

The Bible is a unique book. It is made up of 66 small books that have been grouped together into two sections called the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

Although the Bible includes history, biographies, poetry, speeches, proverbs, songs, parables, prophecies and sermons, it is primarily a revelation of the living God and His dealings with people. Some have considered it worthless and irrelevant. Many have tried to destroy it.

HOW DID WE GET THE BIBLE?

God inspired people with ideas, which they then wrote down. Although the writers used their own words the messages are from God. This is why we speak of the Bible as God's Word to us. We can have confidence in it for it is true. (See John 17:17. Also read Amos 3:7; Luke 24:44,45; 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:19-21.)

There are no original autographs of the Bible in existence today. However, we do have a large source of very old, manuscript copies of various Bible books.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

On the north-west shores of the Dead Sea is the plateau of Khirbet Qumran on which are to be seen the remains of an ancient monastery. Although archaeologists have known of these ruins for years, they were not studied closely until 1947. In that year a Bedouin goat-herder named Muhammed adh-Dhib, who had travelled to the plateau from the springs of Ain Freshkna in search of straying animals, stumbled across a cave he had not seen before.

When the cave was searched several large earthen jars were found. Although these contained parchment scrolls, the goat-herders were disappointed for they found no treasure. What they had found seemed worthless to them. They did not realise that they were holding hand-written, manuscript copies of portions of the Old Testament that were written down 2,000 or more years ago.

Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls all translation work for the Old Testament was based on the ninth century Massoretic text. However, we are now able to compare our Bibles with those from the time of Jesus Christ. This comparison has revealed no

substantial differences between our Bibles and the early manuscripts. Translators are also able to use this greater resource of ancient literature to better understand words used in the Bible. Many modern translations have benefited greatly from the discovery of these manuscripts for they have given added insights into the meaning of words and the culture of the people. The study of the ancient manuscripts reveals that we can have confidence in the Bible. It has been providentially cared for over the centuries. The Bible is God's Word.

WHAT ABOUT THE TRANSLATION?

Most of the Old Testament Scriptures were written in Hebrew. These were translated into the Greek language over 2,000 years ago. That first translation was called the Septuagint or the "Version of the Seventy." Work began on this translation, in Alexandria, in 285 B.C. The Septuagint was in common use during the time of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek and early copies of its 27 books were circulated amongst the churches. However, no translation work was done for centuries. This, along with the fact that printing presses were unknown in those early centuries, resulted in fewer and fewer people having access to the Bible. During the fifth century Jerome translated the Bible into Latin. His translation was called the Vulgate and it became the official Bible of the church during the Middle Ages. However, the Bible was still not readily available and so for centuries error and superstition controlled the minds of clergy and people alike. This remained the situation until the time of the Reformation and the work of the "morning star of the

John Wycliffe (c.1330-1384) was the first to translate the whole Bible into English. He used the Latin Vulgate as his text. His work was opposed and he was pronounced a troublemaker. In the middle of the fifteenth century the printing press was invented, opening the way for Johann Gutenberg to print the Bible. William Tyndale (1494-1536) translated the first English Bible that was printed. In 1525 he had the New Testament, which he had translated directly from Greek into English, printed. His work aroused fierce opposition and many times he had to flee for his life. Finally he was captured and the established church along with Henry VIII had him strangled and burnt at the stake on October 6, 1536. Myles Coverdale's (1488-1569) extensive translation work was based on that of Tyndale. In fact Tyndale's work became the basis of English translations right through to, and including, the Revised Standard Version. The King James or Authorized Version, first published in 1611 and later revised, was also based on Tyndale's work.

Recent translations have taken into account the added insights discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls. They are also easier to read than some of the older translations for the language is modern. There is no such thing as "the best translation" in any language. Those familiar with the fact that there are no original manuscripts will realise that Bible translators have to work with the oldest and most reliable manuscripts they have. Those familiar with translation work will realise that no translation

can accurately portray every meaning of the original word. Linguists realise that the meaning of words change with time and so new translations in all languages are necessary. Read as many translations as possible. There are:

1. Paraphrases: The purpose of the paraphrase version is to convey what the present author considers to be the meaning. The best known paraphrase is the Living Bible by Kenneth Taylor.

2. Dynamic translations: These endeavour to translate meaning for meaning, giving greater regard to the original words than do paraphrases. The Good News Bible or Today's English Version is a well-known dynamic translation.

3. Formal translations: These attempt a word for word translation with some adjustments for flow of language. The King James Version is a formal translation as are the more recent Revised Standard Version (1952) and the Jerusalem Bible.

For our Revelation Seminar Bible we have chosen the New International Version. It is becoming very popular for it is quite accurate and is very easy to read and understand. It was prepared by scholars from a range of denominations which protects it from sectarian bias. You will enjoy and be blessed by this translation. Unless specifically indicated Bible quotations in these seminar lessons are from this translation.■

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE IN A MEANINGFUL WAY

1. Pray for the guidance of God

The Holy Spirit directed in the writing of Scripture. Peter wrote, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:20,21. We need to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us as we read. Jesus Christ said, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." John 16:13.

2. Read each Book as a whole

Many of the Bible books were written as letters

and were meant to be read from beginning to end. When you do this you will see the entire message in its context and its historical setting, and thus understand better the intention of the author.

3. Read the Bible daily

Make it a habit to read a paragraph or section of the Bible each day. Consider its context and look for the significant message in the section. (See Acts 17:11.)

4. Apply the truths you discover

You will receive great benefit and blessing when you apply to your own life the teachings and

messages of the Bible. Cultivate a teachable attitude and apply what you learn. Writing to the young minister Timothy who had grown up in a home where the Bible was read, the apostle Paul urged, "Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 3:14,15. If you have not been in the habit of reading the Bible, follow the example of the Bereans who "received the message with great eagerness, and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." Acts 17:11.

5. Read the Bible as a whole

The Bible is its own interpreter. What was written by Moses will throw light on what Paul wrote. To better understand what we read on a particular subject we should read all that the

various Bible authors have written on that subject. We should read each verse in the setting of its immediate context as well as the greater context of Scripture.

6. Focus on the central message of the Bible

The Lord Jesus Christ is the key person and central focus of the entire Bible. All the teachings of the Bible centre in His life and work. The Old Testament writers pointed to the first coming of Christ. The New Testament writers declared that Jesus Christ was the fulfilment of all the promises of God. (See John 5:39 and Acts 10:43.) The central message of the Bible is that God has given us salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. (See John 3:16.) It focuses upon what He has done for us and upon the fact that He is coming back to this earth. (See John 14:1-3.)

HOW DO YOU START TO READ THE BIBLE?

How do you read a book of over 1,000 pages, composed of 66 individual books and letters, and written by many writers over a period of 1,500 years? The books have not been arranged in chronological order and so reading from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 may not be the best way to start. Here are some suggestions:

1. Begin with the **Gospel of MARK**. Read it right through. It will introduce you to the New Testament and the central character, Jesus Christ.
2. Next read the **Gospel of MATTHEW**. This book repeats almost every line of Mark's book and, in addition, reports on six of the sermons of Jesus. It gives a clear picture of the message Jesus Christ gave the people.
3. Then read the **Gospel of LUKE**. Luke's obvious interest in medical matters gave him a humanitarian outlook. He recorded the parables of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son and the rich man and Lazarus. He portrays Jesus Christ as the healer - the answer to our every need.
4. Then read the **Gospel of JOHN** and discover the impact of Jesus Christ on the human heart. This gospel was written decades after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. For the encouragement of all, including many suffering believers, John wrote down his most treasured memories of His Lord and the promises of His return.

When you have read the four Gospels you will have received the finest introduction to your Bible. Now continue. Read the challenging and inspiring stories of people in the Bible. Pick out the biographies. Read each book as a whole. Read Scripture each day.

WHAT ABOUT THE REVELATION?

The book of Revelation focuses upon Jesus Christ and His people. Every chapter portrays Jesus:

Chapters

- 1** *JESUS* is closely involved with His people. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the book and its purpose is to reveal Jesus Christ and His ministry to His people.
- 2,3** *JESUS* chastens, encourages and counsels His people in the *SEVEN CHURCHES* for He wants them to be overcomers.
- 4,5** *JESUS* is worthy to open the *SEVEN-SEALED SCROLL* before *THE THRONE* for He has overcome Satan and purchased our salvation by His death.
- 6,7** *JESUS* opens the *SEVEN SEALS* to reveal scenes of salvation and judgement, and the conflict and ultimate triumph of those who witness for Him.
- 8,9** *JESUS*, as Judge, in the warnings and judgements of the *SEVEN TRUMPETS*, exposes Satan's purpose to possess and destroy.
- 10,11** *JESUS* is mindful of His people and His Word during the days of *DISAPPOINTMENT* and *TRIBULATION*.
- 12** *JESUS* has a people who resist the attacks of the dragon Satan during the *1,260 DAY TRIBULATION* and the *FINAL TRIBULATION*.
- 13** *JESUS*, His character and His people are attacked by the deceptive agents of the *DRAGON* - the *BEAST* and the *FALSE PROPHET*.
- 14** *JESUS* has a *SPECIAL MESSAGE* of love and mercy to prepare people for His return.
- 15,16** *JESUS* finishes His work as merciful and forgiving High Priest and pours out the judgements of the *SEVEN LAST PLAGUES*.
- 17,18** *JESUS*, who has been attacked and despised by the *EVIL WOMAN "BABYLON,"* (Revelation 17:1,5) exposes *THE FALL OF BABYLON*.
- 19,20** *JESUS* comes as "*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*" (Revelation 19:16) to execute judgement at the beginning and end of the *1,000 YEARS*.
- 21,22** *JESUS* dwells with His redeemed people as the Light and Life of the Holy City, the *NEW JERUSALEM*.

Satan may attack us for following Jesus Christ our Saviour and the Bible, but the message of Revelation is, "Be faithful, even to the point of death." Revelation 2:10. If we are faithful to Jesus Christ and His Word He will give us "the crown of life." Revelation 2:10. There is hope, for Jesus Christ is coming again. We need to read and understand the written Word of God for it has been given to guide us to that day.■