

GRACE BIBLE TRAINING CENTRE (GBTC)
SCHOOL OF MINISTRY
ARUSHA - TANZANIA

SUBJECT: BIBLE SURVEY

LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION

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Read 2Timothy 3:14-17; 2Peter 1:15-21; Psalms 119:96-105

Introduction

How did God give us the Bible? Was it written by angels and left somewhere waiting for someone to find it? Or did someone spend his lifetime studying and searching that he might finally give us his philosophies?

God did not choose any of these avenues to give us His Word. Instead, He used ordinary men from many walks of life and over a span of hundreds of years to give us the Book we call the Bible. The agreement and harmony with which these men wrote stand as a testimony to God, who never changes.

The way the Bible was written is a miracle. Its preservation is another miracle. One of the prophets told how the king took the book of prophecies, threw it into the fire, and burned it. But, the Lord told the prophet to take another scroll and write everything again (Jeremiah 36:27-28). God's Word can never be destroyed. (Matthew 5:17-19)

In this lesson, we will study facts about the Bible – who was used in the writing of it, how one part of the Bible relates to another, and how it all relates to us. As we get better acquainted with the Book, we will appreciate and study it more.

The Bible tells us of God's love for us. In it God gives us instructions on how to live, and promises that someday we will live with Him for eternity. In studying the Bible, we not only learn of God's plans for our future but also of His promises for the present.

Origin of the Bible

The Holy Bible is like a small library of 66 books that God has given us. We call it the Bible, the Scriptures, or the Word of God.

The word *Bible* means "books." *Holy* means "something we respect because it belongs to God." Each of the 66 books of the Bible is holy.

Authors and Inspiration

Approximately forty men were divinely inspired to write the Bible. Some of these men wrote more than one book. A few books were not signed by their authors, so we do not know who wrote them.

The term *divinely inspired* means the Holy Spirit gave the authors the thoughts and words God wanted them to write. The Bible tells us in 2Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is inspired by God. These writers could not have consulted each other about their work because they did not all live at the same time. The first books were written about 1500 years before Christ, and the last was written about 100 years after Christ. Because these books of the Bible were inspired by God, we call them holy.

Among the authors were kings and fishermen, politicians, military and religious leaders, peasants, merchants, and poets. Even though they came from different places, with various interests and backgrounds, they all wrote about the same theme because God inspired them. This theme is the relationship between God and humanity. Such order throughout all of the books, without contradictions, was possible because the Bible has only one principal author – God – who spoke through different men.

The following verse is important to memorize:

Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2Peter 1:21)

General Structure of the Bible

When two people or two nations want to make a special agreement, they can write a *treaty* or a *pact*. Once the treaty is signed, it must not be broken. The word *testament* means treaty, pact, or covenant.

The Bible is divided into two Testaments – the Old and the New. These are the pacts God has made with humankind.

The Old Testament was given to the Jews, who were also called Hebrews or Israelites. God chose them to receive His truths, write them, and teach them to others. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew because it was the language of the Jews.

The Old Testament covers the history and terms of God's relationship with humanity, from Creation to the coming of the Saviour who would establish a new covenant.

The New Testament gives the history and the conditions of the new covenant, or pact, that God has made with all who accept His Son Jesus Christ as their Saviour. The New Testament tells the story of the life of Jesus Christ, and also what He taught.

When the New Testament was written, Greek was a commonly known language. Since this new pact was for all people – not for the Jews alone – the New Testament was written in Greek, thus making it possible for most people to read it.

The Relationship of The Testaments

The Old Testament is very important because it reveals God's plan for humanity. But the Old Testament was a temporary pact until Jesus Christ would come to establish the permanent pact. We are now living under the new pact – the New Testament.

The New Testament is based upon the Old Testament. It not only explains the relationship between the two pacts, but it relates the fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies.

For example, the Old Testament book of Micah 5:2, it indicates that the Saviour would be born in the Jewish town of Bethlehem.

Matthew 2:1, in the New Testament, tells us Jesus the Saviour was born in Bethlehem.

Psalm 22:18 in the Old Testament prophesies that men would gamble for and divide the Saviour's garments among themselves. When Jesus was dying on the cross, the soldiers took His clothes.

Matthew 27:35 says, "When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots."

There are hundreds of other examples. Special books have been compiled which give all of the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament.

It is wonderful that a book as ancient as the Old Testament was preserved for so many years. We should be grateful to God's chosen people who received God's Word, preserved it, and shared it with other nations.

Different Translations of the Bible

God's desire is that every person should accept Jesus Christ as his or her Saviour (2Peter 3:9). Since this is God's desire, we know He wants everyone to understand His Word. This is why the Old Testament was written in Hebrew for the Jews, and the New Testament was written in Greek for the larger world population of that time.

Today, since most of us do not understand Hebrew or Greek, we would have a difficult time understanding the Scriptures if they were not translated into our language. This is why we study the Bible, teach it, translate it, and publish it.

There are Bible societies that are always working on new translations. As of 2005, there are approximately 7000 distinct languages spoken in the world. Complete Bibles exist in 422 of them. The New Testament has been translated into almost 1100 languages. Over 1600 other translation projects are in process.

When a new translation is completed, there is much rejoicing because another group of people are able to read the Scriptures in their own language. There are still thousands of languages into which the Bible has not yet been translated. It is the more reason why we need to pray that those who do this work will have strength to continue their great task.

Different Versions of the Bible

Sometimes there is more than one translation of the Bible in a particular language because languages change. When a translation becomes outdated and a bit difficult to understand, it needs revision. Older words are replaced by newer words – words used in everyday speech.

Making a new version is not an attempt to change the meaning or the teachings of the Bible. All versions—old and new—are the same Bible. The translators have tried to give us the exact meaning that was in the original Greek or Hebrew copies.

The most popular of the English versions for many years was the King James Version. The English, however, is several centuries old and sometimes difficult to understand. Today, many enjoy reading the New International Version or the New King James Version or the KiSwahili Bible.

Some readers find the contemporary language easier to understand, while others still prefer the richness of the old versions.

The Apocrypha

Catholic versions of the Bible include the Apocrypha, a number of books of doubtful origin. Though these books contain some historical information, especially about the 400 year period between the Old and New Testaments, not all their historical data are accurate. Because they lack evidence of divine inspiration, they were not accepted as part of the Jewish sacred writings, which make up the Old Testament.

The collection of books was named *Apocrypha*, from a Greek word meaning “hidden things.” They were considered as being beyond the ability of the average person to understand and appreciate—whereas Scripture is given for us all to profit by and enjoy.

God wants everyone to be saved and “to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1Timothy 2:4).