

Overview of the Bible

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Greatest Book Ever Written

The Bible is the greatest book in the world because it is God's living and eternal Word. It is the divinely inspired record or story of God's dealings with men and nations from the beginning of time through the planting of the first Christian churches in the Roman Empire. The main theme of the Bible is how people like you and me can come to know God in our everyday lives and worship Him. The Bible contains God's revelations, the principles of the Christian faith and God's rules of practice for everyday living. It is different than any other book ever written.

The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

"ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you (1 Peter 1:23-25).

Two Great Collections of Books

God is the author of the Bible through 40 writers, who were inspired by God's Holy Spirit and wrote it down over a period of 1,500 years. Yet, it is a book without contradictions in what it says. It is completely without error and contains the authority of God and the living words of Jesus Christ, His Son, the incarnate Word.

The Bible contains 66 books in two collections called the Old and New Testaments or the Old and New Covenants. The Old Testament was originally

written in Hebrew and Aramaic (Ezra and Daniel), the official language of the Persian Empire. The New Testament was written 2,000 years ago in Greek. Even though the official language of the Roman Empire was Latin, government officials in Rome were the only ones who used it. Most people spoke Greek, and the new Christians wanted their books to be understood by as many people as possible, so they wrote in Greek.

These writings were placed on scrolls made of papyrus or vellum (animal hides). People in Israel often used skins for writing. Rectangles of skin were stitched together to make a long strip that was rolled into a "scroll" and stored in clay pots for safekeeping.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament contains the Hebrew Scriptures. The Old Testament books, of which there are 39, contain the account of creation, God's commandments, the covenants God made with His people, the history of the Jews and the founding of their nation Israel, poetic words of wisdom and prophecies. The Old Testament Scriptures were canonized under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit long before the birth of Christ by the high priest Ezra and the men of the Great Synagogue. Although no original manuscripts of the Old Testament have been found (we have only copies of copies of copies), the Jewish scribes were always aware they were copying a holy text, and took great care not to make mistakes.

In A.D. 1947, Jewish shepherds found some stone jars in caves at Qumran on the Dead Sea. Inside the jars were tightly rolled pieces of parchment and bronze, and in the next few years many more were found in nearby caves. They became known as the "Dead Sea Scrolls," and belonged to the library of a

Jewish religious sect, who lived at Qumran from the second century B.C. to about A.D. 70.

During the period of Israel's history, when kings ruled Israel, each king was required to make a personal copy of the Books of Moses (the Law) for his use in governing himself and the nation:

Now it shall come about when he [the king] sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel (Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

The New Testament

The Old Testament is the foundation of the Christian faith, whose doctrine is found in the writings of the New Testament. The New Testament (of which there are 27 books) contains the four Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Acts of the Apostles after Christ's death and resurrection, letters from the Apostles to the New Testament churches and the revelation of Jesus Christ to John. These books were compiled into one large book before A.D. 325, many years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

Translating the Bible into Many Languages

Jerome, a learned monk and early Church father, translated the Scriptures from the original languages into Latin by A.D. 405. This text became known as the "Vulgate," which means "the common translation." The Vulgate was the Bible of Europe for over 1,000 years and the one that John Wycliffe used to translate the first English Bible. Many scribes and men of God carefully copied the books and preserved them through the ages so that we might have this precious book today.

The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other book in the world. Through the centuries, many men have been martyred for their faith and determination to translate God's Word into the languages of the thousands of people groups around the world. Today, a portion of the Bible has been translated into more than 2,400 languages of the 6,900 languages. The Bible is available in whole or in part to 98 percent of the world's population in a language in which they are fluent.

The Value of Reading the Bible

It is only as we are able to read and know God's Word, that we can know truth! We have much for which to be thankful when we have a copy of the Bible. To study the Bible is the noblest of all pursuits and to understand it is the highest of all goals. God's Word is nourishment for our inner man, or spirit man. It is as sweet as honey to the taste. At the time of Christ, the teachers in the synagogue schools, which were called the "House of the Book," made honey cakes for the children and often printed the Shema ("Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God is One") from the Book of Deuteronomy on them. They drizzled honey on the top of the cakes and served them to the children. The children memorized the Shema and then ate the honey cakes, as they were reminded that God's Word is as sweet as honey (Psalm 19; Psalm 119; Ezekiel 3). They soon learned that education came to involve the task of causing youth to enjoy the sweetness of studying God's Law or truth.

Reading and meditating on God's Word is a noble task. There are many promises in the Bible for those who diligently study the Word and apply its truths to their lives:

*How blessed is the man who does not walk
in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He will be like a tree firmly planted by
streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.*

Psalm 1:1-3