

## ***A History of the Bible: The Book and Its Faiths, by John Barton***

This award-winning book is written by John Barton, the recently retired Professor of the Interpretation of Scripture, and himself an Anglican priest. Barton takes a forensic look at the Bible as a historical text and takes the reader through its various stages of compilation and the circumstances which occasioned them. His chapters are full of critical scholarship, summarizing complicated and sensitive problems with great accessibility and finesse. But they are also full of interesting and surprising discoveries - did you know that Jesus only turns water into wine in one of the four Gospels, and what was likely the latest to be written?

Barton traces not simply how the Jewish and Christian faiths use the Bible differently, but also how the stories of the Bible continue to be interpreted and re-interpreted, as they are applied to newer and newer contexts. When reading the book, think about its author too - John Barton is an Anglican priest, and he is fairly open about that - but some of the things he writes may be quite controversial for believers of different denominations of Christianity, as well as to other Anglicans. What does this tell us about faith? And what does this book teach us about the role of canonical texts in religion given their malleability?

And here are some more suggestions:

If you have not got enough of the New and Old Testament, I would recommend two lecture series as part of the online free Yale University courses:

- Introduction to the Old Testament Lecture  
Series: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLh9mgdi4rNeyuvTEbD-Ei0JdMUujXfyWi->
- New Testament History and Literature Lecture Series:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtQ2TS1CiDY&list=PL279CFA55C51E75E0>

If you are interested in belief today, and the later parts of the book which take us to the present, or other religions and situating Judaism and Christianity, as monotheistic religions, in a wider context I recommend:

- BBC Radio 4 - Beyond Belief (available on all Podcast services and BBC Sounds)
- Jan Assman, *Of God and Gods Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (2008)

- Reza Aslan, *No God but God: The Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam* (2011)
- The Ottoman History Podcast - plenty of episodes on the rise of Islam, and the role of Muslim and Christian faith in the Eastern Mediterranean world today (free on all podcast services)

Finally, and a little on the light side, I recommend the *Life of Brian*, the Monty Python parody film of a less successful prophet in the age of Jesus. Can we learn anything about religion from this film?

**Dr Mirela Ivanova**

*Junior Research Fellow in Medieval History*