

THE ORIGINS OF THE BIBLE

Lesson 1 -- The Authors

This first lesson is to help you learn about some of the authors of the Bible. I said authors, because unlike many books today the Bible was written down by several different men (approximately 40). Also many of these men lived in different areas and spoke different languages. Furthermore, the Bible was written over a period of 1600 years.

By authors, I am referring to the men who wrote down the words. The thing that makes the Bible unique is that it claims to be the word of God and those claims are supportable by evidence.

"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, NIV)

We will examine this claim in later lessons. We will see if the Bible is as perfect and accurate as it would have to be if God truly breathed the words which men wrote down. I do not mean to imply any doubt as to God being the source of the Bible. To the contrary, you will see that there is much evidence outside of the Bible to support God's divine authorship of the Bible, and I trust that this series of lessons will give you great confidence in trusting the Bible.

Now open your Bible to its Table of Contents. You will see that there are two main headings: Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament books were written before Christ was born; the New Testament was written after Christ died.

1. Under the Old Testament there are ____ books.
2. Under the New Testament there are ____ books.

So the Bible is actually a compilation of books. Just like books today, there are many different styles. Some of the books are narratives, some are biographical, some are letters, some are poetry, a few are compilations of wise sayings, others are prophetic, and some are a code of laws.

So we will begin by looking at some of the authors and seeing what we can learn.

MOSES

The first writer of the Bible was Moses. He is the author of the first five books of the Bible. These five books are sometimes called the Pentateuch. Read the passages following each question for some information about Moses' life (Note: You may not be able to answer all of the questions below if you do not read the passages). Obviously, the last few verses of Deuteronomy were added by a later author. Like almost all of the Old Testament books, the Pentateuch was written entirely in Hebrew. That means you are using a translation of the Bible. (Translations and versions will be discussed in detail in a later lesson in this series).

3. Moses was adopted by _____. (Exodus 2:1-10)
4. Moses had to leave Egypt because _____. (Exodus 2:11-15)
5. Moses was told to return to Egypt by _____. (Exodus 3:1-14)
6. After leading the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses lead them to what mountain? _____. (Exodus 19:1-25)
7. List below (or use the back of this page) the commands given by God to the people of Israel: (Exodus 20:1-17)

8. Moses died at ____ years old while on what mountain? _____ (Deuteronomy 34:1-9)

9. List the books which Moses wrote:

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

Moses wrote his books around 1450 BC. (That is about 3500 years ago).

SOLOMON:

Solomon wrote three entire books of the Old Testament and wrote a portion of a fourth. He wrote mainly poetry and wise sayings. His books are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. He also wrote Psalms 72 and 127. The Psalms and Song of Solomon are poetry. We can read about Solomon in the book 1 Kings. Answer the following questions:

10. Solomon was the King of _____ and son of _____. (1 Kings 2:1-12 or Proverbs 1:1-7)

11. What special blessing did Solomon ask from God? _____ (1 Kings 3:1-9)

12. What blessings did God give him? _____ (1 Kings 3:10-15)

13. Solomon wrote _____ proverbs and _____ songs. (1 Kings 4:29-34)
(Note: A proverb is a wise saying)

14. What did Solomon say was the duty of man? _____ (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)

15. Solomon had _____ wives and _____ concubines. (1 Kings 11:1-6)

Like Moses, Solomon also wrote in Hebrew. His father, David, was the author of most of the Psalms (a collection of poetry). Solomon wrote his books around 950 BC. (3000 years ago).

DANIEL

Daniel is one of many authors whose book now bears his name. He is also one of 16 Old Testament writers whose works are primarily prophecy. Prophecy is a type of literature that has hidden meanings. Most often these meanings are predictions of future events. Daniel mixes his prophecies with historical details. Read the following passages: Daniel 1:1-2:48.

16. What did God give to Daniel and his companions? _____

17. Why could not the astrologers interpret the king's dream? _____

18. How could Daniel interpret the dream? _____

The first half of Daniel was written in Hebrew, Daniel's native language. The last half was written in Aramaic, the language of the kings Daniel served. Daniel was written around 550 BC. (2600 years ago).

LUKE

Luke is one of the several writers of the New Testament. He is known to be the author of Luke and Acts. Both of these books are narrative accounts. Read the following introductions to his two books: Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-10. Luke wrote around AD. 50 (1950 years ago). Luke, and all New Testament books, were written in Greek.

19. Luke wrote these two books to a man named _____.
20. Why did Luke write these two books? _____.
21. Luke was a _____ by profession. (Colossians 4:14)
22. Why does Luke think that his account will be better than those written by other men? _____.
(Luke 1:3-4)

PAUL

Paul is the author of at least 13 New Testament books. Look in your Table of Contents. Paul wrote the books beginning at Romans and continuing through Philemon. He may have also written Hebrews, but scholars are uncertain. All of Paul's writings are epistles (a fancy term meaning "letters"). Paul's letters are addressed to individuals and groups of Christians. He was trying to correct mistakes, encourage work, and teach about Christ. Paul wrote at about the same time as Luke. Read the following passage: Galatians 1:1-9.

23. How do we know that Paul wrote this letter? _____.
24. To whom did Paul write this letter? _____.
25. Why did Paul write this letter? _____.

More information about the various authors and the times, dates and circumstances of their writing can be found in the series on "The History and Geography of Bible Events". The material presented here was to give you an appreciation for the differences in the many authors of the Bible. The second lesson will discuss how the authors wrote down their books, what ancient books looked like, and a little bit about what are the oldest copies of the books of the Bible still in existence in their original languages. Later lessons will discuss how certain books came to be included in the Bible and why others were left out, and the reliability of the Bible.

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THE ORIGINS OF THE BIBLE

Lesson 2 -- The Preparation

This lesson is about the making of the Bible. What did the writers use to record the information God gave them? How was the writing passed on to us today? What kinds of copies of the writings do we still have? These are a few of the questions that will be answered in this lesson. This lesson will contain a lot of historical information. Many of the answers to the questions asked will be drawn from the material presented in the lesson.

WHAT TO CALL THE WRITINGS

Perhaps it would be best to acquaint you first with the words you will encounter in studying ancient writings. There is some variation on the use of these terms between some scholars, but I have chosen the terms that will be easiest for you to apply.

Autograph: "Auto" means "self", and "graph" means "writing". Therefore, "autograph" means "self-writing". The term "autograph" is used to refer to the actual writing of the author. Sometimes this writing is also called the original manuscript.

Manuscript copies: Manuscript is the word for hand written copies in the same language as the author used. All of the Bible was completed about 1400 years before the printing press was invented. Copies had to be made by carefully copying each page by hand.

Versions: Versions are translations of the manuscripts or autographs (or other versions) into a different language. You remember from the first lesson that the writers only used three languages in writing the entire Bible. Even in very ancient times, not everyone understood all three of those languages. So people were employed to translate the Bible. Of course, a lot of these versions were completed long before the printing press was invented, so they also were copied by hand. Try to keep a distinction between a manuscript (Hand written copies in the same language as the author used) and a version.

WRITING MATERIALS

When we want to write something down, we might just grab a sheet of paper and a pen and never think about them as writing materials. But the Bible was completed thousands of years before pens and paper, as we know them, were invented. So what did the authors use?

Papyrus: This was an ancient kind of paper. It was made by cutting reeds in long thin strips and setting them in two layers at right angles. These layers were then beaten and pressed together and left to dry. Once dry, they were polished smooth with a stone. Papyrus fragments have been found from 2400 BC (that is about 1000 years before Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible). Since it was cheap and reeds were plentiful, papyrus was used regularly until around 300 AD (about 200 years after John wrote the last books of the Bible). Although papyrus was probably widely used for manuscript copies, we do not have many papyrus manuscripts today because papyrus decays very rapidly in moist climates. The old papyrus manuscripts that we do have today were found in the desert areas of Egypt and Israel.

Parchment: This is the term for the prepared skins of sheep or goats. The skins were shaved and scraped in order to provide a good writing surface. Parchment is much longer lasting than papyrus.

Vellum: This is similar to parchment but is made from the skins of calves. Today we call this material leather. Often the ancient writers dyed the vellum purple. On purple vellum, the writer or copier would use gold or silver ink. The oldest vellum scroll dates from around 1500 BC (about the same time as Moses was alive).

Stone: Stone was the best substance for withstanding the decay of time and weather. An "iron pen" or chisel was used to write on a stone tablet. Read Exodus 34:1-7, 27-28.

1. What did Moses write on two tablets of stone?

2. How long did it take Moses to write it?

Clay or Wax Tablets: Some translations call this a tile. The writer would take a flat piece of hardened clay or wax. He would moisten the top of the clay with water or soften the wax with a candle or the sun. He could then write by making impressions or by carving out his words. Then he would let it harden again. Read Ezekiel 4:1.

3. What was Ezekiel told to draw on the tablet (tile)?

WRITING INSTRUMENTS

Chisel: An iron instrument to engrave stones.

Metal Stylus: A three sided instrument with a flat head for writing on wax and clay tablets.

Pen: This is not a ball-point pen. It is a pen similar to a quill. It is made from a reed cut with a chisel shaped end. The end was dipped in ink and used to write on papyrus, parchment or vellum.

Ink: Ink was usually a mixture of charcoal, gum, and water. Other substances were added to replace the charcoal in order to make colored inks.

FORMS OF ANCIENT BOOKS

Rolls or Scrolls: These were made by gluing sheets of papyrus (or sewing sheets of parchment or vellum) together in a long row and then winding these strips around a stick. A scroll could be almost any length, but a very long scroll was difficult to use. The average scroll was no more than 30-35 feet long. One scroll measuring 144 feet has been found. Usually writing was only on one side, but there have been some two-sided scrolls found.

The Old Testament books were kept as scrolls until several centuries after Christ. Of course, the entire Old Testament is too long to fit on one scroll. Isaiah alone takes up about a 37 foot scroll. So the Old Testament was kept as a collection of scrolls. The Jews kept a collection of scrolls in a cabinet in each of their meeting places (synagogues). Read Luke 4:14-21. The KJV uses the term "book" in this passage, but the word properly means "a scroll".

4. Which scroll did Jesus read from?

The oldest scrolls of the Old Testament that we have today were found in caves near the Dead Sea in Israel. This area is very hot and dry. The scrolls were stored in clay jars along with scrolls that are not a part of the Old Testament. These are manuscript copies (written in the original language). The discovery of these scrolls was made in 1947. The scrolls were written between 100 BC and AD 70. As a collection, all of the scrolls are called The Dead Sea Scrolls. Due to their extreme age, many of the scrolls are badly damaged. More about these scrolls will be discussed in a later lesson

No autographs and no older scrolls have been found. A few older fragments of manuscripts and a few older versions have been found. The Jews were very particular about how they kept the written word of God. When a scroll was worn out, it was recopied and the older scroll was destroyed so that no one would later rely on a copy that was too hard to read. So it is unlikely that we will ever find any complete manuscripts much older than those that have so far been found.

Codex or Book: This is the style of books that we are used to today. Papyrus was glued together along one edge into a volume and written on both sides. This was the primary way in which the New Testament was copied. New Testament autographs were probably on scrolls, but so many people wanted copies, it was cheaper to copy them into book form. New Testament Christians also copied the Old Testament versions and some manuscripts into book form.

The oldest piece of a codex of a New Testament book is part of one page of the book of John written around AD 125 (that is about 25 years after John died). Early Christians made literally thousands of handwritten copies of the writings of the New Testament. We have a fairly large sample of their copies from around AD 150 through AD 300 and beyond. Many of these were copies made by individuals for their own use at home. These copies include abbreviations and explanatory notes that the copier made. We also have many versions of the New Testament because it rapidly spread to lands speaking other languages.

There have been discoveries of three almost complete Bibles from the AD 300s and 400s. From the time period after AD 400, several complete versions (translations) have been discovered. Read Colossians 4:16.

5. Did Paul, the author of Colossians, expect that his letters would be read by more than one group of people?

DIVISIONS OF THE BIBLE:

Chapters: The Bible was divided into chapters to make it easier for people to study. These divisions were made by man, not by God. Sometimes the chapters are placed in the middle of a sentence or paragraph. The chapters that all translations currently use were added in AD 1240 by a man called Hugo.

Verses: Like chapters, verses were added by man to make it easier to find a passage of scripture. Most verses are only part of a sentence. Look for the "." to see where the sentence really ends. The Old Testament was divided into verses in AD 1445 by Mordecai Nathan. The New Testament was divided into verses in AD 1551 by Robert Steven.

REVIEW:

6. What kinds of material did the writers of the Bible use instead of paper?

7. What is an autograph?

8. Why don't we have any autographs of Old Testament writings?

9. What is the oldest collection of Old Testament manuscripts we have found commonly called?

10. What is the difference between a manuscript copy and a version?

11. Before printing presses were invented, how were copies of scrolls and books made?

12. Did the original writers of the books of the Bible divide them into chapters and verses?

Our next lesson will be on how we know that we have the correct books in our Bible. Please feel free to add any comments or questions below:

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Poteau, OK 74953

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Lesson 3 -- The Canon

This lesson is about how we know we have the correct books in our Bible. The English word canon is actually derived from a Greek word which means "reed". A reed (tall thin straight plant growing near water) was used as a measuring device much like we might use a yardstick or a meter stick. So the word "canon" has come to mean the standard. In terms of the Bible, canon means the group of books which meet the requirements to be considered part of the standard by which we live our lives.

WHY DO WE NEED A CANON?

You may wonder why we just don't include all old writings that claim to be inspired works in our Bible. Just like today, in the past many people wrote books. Many people also wrote explanations of other books. Many Jews wrote explanations of the Old Testament. At all times, there have also been men who tried to deceive people by claiming to speak for God. God has always wanted His people to be careful about who they believed. Read Deuteronomy 18:21-22.

1. According to this passage, what is one way of telling if a prophet is from God?

2. Read Deuteronomy 13:1-5. If the prophecy comes true, does that guarantee that the prophet is from God?

So we have a canon to separate the true words of God from all the various other writings and teachings of man. We will look at the canon in two parts: the Old Testament canon and the New Testament canon. We have many ways to determine the ability of certain books to fit into the canon.. The essential questions are as follows:

- a. Is it authoritative? Does it claim authority from God?
- b. Is it prophetic? Does it meet the tests of the prophets as in Deuteronomy?
- c. Is it authentic? Did the other ancient writers refer to it as the words of God?
- d. Was it accepted by the people of God as scripture?

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The Old Testament was completed almost 400 years before the New Testament was begun. The people of God at that time were the Jews. So we would expect that the Jews would take time to consider which books were from God and which were merely the writings of man. From Jewish writings we can find three major divisions to the Old Testament: These divisions are The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings. At the top of the next page you will see a list of the way the Jewish canon is arranged.

The Law

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy

The Prophets

- A. Former Prophets
 1. Joshua
 2. Judges
 3. Samuel
 4. Kings
- B. Latter Prophets
 1. Isaiah
 2. Jeremiah
 3. Ezekiel
 4. The Twelve

The Writings

- A. Poetical Books
 1. Psalms
 2. Proverbs
 3. Job
- B. Five Rolls
 1. Song of Songs
 2. Ruth
 3. Lamentations
 4. Esther
 5. Ecclesiastes
- C. Historical Books
 1. Daniel
 2. Ezra-Nehemiah
 3. Chronicles

Now, although your Bible has a different arrangement of these books, it has the same books. Your Bible divides Ezra and Nehemiah into two books, divides Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into two books each, and divides The Twelve into the twelve individual minor prophets. The three Jewish divisions of the Old Testament were a firm part of the Jewish thought before Christ came. In 130 BC, a Jewish writer referred to the scripture as "the Law, the Prophets, and the other books of the fathers." The last group, The Writings, seems to have been referred to by many names. Read Luke 24:44.

3. What names does Jesus give to the three divisions of the Old Testament?

Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived shortly after Christ died, numbered the inspired books as those listed above on this page. Other Jewish teachers living before and after Christ all agreed that "After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel." (The Babylonian Talmud -- a Jewish writing about the law)

THE OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

"Apocrypha" means "hidden". It is used to refer to a group of books that are generally not included in the canon. The Catholic church adopted these books and placed them in their versions of the Bible. The Catholics did not claim that these works were part of the canon until AD 1546. These books were not, and still are not, regarded as inspired by the Jews or any group other than the Catholics even though many of the books claim to have been written by inspired men. The Jews and early Christians noted that these books were mainly unknown until 200 - 100 BC. The books are full of historical and geographical inaccuracies. These books teach doctrines which are false and encourage practices that are against the inspired words of God. Neither Jesus nor any of his disciples ever quoted from the apocrypha although they quoted from almost every inspired Old Testament writing.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

The New Testament writings had an additional requirement before they were included in the canon. That is that the writings had to have the approval of the apostles. Read John 16:12-15. Here Jesus is talking to his apostles.

4. How were the apostles going to learn everything Jesus wanted them to know?

5. Read Matthew 28:16-20. Who has all authority?
6. Did Jesus command the eleven apostles to teach all nations?

Therefore, Jesus gave the apostles some of his authority. No-one else had that authority. So early Christians did not regard anything as the word of God unless at least one of the apostles had approved of it as scripture. Sometimes multiple apostles approved of a writing. For example, Paul was an apostle and therefore his writings were with authority, but Peter also approves of Paul's letters as inspired by God. Read 2 Peter 3:15-16.

7. Peter says that Paul's wisdom came from whom?
8. Peter places Paul's letters in the same category as "other _____".

The last living apostle, John, died around AD 100. Several of his writings are the last writings written that are included in our canon of the New Testament.

9. Could any writing written after the death of the last apostle receive approval from an apostle?
10. Therefore, no books were added to the canon after approximately AD _____ when _____ died.

THE NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA AND OTHER WRITINGS

We do have copies of other writings by early Christians that do not have apostolic approval. These writings are called apocrypha if they claim inspiration. Since they fail the tests for canonicity, they are not included in our Bibles. The early Christians also did not include them in their Bibles. In fact, the early Christians were very concerned about the canon because within 40 years after John's death false teachers were trying to get other books added to the scriptures that would change the gospel. Read Galatians 1:6-9.

11. What did Paul say about those that would change the gospel?
12. Did an angel have the right to change the gospel after the apostles established what they taught?

We also have available copies of hundreds of books and letters written by early disciples of the apostles. Often this collection of writings is called "The church fathers" or "the apostolic fathers". These men were not inspired. One of them, Ignatius, points out in his letters that he does not have the authority to command like Paul or Peter because they were apostles. Although these writings are not to be placed in our Bibles as scripture, they are useful because they quote from the writings they considered inspired. In fact every single passage of the New Testament canon is quoted somewhere in one or more of these early writings.

Our next two lessons will be on the reliability of the Bible. Please feel free to add any comments or questions below:

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THE ORIGINS OF THE BIBLE**Lesson 4 -- The Reliability of the Bible**

This lesson is about archaeology. Archaeology is the study of the past civilizations through the excavation of ancient cities and studying the artifacts and relics left behind. All historical documents that have been found are proven true or untrue based upon the archaeological evidence. If history tells us that there was a large city built at a specific location, then an archaeologist should be able to go to that location and excavate (dig up) the area and find evidence of the ancient city.

The Bible makes many claims that it is recording the actual history of the people of Israel. If the Bible is God-breathed, then everything written down about the history will be accurate. Archaeology will be able to confirm what the Bible says and show that the Bible is historically reliable.

Here is an example of how archaeology proves that the Bible is the most accurate historical document ever made. Herodotus, an ancient historian, had written that the even more ancient Egyptians grew no grapes or grapevines and drank no wine. Read Genesis 40:1-13. This account is about the same ancient Egyptians that Herodotus had spoken about.

1. The butler has a dream and sees a vine that produced _____. (a fruit)

This places the Bible's account of ancient Egypt against Herodotus' account. Archaeology has shown us which account is the accurate one. Archaeologists have dug up several tombs from ancient Egypt. In the paintings on the tomb walls, Egyptians are shown cultivating grape vines, harvesting grapes and pressing them for their juices. So archaeology proved that the Bible was more accurate about ancient Egyptian civilization than Herodotus.

Here is another example. Read Genesis 11:27-32.

2. In verse 31, Terah leaves from Ur of the _____ and plans to go into the land of _____.

Critics of the Bible for many years said that there was no evidence that anyone from Mesopotamia (the Chaldees) had ever traveled to the Mediterranean Sea (the land of Canaan) during the days of Abraham. Archaeologists have uncovered a written contract in Mesopotamia dated around the time of Abraham. The contract stated that the signer could lease a wagon so long as he promised not to drive it to the Mediterranean Sea. Once again the Bible was more reliable than the so-called historians.

Read Genesis 14:1-16.

3. This passage refers to the following kings and their cities:
 - a. Bera, king of _____.
 - b. Birsha, king of _____.
 - c. Shinab, king of _____.
 - d. Shemeber, king of _____.
 - e. The king of Bela, which is _____.

For many years, historians criticized this account of a war. They said the five cities mentioned above did not exist. The historians told people that this account in Genesis was only a legend. But since 1974, archaeologists have dug up 17,000 clay tablets from the Kingdom of Ebla (this kingdom existed about 500 years before Abraham was born). Within this huge collection of tablets are references to all five cities that historians claimed were legends. On one tablet, all five cities are even listed in the same order as they appear in the Genesis account. Again the Bible was more accurate than historians.

In the 1930's an archaeologist, Garstang, decide to excavate the city of Jericho. Right where the Bible said it would be, Garstang found the ruins of the city buried beneath many years of

accumulated dirt and debris. But something Garstang found startled him so much that he made two other members of the excavation team sign a statement with him as to what was found. Garstang said, "As to the main fact, then, there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over their ruins into the city." Read Joshua 6:1-21.

4. When the people shouted on the seventh day and the trumpets were blown, what happened to the walls of Jericho?

Again archaeology proved that the Bible was accurate in recording history.

Sir William Ramsay, one of the best known archaeologists in the world, tried at one point in his life to prove that the writings of Luke (Luke and Acts) were historically inaccurate. As an example, read Acts 14:1-6.

5. This passage states that Lystra and Derbe were cities of _____.

The passage also seems to imply that Iconium was not of Lycaonia since he fled from Iconium to the cities of Lycaonia. However, an ancient Roman statesman, Cicero, had listed Iconium as a city of Lycaonia. In 1910, Sir William Ramsay, found a monument that referred to Iconium as a city of Phrygia, not Lycaonia. Read Luke 3:1.

6. Who was tetrarch of Abilene?

7. Which year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar?

Historically, we know that the fifteenth year of Tiberius' reign was about A.D. 27. Historians used to say that Luke made an error since the only Lysanias they knew of died in 36 B.C. However, an inscription from around A.D. 25 found recently near the area of Abilene refers to "Lysanias the Tetrarch".

Historians also used to doubt Luke's use of words as being historically reliable. For example, read Acts 28:7.

8. Publius is described as the _____ of the island.

Historians did not think that expression was the proper title for the ruler of the island of Malta. Archaeologists have dug up inscriptions from that time period that call the ruler "first man" or "chief man". Read Acts 17:6.

9. Jason and some of the brethren were brought before _____.

Historians used to say that Luke was wrong in using this expression (*politarch* in Greek), because no ancient writings ever called the city officials, "the rulers of the city". Archaeology has dug up 19 inscriptions that use the term *politarch* ("rulers of the city"). Five of these inscriptions were found in Thessalonica, the city Luke was describing in Acts 17.

After several years of excavating the areas referred to in the Bible, Ramsay had the following to say about Luke, "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy . . . this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians. . . . Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness."

Our next lesson will be on the reliability of the Bible as God-breathed. Please feel free to add any comments or questions below or include a note:

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THE ORIGINS OF THE BIBLE

Lesson 5 -- The Inspiration of the Bible

This lesson is about what it means to say that the Bible was inspired by God. Some people will say that they believe that the Bible was inspired, but then they start to discount certain portions of the Scriptures by calling them myths and legends. Others will say that the Bible was inspired, but that the writers were able to choose what they wrote so that errors are possible in the Bible. We will look at the nature of inspiration and how that inspired message has come to us.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

1. All Scripture is _____.

Some translations say "inspired by God", others give the literal meaning of the Greek phrase as "God-breathed" (for example, NIV). When Paul tells Timothy that all Scripture is inspired by God, he means that God breathed the words. He does not say that the writers had an option to change God's message. Read 2 Peter 1:12-21.

2. Peter says he is writing these things so that after his death his readers will always be able to _____ . (verse 15)

3. Peter says that the things the apostles had told people about Jesus were not _____ . (verse 16)

4. Peter says that the apostles were " _____ of his majesty."

5. Peter reminds his readers that he was on the mountain with Jesus when a voice spoke from heaven that said " _____."

6. Peter also says that no prophecy comes from the will of _____ . (verse 21)

7. On the contrary, prophecy was when men spoke as they were "moved by" (KJV) or "carried along by" (NIV) the _____.

Inspiration, therefore, is when men were directed by the Holy Spirit to write down or speak words that were breathed by God. These words were true. Read Hebrews 6:18.

8. It is impossible for God to _____.

Since God told people the story of creation as it is recorded in Genesis, then it must be a true version. God cannot lie. When we read about the life and death of Christ and his resurrection, we know that the story is accurate because God is the one who told people what to write down.

However, saying that the Scripture is God-breathed does not mean there is no variation in the writing styles of the authors. The styles in Greek are very different between writers, but the

messages of all the writings came from one source, God. No mistakes were made in the original writings (autographs). God revealed His words and will and did not let men change His words.

Of course, God inspired the writers and not the copyist. We looked at the fact in an earlier lesson that the Bible was copied by hand for many hundreds of years. Some people worry that maybe a mistake was made in copying that would change the meaning of Bible passages. The same worry was in the minds of Jews 1700 years ago (AD 200). They wanted to be certain that no mistakes were made in the copies of the Old Testament. A group of Jewish copyists began what is now called the Masoretic tradition. These Jews went through the entire Old Testament and counted the number of letters in each book. They counted how many times each letter was used in each book. They figured out which letter was the middle letter of each book. They made many other types of similar calculations. Then, whenever a new copy was completed of any book, they would start counting the letters. If the new copy did not match up with the original numbers, then it was destroyed as imperfect.

You may recall that the Old Testament was completed in its writing around 400 BC. That means there was a 600 year gap before the Masoretic tradition began. The Dead Sea Scrolls found in the 1940s have helped scholars to be sure there were no mistakes in the Masoretic copies. The Dead Sea Scrolls were written around 100 BC and contain partial or complete copies of almost every book in the Old Testament. With these books, scholars have found out that the Masoretic tradition was very effective in preserving the text. Only a few changes have been necessary to the text. These were generally spelling mistakes and no mistake of the copyist ever changed any Biblical doctrine.

For the accuracy of the Old Testament, the problem has been the scarcity of ancient manuscripts. For the new Testament, there is an overabundance of manuscripts. Read Acts 17:6.

9. When some of the brethren were brought before the rulers of the city, they were called "These that have _____ the _____ upside down."(KJV)

10. Read Acts 8:1-4. Those who were scattered by persecution "went _____ preaching the word."

There are many thousands of manuscripts copies and several more thousands of versions. Everyone who became a Christian was wanting a copy of the writings. So ordinary people would sit down and make their own copies of the different books. We have copies that include abbreviations, misspellings, repeated words and other ordinary mistakes. Scholars today have been working with the manuscripts to trace their origins. For example, if I misspelled a word in a manuscript and then let you make a copy of my manuscript, then your manuscript would probably have the same misspelling, and if you let some friends copy your copy, then the mistake would continue. We call that a line of manuscripts because we can trace all the manuscripts to the original source where the misspelling occurred. There are three main lines of New Testament manuscripts (of course there are many lines that branch off from each of these lines, but since these three are the main lines and, therefore, the oldest lines, they are the ones that will most accurately reflect the original writings). These three lines account for the differences in many of the translations existent today.

Our next lesson, the final lesson in this series, will discuss these three lines and the various English translations. Please feel free to add any comments or questions below or include a note:

Mail to: Correspondence Courses
PO Box 1123
Poteau, OK 74953

THE ORIGINS OF THE BIBLE

Lesson 6 -- English Translations of the Bible

This lesson is about the various English translations of the Bible. I will try to explain the differences between the translations and help you see which translation might be best for you to use in your studies. As with some of the other lessons in this series, the questions will be in a review format at the end of the lesson.

THE TEXTS

As we discussed in our last lesson, there were three major lines of texts for the Greek New Testament. Today we call these (1) the Received Text, (2) the Alexandrian Text (sometimes called the Critical Text), (3) the Majority Text. The Received Text was originally published in the 1500's based on the Greek manuscripts then available. None of these manuscripts were what we today would call ancient. They were copies of copies of copies many times removed from the original writings. The Alexandrian Text was first published in the 1800's based on some ancient manuscripts found in the Vatican and in Sinai and Alexandria. These ancient Greek texts were probably written around A.D. 400. The Majority Text attempts to take all of the various Greek manuscripts and other writings and make a text based on the reading used in the majority of the texts. The texts used were written beginning in A.D. 400 and continuing for several centuries.

THE METHODS

Besides the different texts used in the translations of the Bible, there is also a difference between translations because of the translation method used by the translators. Some translations try to give a word-by-word translation. You will read the same phrases as are in the Greek. However, Greek, like many other languages, uses idioms (phrases that have a greater meaning than the words alone may convey) and expressions that were based upon their culture and customs. When these are translated word-by-word into English it is confusing because we do not understand the idiom or expression.

A different method of translating is to give a "dynamic equivalent". This means the translators read the Greek idiom or expression and try to give an equivalent idiom or expression in English while not changing the historical context of the words.

A third method, which is really not translation, is called paraphrase. Usually paraphrases are based on one of the actual English translations although a few paraphrases claim to have first translated the Greek and then paraphrased the message. "Paraphrase" means that the person looks at the phrase and then rewrites it in his own words. Paraphrases are extremely inaccurate, because they express only what the paraphraser believes the Bible meant.

Also paraphrases are usually the work of only one man while translations are usually the work of large committees. Committees have an advantage. Usually the committees are made up of dozens of scholars in Greek and Hebrew. Different scholars check each others work to make certain that the translation is true to the Greek or Hebrew text. A few translations have been done by individuals. These translations should be regarded warily since they did not have anyone to check their work for accuracy.

THE TRANSLATIONS

The King James Version (or Authorized Version) was translated in 1611 under the authority of King James I of England. Forty-seven scholars worked on the translation. The only Greek text then published was the Received Text and that was the one used. The method used by the translators was

word-by-word with no attempt to explain the meaning of Greek idioms or expressions. As in all languages, words change their meaning over time. The English used in the King James Version is very archaic and is very difficult for even native English speakers to understand. The last time the language of the KJV was modified was in the late 1700's. So the language is about 200 years out-of-date. It uses words like "thee" and "thy" instead of "you" or "your". The KJV is mainly used because it was for many centuries the only good English translation. Most translations of the Bible into other languages were made by translating the KJV into native languages. Unless your English is very good and you have an understanding of archaic English words, you will find this version very difficult to study. Also this translation may confuse the reader by not giving a clearer meaning to Greek idioms and expressions.

The Revised Version (RV) was made in the 1880's by a group of British and American scholars. It was meant to be a complete revision of the KJV. The translators based their revision on the Alexandrian Text. There was disagreement between the British and American scholars on the best way to express many of the phrases in English. This was because the English spoken by the British and that spoken by the Americans is very different. Although both are English, grammar and structure are different at times and the expressions are quite different. The British scholars' choices are found in the RV. The American scholars' choices are found in the American Standard Version (ASV) published in 1901. Both of these translations are word-by-word translations based on the Alexandrian Text. The language in these translations is very choppy because the translators did not want to make any changes from the Greek. Many English speakers find it hard to read these translations.

By the 1950's both of these versions were being revised to make them easier to read. These revisions are now called the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and the New American Standard Version (NASV). Both of these revisions remain essentially word-by-word translations (though now put into readable English sentence structures) from the Alexandrian Text. More recently, the RSV has undergone another revision which is called the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

In the 1970's the New International Version (NIV) was published. This was the first major translation that has attempted to use "dynamic equivalents". The large body of scholars, from all around the world, wanted a translation that could be read by people whose first language was not English. The phrases and sentences are easily read. The Greek idioms and expressions have been changed into simple English equivalents. The scholars did not stay with the Alexandrian Text in all cases, although this was their major text. When the scholars could not agree as to which text or translation should be used, a vote was taken. The choice with the most votes was placed into the body of the translation. The minority opinion was placed in the footnotes to that verse. So when using the NIV be sure to look at the footnotes. For people whose first language is not English, NIV is an excellent choice.

In the 1980's a group of scholars decided to make another translation of the Bible that would preserve the wonderful style of the KJV but use modern English and consider the Alexandrian and Majority Texts. This version is called the New King James Version (NKJV). The NKJV mainly uses the Received Text for the body of its translation unless the Received Text translation is not supported by any other texts. The footnotes in the NKJV point out all of the differences in both the Alexandrian and Majority texts. The translation, like the KJV, is a word-by-word translation with a little variation to make it more readable by English speakers. With its footnotes of varying texts, this translation makes a good study Bible. The NKJV is another excellent choice for those who need a simple English wording, and it is especially good for those who are used to and familiar with the KJV.

PARAPHRASES AND SEMI-PARAPHRASES

As stated above, paraphrases are not a good source for study from the Bible. One of the best known paraphrases is the Living Bible (LB). The LB is the work of one man who wanted to make the KJV easier for his children to understand. So he just read the KJV and then expressed each verse based on his own understanding. Therefore, the LB is really just one man's opinion as to what the Bible means. It is not a translation of the Bible.

There are also some semi-paraphrases available to the public. These are actually translations of the Greek and Hebrew where the translators went very far in trying to come up with an equivalent

English expression. Sometimes the translators had to reword large sections to try to explain what they thought the text meant. Although better than a paraphrase like the LB, these semi-paraphrases should not be considered the best way to read God's word. Examples of semi-paraphrases are the Amplified Bible (Amp.B), the New English Bible (NEB), and Philip's Bible (Philip's).

REVIEW

1. What is the difference between a translation and a paraphrase?

2. What are the three main Greek texts from which translations are made?
 - (a)
 - (b)
 - (c)

3. Explain what "dynamic equivalent" means.

4. Name a translation that uses dynamic equivalents.

5. Name two translations based mainly or exclusively on the Received Text.
 - (a)
 - (b)

6. Which translation was made especially for non-native English speakers?

7. Why are paraphrases not a good source for studying the Bible?

8. Which translation includes footnotes about the variant readings found in the other Greek texts?

If there is another translation or paraphrase that you would like to know the history behind, just write the name of the version below.

I hope you have found this lesson, and especially this series, profitable. I am glad to have had this opportunity to share with you a little knowledge about where our Bible came from. Remember that all scripture is God-breathed (inspired) and should be studied. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Timothy 2:15). I hope you will continue to study. If you would like to study another series of lessons with me, please indicate a topic listed below or write down a topic of your own choosing on the blank line.

___ What Is Sin?

___ What Must I Do To Be Saved?

___ The Church That Jesus Built

Please feel free to add any comments or questions below or include a note:

Mail to: Correspondence Courses
PO Box 1123
Poteau, OK 74953