

# UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF GOD'S WORD

## WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The Bible is comprised of 66 separate writings or books. It was written over a period of approximately 1400 to 1800 years by more than 40 authors from various walks of life. While many of the authors are identified, some remain unknown.

The Bible is divided into the Old Testament, comprised of 39 books, and the New Testament, comprised of 27 books. The Old Testament, the Bible of the nation of Israel, was divided into three segments: the Law or Torah, the Prophets or Nebi'im, and the Writings or Kethubim.

Although the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic, it was translated into Koine (common) Greek around 250-100 B.C. This translation is referred to as the Septuagint or the LXX. It contains the same books as the Hebrew Old Testament, but the order and breakdown of the books was changed to the form now used in the Old Testament.

While the Old Testament was originally written in two Semitic languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, the vast majority of it is in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Koine Greek, the popular language used throughout most of the Mediterranean world in the time of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, a few Aramaic phrases are found in the New Testament because Aramaic was the vernacular of the people of Israel. Jesus and His disciples spoke Aramaic as well as Koine Greek. Much of the Old Testament was translated into Aramaic, and these works are referred to as the Targums.

## HOW WAS THE BIBLE WRITTEN AND TRANSLATED?

The Bible itself tells us how it was written: "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). Men "moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God"

(2 Peter 1:21). The Greek word for inspired, *theopneustos*, means "God-breathed." The Holy Spirit carried men along, moving and guiding them as they wrote in their own words what God wanted them to say. Thus we have *verbal* inspiration, because the words of the original text were inspired by God. And because all Scripture was given by inspiration we have *plenary* inspiration, which means *total* or *complete* inspiration. Every part of the Bible is inspired. The Bible does not merely contain the words of God, but it actually is the Word of God. Thus the original writings, often called *autographs*, are *infallible*—without error. This concept is called the verbal, plenary inspiration of the autographs.

## Autographs

In early history, writing was done on stone, clay tablets, leather (animal skins), and papyrus scrolls. The autographs were probably written on papyrus. Papyrus, made from the inner bark of a reed plant, was formed into a paper-like material which was glued together and rolled into a scroll. Normally the writing was done on only one side of the scroll, so that as it was read it was unrolled with one hand and rolled up with the other. The scrolls were kept in a cylindrical box called a *capsa*.

According to the Jewish Talmud, the Scriptures were to be copied only on the skins of what God deemed as *clean animals*, such as sheep, calves, and goats. *Parchment* (dried animal skin) was costly but *more durable and permanent* than papyrus.

## The Accuracy of the Copies

Eventually the scrolls were replaced by the *codex*. The codex (plural *codices*) was made from folded sheets, *quires*, which were stitched together like a book. Copies of the Old Testament

were transcribed by hand under the strictest measures. The men who copied the manuscripts were called scribes. If one error was found the entire copy was destroyed. Thus the accuracy of the Old Testament is phenomenal. This accuracy has been confirmed by the multiple number of copies, by the Septuagint, and by the Dead Sea Scrolls.

More than 5000 ancient Greek copies of all or portions of the New Testament have been found. Although there are minor variances in the copied manuscripts, none affect doctrinal issues.

### The Canon

The same omnipotent Sovereign who inspired men to write the Word of God led other men to recognize that these were the books which would comprise the *canon* of Scripture. The canon is the group of books which are recognized to be inspired by God. This group comprises the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament canon of 39 books was fairly widely accepted in the days of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself, who is one with the Father, always affirmed and never contradicted the Old Testament. Revelation, the last of the New Testament books to be written, was completed before the end of the first century A.D. By A.D. 367 Bishop Athanasius compiled the first known list of the current 27 books of the New Testament.

### Translations

The Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek copies of the 66 books of the Bible are the basis of the translations made in the various languages of the world. A translator will study the original words of these copies, determine what those words mean, and then select the best way to faithfully transmit the meaning of the original words in their context into the language of their translation. This is called a *primary translation*.

A *secondary translation* occurs when a translation is made from a primary translation of another language, say English, into a third language. Thus a secondary translation is not made from a copy of the original language but from a second language translated from the original language (the primary translation).

## HOW DO WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS WHAT IT CLAIMS TO BE—THE WORD OF GOD?

Believing the Bible is ultimately a matter of informed faith. You either believe what the Word of God says about itself or you don't. You either believe the testimony of Jesus Christ regarding the Word of God or you don't.

There are several areas of objective evidence that test and support the veracity of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the autographs.

First, there is *bibliographic evidence* for the Bible's authenticity. No other ancient writings have as much manuscript evidence as does the Bible. Aside from 643 copies of Homer's works, which were written about 850 B.C., the other classical works written between 450 B.C. and 10 B.C. have anywhere from 3 to 20 copies each, but the New Testament has about 14,000. And not only is there more than an ample quantity of copies of the Bible, but the quality of the biblical manuscripts surpasses that of other manuscripts as well. This is largely due to the Jews' extreme caution in the translation and preservation of the manuscripts.

The passage of time is also a factor. The Dead Sea Scrolls, which date from 200 B.C. to A.D. 68, greatly reduce the time span between the writing of the Old Testament books to our earliest existing copies of the Old Testament. The time span between the autographs of the New Testament and its existing copies is between 100 and 200 years, a very low figure.

Second, there is *internal evidence* for the authenticity of the Bible. The Bible not only claims to be the Word of God, but it also states that not the smallest letter or stroke will pass away from the law (the Old Testament) until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:17, 18). Many of the writers claimed to be eyewitnesses who wrote what they saw, heard, or experienced. Although over 40 different authors wrote 66 separate books over a time span of almost two millennia, there are no contradictions in what they wrote. Also, what was written in the Old Testament, sealed and canonized, is often seen fulfilled in the New Testament. Thus there is the internal evidence of

fulfilled prophecy, some of which is being fulfilled even in our time.

Finally, there is an abundance of external evidence that supports the Bible's infallibility. When the Bible speaks on matters of history or science, it speaks accurately. There were times when it was supposed that science or history contradicted the Bible; however, later it was discovered that all the facts had not yet been uncovered.

More recent archaeological evidence has affirmed the historicity of the Bible in a multitude of ways as it speaks regarding rulers, nations, languages,

cities regarding Israel and her relationship to various world powers are seen in a new dimension.

Once you are acquainted with the religious, cultural, and political setting of Bible times, you will better understand God's plan for mankind and you will have a greater appreciation of the times in which our Lord lived and gave birth to His church.

## FROM ADAM TO ABRAHAM

(The Beginning to About 2000 A.C.)

In the beginning there was no sin. Adam and Eve lived in unbroken fellowship with their Creator until they believed a lie and chose to disobey the explicit command of God. From that time on all mankind would be born in sin and bear its consequence: death.

Yet a merciful and loving God did not leave mankind in despair; He promised a Redeemer, born of a woman's seed. Over a thousand years passed, and with the passing of those years man's iniquity increased until every intent of his heart was only evil. God was grieved in His heart and "sorry that He had made man." And with that He determined to "blot out man... from the face of the land." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord, for he was a righteous man, blameless in his time.

When the flood came, only those in the ark were preserved: Noah and his family, eight people in all. However, the basic sin nature of those

battles, customs, geographic locations, tragedies, and other events. Extrabiblical writings also affirm what the New Testament teaches about the historicity of Jesus Christ and other New Testament characters.

Have you accepted the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, that you may be adequate, equipped for every good work? (2 Timothy 3:16). As you study the Bible, you will discover that it is a supernatural book... the very words of life.

... Then a rainbow from the face of the earth, for He had put a rainbow in the heavens, and had made a covenant which He would not break. God intervened by confusing mankind's language and scattering them over the face of the whole earth.

Then about 2000 A.C. God called a man to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to a land which He would show him. That man's name was Abram. From Abram God would not only make a great nation, but through him He would bless all the families of the earth. Thus God made a covenant with Abram and his descendants forever, and with that covenant He changed Abram's name to Abraham, "Father of a Multitude." With that covenant also came the promise of the land of Canaan as the eternal possession of Abraham's descendants.

The Seed that God promised Adam and Eve, the One who would redeem mankind, would come not only through the seed of the woman, but also through the loins of Abraham and his descendants, Isaac and Jacob. To Isaac would be born Jacob, and to Jacob 12 sons. As God confirmed His covenant with Jacob, He changed Jacob's name to Israel, the one who fathered the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. A covenant nation had been brought into existence by God. In the fullness of time the Redeemer, the messenger of the covenant, would come from the tribe of Judah.

But all was not well among Jacob's sons, for