly relevant to daily life:

- If one of my friends has a dream in which a foreign god speaks to her, I am supposed to kill her on the spot. It is good to know this in advance, as wholesale slaughter can really put a damper on a relationship.
- The Book of Revelation has another nativity story that's not quite like the shepherd-and-manger one from the Gospel of Luke. In this one, a sparkly woman gives birth to

baby Jesus with a dragon in attendance so it can get first dibs on eating the baby. It's difficult to pull this off in local Christmas pageants, so the story gets little play.

- When God promised Noah that he would never again destroy the earth by flood, he didn't say anything about the earthquakes and tsunamis he was holding in reserve. So do watch the Weather Channel.
- When God's spirit departs from the Jerusalem temple in the Book of Ezekiel, it's like in Star Trek where the Enterprise's shields go down and they're vulnerable to Klingon attack. You really don't want to be on the ship at that moment.
- There are 150 Psalms, which can be five months of your life if you are tweeting the Bible every day. It turns out that is a very long time.

I've also learned that the Bible is a wonderful collection of teachings about God. Its 66 books run the gamut from God as Punisher-in-Chief (Numbers) to God as a merciful and loving Dad who just can't understand why his kids give him crap all day long (Hosea). Its characters are schemers and prophets, failures and heroes, lovers and fighters—and all those contradictions can be embodied in the same individual. (I'm talking to you, Jacob.)

In short, the Bible is wildly complicated. *The Twible*, by contrast, is pretty simple. Its goal is to make you laugh. If you learn something along the way, as I have, all the better. It's certainly true that most of us, even those who identify ourselves as Jewish or Christian, don't know a lot about the Bible these days. Gallup polls suggest that “basic Bible reading is at a record low,” and religion scholar Stephen Prothero cites surveys showing that although two-thirds of Americans think that the Bible has the answers to life's most important questions, they're not actually reading it. Most cannot name the first book of the Bible; only half can identify even one of the four Gospels; and ten percent think that Joan of Arc is Noah's wife. (That last bit is not a joke, unfortunately, even though it sounds exactly like something *The Twible* would make up.)

As I've been tweeting the Bible, the greatest compliment I've received is when people thought something was funny. One woman told me that a morning tweet was amusing enough that she snorted coffee out her nose, which made my day because causing readers to spew beverages should be the express goal of every writer. The main purpose of this

project has always been to bring levity to an all-too-serious subject. But the second-greatest compliment I've gotten is when people tell me that *The Twible* has actually sent them to the original Bible to see for themselves what these stories have to say.

You can read *The Twible* any way you please. You might do it straight through from Genesis to Revelation so that you can brag to your friends and kids that yes, of course you have read the entire Bible and you know exactly what the book of Obadiah is about. (It's about killing Edomites, since you asked.) Or maybe you will read *The Twible* just for the cartoons. There are more than fifty of them in this book, because how fun is the Bible without cartoons? It's fine if you want to laugh at the pictures instead of reading the text. That's how I read *The New Yorker*, only don't tell anybody.

You'll see throughout the book that some biblical characters' names have been shortened for Twitter usage. God goes by G, Jesus is JC, and Job is just Job, because poor Job loses so many other things in the Bible that it seemed like the final insult to also abbreviate the letters in his name. If you ever get confused about who's who, just check out the glossary at the back of the book.

The Bible says that a cheerful heart is good medicine (Prov. 17:22), so it's my hope that *The Twible* contributes to a cheerful heart and therefore to your overall health. Happy reading.


Jana

HEBREW BIBLE

OLD TESTAMENT



GENESIS



Overview: In the beginning were some messed-up folks and a God who couldn't decide whether to love them or kill them. Say amen.

1: After 6 days of creation, G's totally wiped. Day off tomorrow! Key point: human beings very good. M and F in G's image.

2: 2nd creation story. G forms Adam from dust; very green, 100% recycled material. Eden good. Don't eat *that* tree. Yep, that one.

3: Adam and Eve social climbers. Drink antioxidants from pomegranate juice so as to live forever. Doesn't work out; G's ticked. Exile.

4: Adam and Eve find sex fun, but kids are a problem. Cain forgets meds; offs Abel. "Am I my bro's keeper?" Abel replaced with Seth. Ouch.



Two By Two By Seven

You know all those songs about how Noah brings one pair of each animal onto the arky, arky? Well, if you were an unclean animal, that's a totally accurate picture. Mr. and Mrs. Pig, for example, would both happily lumber onto the boat that would save their entire piggy race. So it would go for the unclean.

But if you were a clean animal (lucky you!), Noah was supposed to bring along seven pairs of you. Was he saving all seven because they were special, you ask? Good question. But no. The Bible isn't as sweet as all that. The other pairs of clean animals were destined for sacrifice.

(Just as an early FYI, a *lot* of the creatures and people you meet in this book are going to die. It's a Bible thing.)

5: Adam dies @ 930 years. It's all downhill from here as life span dwindles. Except for Methuselah @ 969 years. He ate whole grains.

6: Nephilim demigods get it on with human chicks and sire giants. Weirdest passage in Torah? G has maker's remorse and regrets humanity.

7: Weather alert! G gives Noah 1 week eviction notice: "Take 7 pairs of each clean animal in Ark to avoid flood. Oh, and BYO Renuzit."

8: After 190+ days, H2O subsides. However, a crummy vacation package requires 150 more days of waiting on the stinky ship for FEMA cleanup.

9: They've de-arked. G sends a rainbow to promise he'll never again murder us by flood. Keeps earthquakes, tsunamis & hurricanes in reserve.

10: Begat, begat, begat. Name index includes Ludium, Lehabim and Jerah, all now available by prescription. Ask your doctor about Ophir.

11: We built this city! We built this city on rock and stone! Bad idea; G annoyed. Language scattered. *No puedo entenderte.*

12: Hello, Abram. G promises land and descendants. Father Ab responds by lying to Pharaoh and pimping out wife Sarai. What a bright future.

13: Abram, loaded with cash, divides turf with nephew Lot. Lot gets Sodom, a risky real estate investment. Be sure to buy fire insurance.


14: Four kings seize Lot. Oh no! Ab comes to the rescue even though Lot's the village idiot. Maybe blood really is thicker than water.

God's Plan B

"The first eleven chapters [of Genesis] . . . are about the relationship between God and the entire human community. That relationship does not go well, and after ten generations the deity decides to destroy the mass and start over with a single virtuous man's family [Noah]. But it turns out that choosing a virtuous individual does not guarantee that this individual's descendents will be virtuous as well. Another ten generations pass, and humans in general are not a planet-full of Noahs. So once again the focus narrows to a single virtuous person, Abraham. We must keep in mind what has happened up to this point when we read this, or else we will lose the significance of what is happening here. Wiping out everyone but a virtuous person did not work. So God leaves the species alive but chooses an individual who will produce a family that will ultimately bring blessing to all the families of the earth."

■ Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*





15: Ab: “Where’s that friggin’ heir you promised?” G: “Number the stars. So will your offspring be. You’re gonna need a bigger boat.”

16: Barren Sarai begs Ab to bed down with slave girl Hagar. This solution spawns a son but also impressive catfights. Ab gets a migraine.

17: Abram now Abraham. G was clearly not thinking ahead about the Twitter character count. Name longer; foreskin snipped. A tradeoff.

18: *The Negotiator.* Ab: “What if 50 righteous are in Sodom?” G: “OK, I won’t torch if I find 50.” Ab: “45? 40? 30? 10?” G: “OK, OK! Lay off!”

19: Lot sacrifices his own daughters to the raping hordes. BTW, Lot’s the GOOD guy in chapter 19. Just in case you were wondering.

20: Ab pulls the “she’s my sister” act again; successfully pimps out Sarah for more sheep, oxen, and slaves. Three cheers for Father Ab!

21: Ab (100) and Sarah (90) have Isaac without IVF. Wow! But they don’t need Hagar anymore, so they throw her under a passing bus.

22: Ultimate psych test: G commands sacrifice of Ab’s chosen son Isaac. Ram saves day @ the last minute. Um, what kind of G is this?

The Top Five Incestuous Relationships in Genesis

1. Judah sleeping with daughter-in-law Tamar (Gen. 38).

FYI: Judah actually mistakes her for an anonymous prostitute, which would of course make everything morally above board. So stop your judging.

2. Cain and whoever he had kids with (Gen. 4). If you interpret the Bible literally and believe that Adam and Eve were the first people on the earth, his mate had to be his own dear sister, because she would have been almost the only game in town at that point. The other option would be Eve, Cain's mom, but let's not even go there.

3. Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19). Lot's two daughters get him drunk and seduce him, then nine months later bear Ammon and Moab, respectively. And this from the people who were righteous enough to survive Sodom and Gomorrah.

4. Sarah and Abraham (Gen. 20). They're half-siblings, so when Abraham excuses his behavior of prostituting Sarah to wealthy men with the "she's my sister" routine, he's actually half-right.

5. Reuben and Bilhah (Gen. 35). Jacob's son Reuben has an affair with Jacob's concubine Bilhah, the mom of Dan and Naphtali. And there is Reuben wondering why he isn't Dad's favorite child. Hmmm.



Sibling Rivalry in the Bible

You know the Bible's going to be a brother-on-brother kind of book right from the beginning, when Cain slays Abel. Never mind that Abel was kind of a suckup who might have deserved it, or that God is patently unfair to Cain. It's still fratricide.

The rivalry of Jacob and Esau sets a pattern in the Bible for younger brothers to subvert the whole primogeniture thing and put themselves forward. Jacob may trail Esau in coming out of the womb, but he's top of the class in deceit, tricking their dad (and Esau, who comes across as a bit of an oaf) into giving him the blessings and rights that should have been Esau's. Nicely played, Jacob.

But turnabout is fair play in the Bible, and Jacob soon watches with horror as similar dramas unfold among his own twelve sons. Next-to-youngest son Joseph has big dreams and his father's unswerving devotion, so he's Public Enemy Number One in the eyes of his older brothers. First they try to kill him but then decide merely to sell him into slavery and lie to Dad about it.

It's not like the younger brother pattern stops with Genesis. In Exodus, we'll see Moses become more important than Aaron; later, wimpy runt David surpasses all his older brothers to be chosen as the next king; and later still, David's semi-bastard Solomon takes the throne when his older brothers try to kill Dad and each other.

How's that for family values?

23: Sarah dies at 127 and Ab nabs choice burial plot. (This chapter is mostly filler after the drama of the-sacrifice-that-wasn't. Yawn.)

24: Meet-cute 1. Isaac is told, “Whoever waters the camels is your girl.” Rebecca wins! See tabloids for spicy details & glam wedding pics.

25: Reb’s twins have a WWF-worthy prenatal throwdown. (Psst! Foreshadowing.) Esau’s 1stborn, but Jake’s a real trickster. Watch your back.

26: Like father, like son. Isaac mimics the “she’s my sister” act to pimp out wife Reb. Again leads to riches. We never learn.


27: Jake tricks Isaac into blessing him instead of big brother Esau. Isaac, like Brad Pitt, appears to have facial recognition challenges.

28: Jake gets outta Dodge but suffers weird ladder-climbing dreams. This “stone for a pillow” stuff is a far cry from Westin’s Heavenly Bed.

29: Meet-cute 2. Jake works 24/7 to wed Rachel, but her dad pulls a sneaky switch and substitutes Leah instead. Way to trick the trickster.

30: Rach to G: “Gimme kids!” Finally, Rach has Joseph, one of Jake’s 11 (later 12) sons. There’s also a daughter, or 6, or possibly 21.





31: Rach steals family idols and sits on them. Says she's having red tent issues, but Jake's the one who acts like he's got PMS.

32: Jake wrestles with an angel. Man, he'll pick fights with *anybody!* Moral: when you want G's blessing, always employ violence.

33: Jake and Esau reconcile. Well, sort of. "Let's do lunch," says Jake, while settling his family a REALLY safe distance away.

34: Rape of Dinah. Jake arranges a shotgun wedding, but the bros prefer vigilante justice. Blood, gore. Your typical day in Bibleland.

35: Jake purifies the house of all foreign idols, but Rach dies in childbirth anyway. Such is G's loyalty rewards program.

36: Footnote. Esau is the father of the Edomites. They don't become important until the Book of Obadiah, or maybe ever. Begat, begat.

37: 11 Bros ticked when Joseph dreams of lording it over them. First they deep-six him in a pit, then try human trafficking. Joe enslaved. ☹️

38: Trouble back home. Judah's ex-DIL Tamar asserts her rights, dressing as a whore to nab Judah as her new hubby. Um, eeeeew.



39: Joe's a model slave until he's falsely accused of a sex scandal with the boss's wife. So then he's sold down the Nile. Literally.

40: Joe interprets the dreams of a cupbearer ("Early parole!") and a baker ("You're wearing a very red shirt"). Chef, you've been chopped.

41: Joe interprets Pharaoh's funky dream about feast & famine; supervises massive Agriculture program. Joe's a hero & leader. A bit smarmy.

42: Meanwhile, back at the ranch in Canaan, Joe's family begins to starve. So they trek to Egypt for food stamps in hieroglyphics.

43: The brothers are so wiggled out w/ hunger that they don't recognize Joe, who's oddly glad to see his would-be murderers. Family ties.

44: Still no Big Reveal. Joe frames Ben as thief to test his brothers' family values. They pass when Judah offers himself instead. A+.

45: FINALLY the teary reunion. Joe forgives his brothers and sets whole family up for life. *Extreme Makeover: OT Edition*. Robes, gifts.

46: G persuades an aging Jake to move the entire clan to Egypt. It's not like there's a single twig left to eat in Canaan anyway.



47: Phar nationalizes land and livestock. He also begins to enslave people, a policy that will bite him in the ass in about 400 years.

48: History repeats itself when Jake swaps the deathbed blessings of his grandsons, favoring younger bro Ephraim. A trickster to the end.

49: Dying Jake chastises Reuben and praises Judah. (How soon we forget Tamargate.) The 12 brothers are now the 12 tribes of Israel.

50: Bros to Joe: “No hard feelings?” Joe: “Nah, we’re square. It’s super that you tried to kill and enslave me. I so totally love you guys!”



***Twible* Tip to Straighten Out the Genesis Patriarchs**

If you’re having trouble remembering all five generations, use alphabetical order for each major patriarch: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Manasseh.

This technique doesn’t work with the women’s names, but women appear to be afterthoughts anyway, so, you know, whatever.



JOB



Overview: I'd tell you about Job, but man, my boils are itchy. Also, my kids all snuffed it and G's gone AWOL. Waaaaah. Why me? *Why?*

1: “The Satan” makes Bible debut; looks Job up on “The Google.” Is Job really that pious? Let’s kill his 10 kids and find out!


2: Job still won’t curse G, so Satan ups the ante by giving Job boils on his skin. Surely now the guy will crack. Literally.

3: Now entering 40+ chapters of poetry. Job curses the day he was born—with onomatopoeia, no less. That’s grace under pressure.

4: With friends like these, who needs Friends of Job? FOJ #1 says, “Dude, this is all your fault. You reap what you sow.”

5: FOJ #1 cont: “Happy are those the Lord disciplines!” That’s easy for you to say, Mr. Smug. You’re not childless and covered in boils.





6: Job: “Gee, did you also bring salt and lemon to rub into my open sores, here, people? Talk about blaming the victim. Sheesh.”

7: Job talks to G like his friends aren’t really there. (They never listen anyway, so it’s OK.) “G, just let me croak already.”

8: FOJ #2 insists that good people always get rewarded and bad people always get punished. He learned that at the movies.

9: Job: “Once more for the hearing impaired: I’m *blameless*. Really. This isn’t punishment for sin!” But FOJs don’t get the memo.

10: Job: “Woe is me. G, I’m hauling your ass to court for abandonment. My life sucks and it’s not my fault. *Where’s Judge Judy?*”

11: FOJ #3 tells Job to stop blaspheming and start IDing where he sinned. If he repents, everything will be peachy again. Promise!

12: Job belts a 12-bar blues classic about being a laughingstock, but follows up with a praise song about G’s terrible power. Kinda schizo.

13: Job: “OK, that’s it. I’m lawyering up. But you 3 clowns will NOT represent me with your cute aphorisms. The door is that way.”

14: Deep Thoughts about death: We’re like those leaves that trickle down, always at the mercy of the Great Leaf Blower of life.




This is all your fault, Job.

Bad people always get punished.

But aren't you lucky to have good friends like us?





15: FOJ #1: “Job, you’re undermining Mom, religion, tradition, and green bean casserole. You make me nervous with your questions.”

16: Job: “Can I just say that you 3 stink as comforters? You talk, talk, talk, but do you even care? Wait, don’t answer that.”

17: Job prays to G for relief from suffering. It might also be nice if G saw fit to smite his so-called friends. Just an idea.

18: FOJ #2 strains his head with this syllogism: “If G punishes the wicked, and Job is suffering, THEREFORE Job is wicked. It’s so clear.”

19: Job: “I know that my avenger lives. It’d be gratifying if I got justice before my flesh is ripped off, but I guess I can’t be picky.”

20: FOJ #3 starts getting all offended and reminds Job that the wicked never go unpunished. Job is rolling what remains of his eyes.

21: Job: “Actually, wickedness goes unpunished often. Exhibit A is standing here in front of me. Remind me why you’re still here, liar?”

22: And it’s Round 3 with the 3 FOJs! FOJ #1 goes for the jugular and says Job oppressed widows and the poor. Them’s fightin’ words.

23: Job mutters to G about how an upright person who obeyed the law ought to be permitted to lodge a proper complaint. So there.

24: Q: Why does Donald Trump prosper and celebrities go free after murder? *Why, G?* A: Um, we'll get back to you on that. Or not.

25: FOJ #2 finally says something worth hearing: "Job, G is all-powerful, and YOU'RE NOT HIM." Well, when you put it that way.

26: Job: "Again with the blame-the-victim schtick. But since you mention it, G *is* pretty amazing, huh? Who are we to understand?"

27: Death comes even to the rich. This is a good thing, or there'd be no justice at all. When it does, can I take your vineyard?

28: We've had a lot of heavy philosophy, so let's interrupt with a lovely song to Dame Wisdom, who rocks. Gold and silver can't equal her.

29: Job offers closing argument as his own defense counsel: "My life used to be so blessed. I helped the poor. WTF happened, G?"

30: Job: "Now I'm mocked and hated; why? And why is G not answering my calls? Oh, and my skin is falling off. What's up with THAT?"

31: Job ends closing argument and insists he's blameless. What judge wouldn't be moved by his ordeal? Judge G, it seems. *Silence.*



Wisdom Literature

The Bible is one wise book. Well, actually, the Bible is a compilation of many wise books, written by many people over the course of centuries. But some of those books are wiser than others, and those are the ones called “wisdom literature.” (Cryptic, I know. Stay with me.)

Let’s take a look at where this wisdom lit fits into the grand scheme of the Bible. In the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, the three main divisions of books are:


- 1. Torah, or the Pentateuch.** The Torah (Hebrew for “law”) is made up of the first five books of the Bible. As you probably remember, it’s mostly history with some important laws thrown in, like the one about washing hands over a dead cow whenever you’re trying to figure out who committed a murder (Deut. 21). This vital crime-solving technique is now standard procedure in our nation’s police academies.
- 2. Nevi’im, or the Prophets.** We’ve already seen some of these books, called the “Former Prophets” (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings). Pretty soon we’ll get to the really juicy “Latter Prophets,” like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. They have some, er, lively words to tell Israel about the many inventive ways God is planning to carve her up and serve her to Assyria. Or maybe Babylon. Or perhaps Persia.

3. Ketuvim, or the Writings. Every taxonomic system needs a catch-all category, right? Well, “the Writings” would be it for the Bible. This includes everything from history (the Ezra-Nehemiah unit and Chronicles) to wisdom literature, which gets its name not just from its sage advice (though there’s that), but also because Dame Wisdom often appears in these books as a personified character. In the Bible, wisdom starts with standing in awe of God (Prov. 9:10), so it’s more about putting God first than it is about accumulating degrees or particular knowledge. The wisdom literature books include:

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon
- A couple of other books that Protestants have downgraded to the Apocrypha but which you should check out anyway

A primary feature of the Bible’s wisdom literature is poetry, which is a significant portion of the Book of Job here. Remember that you get extra credit as a *Twible* reader every time you go back to the original Bible for a consult, and that’s especially true of the wisdom literature. The poetry is often gorgeous, and 140 characters can’t even begin to do it justice.





32: Job gets the champion he's been seeking in young Elihu, who makes mincemeat of the FOJs' arguments. Hooray! An eleventh-hour witness!

33: Hold the phone. Elihu's rebuking Job now too: "G's bigger than any human, even a Mr. Clean type like you." Things get interesting.

34: Elihu turns out not to be Job's defense attorney so much as G's Piety Czar. Rats. Job knew he should've hired Dershowitz.

35: Elihu: "Let's get some perspective. G's a lot bigger than you, Job. Try to see his side, and don't be such a Debbie Downer."

36: Elihu insists that G is fair, despite Job's dead kids, rotting body, and sudden famine. For some reason, Job's not feeling the love.

37: Elihu closes his speech with a nod to G's impressive natural wonders. Thunderbolt and lightning, very very frightening. Be afraid.

38: G makes an unexpected cameo appearance, going mano-a-mano with Job about creation: "Where were you, punk, when I created the earth?"

39: G goes at Job again with the 20 Questions about creation. Bottom line: If you want to play God, you first need to be a top veterinarian.

The Friends of Job

I've been a little hard on the FOJs (Friends of Job) in these tweets. In condemning them I'm standing in a long line of interpreters who sniff and say, "Some friends!" every time one of the companions says something stupid, which is often. We like to see ourselves as Job—wrongly accused, shattered by loss, deserving of sympathy—but not in the characters of his several friends.

But philosopher Mark Larrimore cautions in *The Book of Job: A Biography* that this is a misleading path for us to take. "The book of Job should teach us to expect failures of friendship, especially from ourselves," he says. Even though Job's friends seem to continually say the wrong things, blaming Job for his suffering and clinging to conventional pieties, Larrimore points out that there's no textual evidence the three clowns ever leave his side. By the end Job may have *wanted* them to leave his side, but they probably didn't. And that in itself is friendship—even while they spout platitudes or shrink from his deep and discomfiting theological questions, they're still accompanying him in his misery. Like the friends, Larrimore says that we, too, should keep company with Job, recognizing that "Job's questions are not only 'unfinalized' but 'unfinalizable.'" Our obligation is to listen to the pain.



MATTHEW



Overview: “Just in case you missed it, JESUS IS THE MESSIAH OF THE JEWS. And Christ, it’s about time he showed up.”

1: Just when you thought we’d left the OT, here’s a string of begats to put you at ease. Ancestry.com says JC’s descended from David. Woot!

2: Astrologers are sent on a field trip to find a Messiah child somewhere out west. “A ‘star’ . . . um, could you be more specific?”



The Christmas Story

Wise men and shepherds, angels and donkeys. Few New Testament stories are more beloved than the one about Jesus' birth. Or, more accurately, the ones about Jesus' birth, because there are two and they're pretty different. So take a closer look at Matthew 2 and Luke 2. Then listen to what Timothy Beal, author of *Biblical Literacy*, says about the Nativity.

Do you notice anything missing here [in Matthew]? Where's the annunciation to Mary by the angel Gabriel? What about Mary's visit to Elizabeth? The birth of John the Baptist? No room in the inn? Away in a manger? Shepherds watching flocks by night? None of that is part of this story. That's all in the Gospel of Luke. In fact, the story of Jesus' birth that most of us know from "The Little Drummer Boy" and Christmas pageants is an amalgam of Matthew and Luke, bringing together characters and events from both gospels into one story.

What we do see in Matthew's Nativity are things that point to Jesus as a Messiah and king. Not for Matthew are lowly shepherds the first to hear the news, or poverty-stricken parents forced to give birth in a stable. After opening with a substantial genealogical detour to demonstrate Jesus' Davidic street cred, Matthew immediately places him as a "king of the Jews" who is feared by other kings. A king needs to be visited by dignitaries, so Matthew is the gospel that shows the wise men/magi not only visiting Jesus—then probably approaching two years of age—but kneeling before him. (The gospel never calls them kings, by the way, or claims that there were three of them.)

What's important about understanding these early differences in Matthew and Luke is that they are signposts to show us what will be emphasized throughout each gospel. Matthew is generally going to emphasize continuity with Jewish tradition and keep a focus on Jesus as the king of the Jews, the fulfillment of prophecy. Luke, by contrast, is far more interested in spreading the gospel beyond the Jews to include Gentiles and God knows who else.

- 3:** John the Baptist prepares the way by baptizing JC and anticipating the organic food movement. Locusts + honey = delish.
- 4:** JC's chapter checklist: Get tempted by Satan. Transform 12 losers into disciples. Launch universal health care. Quote OT when possible.
- 5:** JC's Greatest Hits include "Beatitudes," "You Are Salt," and "Don't Even Think about Adultery or You've Already Committed It."
- 6:** Don't store up your treasures on earth. Get a safety deposit box in heaven and put your heart in it. Metaphorically speaking.
- 7:** Dear judgmental hypocrite: You probably haven't noticed, but there's a big honkin' plank in your eye. You might want to remove it.
- 8:** JC heals Peter's MIL so she can fix him some supper. At least he doesn't also have her fetch him a beer while he watches TV.
- 9:** JC explicitly orders two guys not to tell anybody that he just healed them of blindness. Apparently they were also deaf, however.
- 10:** The 12 get promoted to new job title of "apostles." No extra pay, but they receive cool new superpowers. Some travel required.
- 11:** JC and JnBap are chided for not joining in the crowd's reindeer games. JnBap's too pious and JC's not pious enough. They just can't win.





12: JC tells Pharisees to lighten up about the Sabbath, which is a message so dangerous they plot to kill him. Just not on the Sabbath.

13: The 12 ask JC why he speaks to the people in parables. They'd prefer straightforward behavioral checklists, please. With maps.

14: Salome gets JnBap's head on a platter! This nummy tale whets our appetite for the next story: Feeding the five thousand. Pass the chips?

15: Pharisees are mad that the 12 don't wash hands before meals. Even Pharisee preschoolers wash while singing "Happy Birthday" to the end.

16: Spoiler alert! JC says he'll go to Jerusalem, suffer terribly, die, and rise again. The 12 want a new script with less trauma.

17: After a mountaintop transfiguration, JC no longer has to send his robes out for bleaching. Also, his face is all shiny-happy.

18: If your eye makes trouble, gouge it out. (Disclaimer: *The Twible* is not liable for any maimings that result from biblical literalism.)

19: JC says it's easier to thread a needle with a thick rope than for the rich to get into heaven. And we've botched that verse ever since.

20: Workers in a vineyard sue the boss for unpredictable labor practices. Oddly, JC sides with management. I'm more for the workers, myself.

21: JC curses a perfectly innocent fig tree. What did that tree ever do to him? Now it can never become a Fig Newton.

22: The kingdom of heaven is like when Emeril prepares a rockin' feast and invites every homeless street person in NOLA. Jumbo gumbo = yum.

23: "Woe to the Pharisees!" Which, if you read closer, probably means you. How's that gnat-straining working out for you?

24: JC says the signs of the end will include war, earthquake, and famine. Which pretty much describes every single year of human history.

25: Calling all sheep! All sheep, head this way to heaven! Thanks for feeding and clothing the poor. P.S. Sorry, goats, you're on your own.



Salome felt like her birthday
came early that year.



The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25 is one of those chapters that most of us would like to soften. Or ignore entirely. The climax of the chapter is a vision of the end times, when Jesus separates the sheep (those who have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the imprisoned, etc.) from the goats (those who preferred watching other people do good deeds on TV). The chapter puts forward the unforgettable idea that whatever we do to one another, for good or for ill, we are actually doing to Christ. What's more, our sins of omission are just as damning as any wickedness we could actively pursue.

I should tell you, on a personal note, that this passage has long scared the pants off me. I am not a biblical literalist—which will not come as a shock to you at this juncture, three-quarters of the way through *The Twible*—but if there is a fire-and-brimstone passage I take literally, it would be this one.

It's all quite terrifying, to tell you the truth.

So this seems like a good place to mention that a quarter of all author proceeds from this book are being donated to five different charities that practice humanitarian aid, and that one of them is Matthew 25 Ministries. See the acknowledgments at the end of this book for more information.

26: Rough night. Judas betrays Jesus and the other 11 fall asleep during his darkest hour. They had overloaded on carbs at the Last Supper.

27: After being tried and mocked, JC's crucified on the cross. "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" Even JC can feel distant from G.

28: JC rises from dead—stronger and now with more salvific staying power! Guards improvise a CYA story to explain how they lost his body.



40: Job: “Uh, sorry. It seems I’m out of my league.” G: “We’re not finished. You called me down here and now we’re gonna RUMBLE.”

41: G: “And have you met my pet Leviathan? No, I didn’t THINK so. If you can’t even face him, why would you want to mess with me?”

42: Justice. G rebukes the FOJs; restores Job’s kids and wealth. But being G means never having to say you’re sorry. Where’s Ms. Manners?

