This book describes and illustrates each plant mentioned in the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha. It draws on Lytton John Musselman’s extensive field investigations from Beirut to Borneo and from the Atlas to the Zagros mountains and includes his own photographs of each plant. The text also reviews recent analytical studies of plants used in materials and technology as well as beer production, medicine, tensile materials, soaps, and other articles. On the basis of these materials, Musselman provides several new plant identifications from controversial biblical passages. In addition, the book surveys the history of biblical plant literature from the time of the Greeks and Romans to the present and reviews and correlates it with biblical plant hermeneutics. To aid readers, extensive references for further study are provided, along with an index to all verses containing references to plants that enables the reader to quickly locate a plant of interest in its textual setting.

Lytton John Musselman is Mary Payne Hogan Professor of Botany in the Department of Biological Sciences at Old Dominion University and a longtime student of plants of the Bible and Quran. Among his books on this topic are Jordan in Bloom: Wildflowers of the Holy Land and Figs, Dates, Laurel, and Myrrh: Plants of the Bible and the Quran. He is also founder and manager of the Blackwater Ecologic Preserve in southeastern Virginia and is presently part of a team working on a flora of Iraq.
For my parents, who taught me to
appreciate the Book of Revelation
and the Book of Creation
Solo Deo Gloria
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A chief objective of my research was to see every plant mentioned in the Bible in its indigenous setting. Many people on four continents have helped me in countless ways. It is impossible to name them all, but several deserve special note.

Beginning farthest east, Professor Kushan Tennakoon arranged fieldwork in Brunei Darussalam and Sri Lanka. He made sure I saw aloeswood in Brunei as many times as possible. Likewise, in Sri Lanka, Kushan ensured that my time was profitable. My trek to populations of nard in Nepal was graciously and efficiently arranged by Jangat Ranjit. My companions to the remote fastness of Lauribinayak, high in the Himalayas of Nepal, were Suman Neupane and Luke Cutherell. Thanks to Luke for being the “beloved physician” and for ensuring that the exhausting climb was not my last. In Iraq, I was ably assisted by Nabeel Abdul Hassan and Saman Ahmed Chnaraye, who shared their knowledge of the flora and use of local plants. Bob and Barbara Reimer introduced me to the oases of Oman as well as the ecology of Abu Dhabi. In addition, I was the beneficiary of their warm hospitality in Al Ein. My Syrian colleagues, Fadi al-Mahmoud and Hayan Hmidan, showed me much kindness from one end of their country to the other. The Hmidan home in Jebel Druze was the center for our work in that fascinating region of Syria. For many years, I have had the privilege to work with scientists at the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Tel Hadya, Syria, where my longtime friend Atef Haddad has helped me in many ways. To Ahmed Amri of ICARDA, I owe a better understanding of barley and its relatives. Under the shadow of our alter ego, George Edward Post, Mohammad Al-Zein worked with me in Lebanon and retrieved information on traditional uses of plants. In Turkey, Mustafa Keskin drove me over much of western Anatolia, taking pains to show me plants in which I was interested. Jay Bolin researched with me in Turkey and Greece and was an invaluable colleague in Chios.

Bala Siti Aliyu was my host and mentor in Nigeria. This is not the first country of which one thinks when one is studying biblical plants, but a visit to the local market in Kano located several. Mustapha and Amina Bouhamidi hosted and expedited work in Morocco.
The world’s leading authority on mustards, Ihsan al-Shehbaz, read and critiqued my treatment of that group. David Cutherell and Peter Schafran were excellent editors. Peter also researched the biology of several of the plants. Bryan Oloughlin compiled much of the bibliography and files. I have valued the criticism of Rob Sampson and Jack Howell on various pieces of the manuscript, which are now, it is hoped, less inchoate as a result of their kindness.

All these colleagues, friends, and students have taught me so much and made me realize how much there is to learn. I have drawn heavily on their knowledge, though any errors remain solely my responsibility.

I have been blessed to be at Old Dominion University, where I have received unflagging institutional encouragement for my botanical pursuits for almost four decades. Special thanks go to the library, by which a flood of requests to the interlibrary loan department were handled with alacrity.

Much of the work reported here has been supported by the Mary Payne Hogan Fund, which I most gratefully acknowledge.

My children and grandchildren, all 17 of them, are a continuing joy and a source of strength. May their interest in plants continue. My wife, Libby, deserves special thanks for supporting a project that has taken so many hours of family time. Without her support, I could not have done this.

My prayer is that this book will be a blessing to its users, drawing attention to the beauty of the written word and the glories of God’s wondrous handiwork as revealed in plants.
In this book, I review biblical plant literature from the past half millennium. It could be asked if another treatment is needed. Has any new information been obtained? If so, what are the sources of these data? Put another way, what makes this dictionary different from its many worthy predecessors?

First, it is the only dictionary in which each biblical plant is studied in situ. This means not only that each plant was seen and photographed in the field but also that indigenous knowledge about the plant and its uses was gathered. In other words, each entry has a strong ethnological basis, essential to a proper understanding of the plant in its scriptural context, as noted by several earlier writers. Collecting this knowledge involved years of fieldwork from Beirut to Borneo and from the Atlas to the Zagros mountains.

Second, research into the utilization of a crop in ancient eras often revealed the basis of misunderstandings of the texts. One of the best examples of this is the almost exclusive use of emmer wheat in Egypt during biblical times, a crop that required additional specialized preparation not necessary for modern wheats.

Finally, extraordinary advances in analytical processes in archeology, including the development of the science of archeobotany, have elucidated the plants that produced ancient products, for example, the plants used in Egyptian embalming, and have shown the extraordinary ability to determine the composition of materials found in vessels. All this new information is now handily available through immense databases.

The plan of the book is simple: plants are arranged alphabetically by their most frequently used English names, and their scientific names are also provided. For each entry, I do not exhaustively review how the plant has been treated by earlier writers; however, I place emphasis on plants that I consider to be mistreated and note those features necessary to understand the context in which the plant is used in the text. Verses in which the plant is mentioned are listed.