

A Survey of the Bible

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” Psalm 119:105

Lesson 1

What is the Bible?

The Bible: The Book of “Books”

Imagine entering a room and seeing a bookshelf with sixty-six different books arranged by literary style or subject. The books have the title and the author of the book written on their spines. Upon closer investigation you find that every book, despite the author listed on the spine and title page, is the product of one mind. The authors were, in actuality, different personalities all instructed by one, and the material they wrote was the material they had learned. This library of books is illustrative of the Bible.

The Bible is a ‘library’ of sixty-six different writings [‘books’] by about forty men whose lives spanned 1600 years of earth’s history. These men were guided in their writing by God. The words written are the words of God penned by men taught of God.

Look back again to the imagined bookshelf. On the bookshelf there are two major divisions of books, and within each of these divisions there are subdivisions of five each. This is similar to the divisions of the Bible. The two divisions are the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is divided into five sections: Law, History, Poetry, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets. The New Testament is also divided into five sections: Gospel, History, Letters, General Letters, and Revelation (Prophecy). All sixty-six books of the Bible fall into one of these ten literary sections. Some have only one book, while others have up to 14 books. Each book is further divided into sections called chapters and verses. The book of Psalms is the exception. Psalms is a compilation of varied psalms. Each psalm has its own historical context and human writer. Each of these psalms, however, is divided into verses. All sixty-six books are the product of one mind, God.

The Bible is a “library” of 66 books, all from the mind of God.

The Bible: A Book From God

God could have chosen to communicate with man in many different ways. The way God chose to communicate is through one inspired book, the Bible.

The Bible is the inspired word of God. The word “inspiration” is from a compound word in the Greek language which, literally translated, means “God breathed” or “God spirited.” Peter emphasized the process of inspiration: *“holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:21). The word inspiration points out that God is the source while man is the agency through whom and to whom God speaks.

Moses learned about inspiration in a unique sense. When he complained that he was not eloquent God provided an answer. Aaron, his brother, would be his spokesman. *“Now you [Moses, G.W.] shall speak to him [Aaron, G.W.] and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God.”* (Exodus 4:15, 16). Aaron was the mouthpiece but Moses was the source of what Aaron would say. This is exactly what inspiration is about. God is the source, man is the mouthpiece. So even though man spoke it, and penned it, the words given are from God.

Inspiration was a precise action also. God told Moses that he was to *“put the words in his mouth”* (Emphasis added). In the later years of the kingdom of Israel God told Jeremiah *“Behold I have put My words in your mouth”* (Jeremiah 1:9 emphasis added).

When God gave a message he gave the precise message for his servants, the prophets, to express to his people. This is the message we have in the Bible, the words of God as given through his prophets. When we want to ask, “What does God say?” we simply go to the Bible and find God’s word.

The Bible is God’s message to man. God promises blessings to those who read and obey.

The Major Divisions of the Bible

The Bible is divided into two major divisions: the Old Testament and the New Testament. This designation comes from the Bible itself. The writer of the letter (epistle) to the Hebrews contrasts the divine covenant (testament) which was in existence before the cross to the covenant which began at the cross. In the letter to the Hebrew Christians (Hebrews 8:13) the writer called the first covenant old, so the later covenant is the new. From this we have the designations Old Testament and New Testament.

The Old Testament was written over a period of about one thousand years. It is the record of God's creation and his relationship with man from the beginning. The first writer of the Old Testament was Moses. Although Moses lived in the 16th and 15th centuries B.C. and did not witness the events of the book of Genesis he was given this material by the Lord himself. Beginning with Moses God had faithful men write the 39 books of the Old Testament, ending with Malachi. The Old Testament is the record of man's sin and his need for salvation. It also records God's love toward man despite man's unfaithfulness toward God. Within these pages the nature of God is revealed, from his patient love to his righteous anger. Throughout these books there is a central thread, the promise of the coming Messiah, the Savior. The prophecies of Jesus Christ unfold throughout the writings of the Old Testament so that when he came to this earth to save humanity he would be recognized.

The theme of the Old Testament: Jesus is coming!

The New Testament begins with Matthew and ends with Revelation. Actually, this division is a little tricky. Chronologically speaking, most of the events recorded in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John took place in the Old Testament time period. Remember, Jesus' death on the cross is the dividing line for the Old and New Testaments. In fact, much of the material of the gospels, Matthew through John, is reflective of Jewish life under the law given through Moses (the Old Testament). Some information is to be observed under the New Testament age, such as the references to the church

The Theme of the gospels: Jesus is here!

and life in the church.

The New Testament is the record of the life of Jesus and the church he established. The gospels document Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The book of Acts records much of the life of the early church, which was established on the first Pentecost (a Jewish feast day) following Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The letters, also called epistles, instructed the church and individual Christians in their life. The book of Revelation was written to give the message to a persecuted church that faithfulness to Christ will result in victory over all the forces of Satan. The New Testament is a remarkably short document with amazingly powerful messages. But isn't this what one would expect of the Book from God?

The Theme of Acts to Revelation: Jesus was here and is coming again!

The Bible: A Guide to Heaven

If the Bible were simply a record of man's history, even an inspired record, it would be of great interest but a study of it would not be urgent. After all, as some say, who cares what man did in times past? It may be of interest and of some profit but it would not be life changing to most. But, the Bible is more than just an inspired record of man's past.

The Bible reveals God's plan for man's redemption. This places the Bible on the "required reading" list of mankind. In this inspired volume God gives man the solution to all problems of humanity.

First, we understand that we came from God. God created us (Genesis 1,2). We understand that we are unique in all of God's creation. Of all creation, only Adam and Eve (humanity) was made in God's image.

Second, we understand that man's basic need is forgiveness. Adam and Eve were placed in a perfect environment and fellowship with God, but they sinned and were cast out of the garden. From that day every man and woman has sinned against God, except Jesus. The Bible, from beginning to end, addresses the need for and means of forgiveness of sins.

Third, we understand that those who find forgiveness and live a life faithful to God will have an eternal home - a home with God forever (John 14:1-3). Those who ignore or reject this forgiveness will

also continue through eternity, but not with God (2 Thess. 1:5-7).

The Bible is an important book. Only this book reveals the path for man's salvation and eternal life. It is important for every man and woman to read this book and follow God's instructions to enjoy the blessings he promises.

Translations of the Bible

If you go into a bookstore today and ask to purchase a Bible the first response may be, "Which version would you like?" Over the years several versions [translations] of the scriptures have been made available to man. Why?

The basic reason is that the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language with a few short sections of Aramaic and the New Testament was written in Greek. Few Americans would be able to struggle through these original texts and understand them. For this reason we have English translations of the Bible.

Men have been translating the scriptures into English for centuries. However, one glance at a 1624 edition of the King James Version emphasized to this writer that even a 17th century English Bible would be very difficult to understand. For this reason we have versions that have been translated in our own century. More recent translations include the American Standard Version, the New American Standard Version (which has been recently revised), the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, the New King James Version and others. This writer recommends the King James Version, the American Standard Version, the New American Standard Version, or the *New King James version. These versions are recommended above all others because of how they were translated. The translators of these versions understood the need for a translation which reflects the word-for-word inspiration of the original texts. They strive to give the best translation, a translation consistent with the words of the original documents. Other translations strive for a thought-for-thought translation. This method lends itself to the translator being more "free" with his translation. Since we are dealing with God's words to man we need to have the best translation(s) to understand God's word properly.

*These lessons are based on the New King James translation.

Summary.

The Bible and its sixty-six books is like a library. There are within these books a variety of types of writings and a progression through man's history. But these books reveal the work of God, his character, and his promised blessings to mankind. In the pages of this volume we understand God's love for man and his sacrifice to provide salvation to man. We also are informed as to what our part in salvation is. Therefore, a study of the word of God is the most important activity in your life. I hope in this course to introduce you to the riches God has given to man, and to enable you to become familiar enough with the Bible so as to easily visualize the Bible's history and message.

Through the Bible God answers the questions of life: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going?

The Old Testament

Law. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

History. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

Poetry. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon.

Major Prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel.

Minor Prophets. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi.

The New Testament

Gospel. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

History. Acts of the Apostles.

Letters. Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews.

General Letters. James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude.

Prophecy. Revelation.

Bible References

If the Bible were one long document it would be a difficult task to find a specific phrase. But, since the Bible is divided into 66 books, finding a reference becomes much less challenging. To make that task even easier, the books of the Bible have been divided into chapters and verses. These divisions make our task of finding references very easy.

Bible references are given in book, chapter, and verse for the specific location. For example, if I were to ask you to look at Gen. 15:3, you would look in the book of Genesis, chapter 15, and verse 3. The table of contents of each Bible lists the books in order and many of them give the abbreviations for each book. If you remember that an abbreviation is a shortened form of the word then you can determine which book is referred to simply by looking at the list of the books of the Bible and comparing the abbreviated form with the full form.

For practice, give the full form for the abbreviations listed below [remember that some writers abbreviate differently than others].

Ex. _____

Matt. _____

Rom. _____

1 Sam. _____

Ez. _____

Mt _____

Ps _____

For Further Study.

Sidney Collett, All About the Bible (N.Y.: Fleming H. Revell Company, nd).

Neil R. Lightfoot, How We Got the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997).

Wayne Jackson, The Bible Translation Controversy (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 1985).

See also www.apologeticspress.org

Go to www.tftw.org for Chinese and Spanish studies.

"A Survey of the Bible" is written by Greg Weston.

Becoming Familiar with the Bible.

1. Locate the 'title pages' of both the Old and New Testament.

2. Look through the table of contents.

3. If your Bible has helps, such as center column references, look at just a few of them. These references are used like footnotes. In the text you will find a letter or number beside words. These letters or numbers will explain the word or tell you where you can find the same word or concept in other places in the Bible. *Remember, these references are not inspired. They are compiled by men.*

4. If your Bible has maps in the back, take a quick look at the maps and see what features, nations, cities, and other references you recognize.

5. Take a casual glance through the Bible. Become familiar with the Bible for greater ease of study..

For Review.

1. How many books are in the Bible? _____

2. What are the two major divisions of the Bible?
_____ and _____

3. What does the word inspired mean? _____

4. List the four gospels. _____, _____,
_____, _____.

5. Why should every person study and understand the Bible? _____

6. How did Peter explain inspiration? _____

7. What is the theme of the Old Testament?

8. What is the theme of the Gospels?

9. What is the theme of Acts to Revelation?
