

Book of Books

Introduction

With this lesson we begin our introduction to the world's most amazing book.

In the first lesson of the six we look at the Bible, How it is made up and the circumstances in which it was written. It will cover two diagrams: "The Book of Books" and "The incomparable Book."

The second lesson will be based on the diagram "A Relationship Broken.", It helps us to see our real need for the message of the Bible.

The third lesson in the series is simply called "Redemption." It will study the theme of redemption, which i think you will see is the theme of the Bible. Of course, by the time we get that far along you will understand what we mean by the different words used.

It will be an important lesson in that it will survey the contents of the Bible from beginning to end. It will help us to have confidence in the Bible as a historical record that needs to be taken seriously.

For our fourth study we will look at "Salvation in Christ." It's designed to help you see how you may be part of the exciting plan God's had from the beginning for the human family.

Our fifth and sixth lessons will look at "The Church." We will attempt to present the church as it existed in the first century, the exciting context in which the followers of Jesus lived and worshiped.

I must point out that the order of lessons can be changed at times to meet the special needs of the student. This decision will usually be made by the person providing the course for you.

Now, for the lesson.

Here you have a diagram entitled "Book of Books." The Bible is in fact a book of not merely one book, but a book made up of many books.

There are 66 books in the Bible. They are arranged in two large divisions known as the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New.

The books within each of these divisions are arranged like any systematic library, in different sections according to the type of material they contain.

The Books of Law.

The detailed diagram at the lower left side of the page shows you the books of Law. There are five of them: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books contain the Law which God gave to His people at the hands of a servant called Moses, whom we shall meet more personally in our third lesson.

But not only do the books contain the magnificent Law, the first book, Genesis, contains history. It tells about the beginning: the beginning of this world, the beginning of mankind, the beginning of our problems, the beginning of God's plan to recover man from himself, and the beginning of a special nation called Israel (later to be called Jews). Not surprisingly, Genesis means "beginnings." We need to have some knowledge of these five books to help us find out what the Bible is all about.

The Books of History

The second detailed diagram on the lower right side of the page introduces you to the twelve books of History in the Old Testament. They are: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

They follow the early history of the nation I mentioned that was introduced in the Law section, the nation of Israel. From the time it went into the land God promised it until it experienced great tragedy, being taken into exile by alien nations, then some of them being brought back to the land. All of that is covered in these twelve historical books.

I must make a comment at this point. I will be mentioning things now that you may think I expect you to be familiar with. No, I don't. In this study I find it better to assume that the student is completely ignorant of biblical material. I am often wrong in that assumption because most of us have a smattering of Bible knowledge living in this part of the world. But it is better for me to assume that so I can go ahead and explain things as simply as possible, and you won't think I am speaking in a patronizing manner. I shall of course be speaking of things you are not familiar with, but they will be introduced in such a way that you will have no trouble keeping up. And remember, you can always go back and listen again.

The Books of Poetry

We now move to the upper left-hand corner of the next page and look at the five books of poetry that come next in the Old Testament. These books are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

They really help us to look into the Israelite's mind as he worships God, or ponders life, thinks about suffering, and how everything relates toward God's goodness and justice. These books contain passages with which we are all in some way familiar.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He restores my soul."

Most of us are familiar with and love the words of the 23rd Psalm.

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, when we remembered Zion."

These words were made more popular in a song lifted from Psalm 137—a beautiful lament of God's people for their sad plight in a far country, Babylon, as a result of their sin. These are books in which we are able to share with the Israelites, under God's guidance, the great problems of life.

The Books of Prophecy

Seventeen books of prophecy come next. They comprise the last section of the Old Testament. The first five books are called the major prophets, and the last twelve are called the minor prophets. Most of the minor prophets are shorter than the major prophets.

The five major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The twelve minor prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The Old Testament prophets were courageous individuals sent to God's nation Israel to pull them back to God's ways. The prophets therefore delivered many warnings to Israel of God's judgments on them when they insisted on leaving God's ways. Because of this, many of the prophets' words sound almost as though they were written to our country here in the 21st century. The prophets also pointed to future events, especially the coming of Jesus into the world.

Perhaps you will have gathered from these few remarks that the prophets' work was not always to foretell, but it was always to tell forth what God had to say. With the prophets we have seen the final section of the Old Testament. We will now look into the most recent part of the Bible, the New Testament.

The Four Gospels (Books of Biography)

The next detailed diagram on the page tells of four books of biography: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books tell about the life of Christ. I am more likely to get a correct answer when I ask questions about the contents of these books more than any others. Quite a lot of people are aware of Jesus' life on earth as we read it in these volumes. And I must admit I kind of feel like I'm on home base when I am in one of these four vital books.

The Book of Acts

The one book devoted to history in the New Testament is noted on the page directly under the biography diagram. It is known as the book of Acts, or Acts of the Apostles.

It is a book of tremendous significance, because it tells how the message of Jesus was made real and personal in the lives of thousands and thousands of men and women in the first century. It really covers about the first thirty years of the history of Christianity. Its second chapter mentions the first preaching of the resurrection of Christ and the beginning of what was called "The Church." It is a really pivotal book, showing as it does how the Jesus promised in the Old Testament and made historical in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John changed and led men and women after He had left the earth.

The Epistles

Twenty-one books follow the book of Acts, and these are called Epistles. They are represented in the diagram at the center right on the page.

What is an epistle? I am told a little girl once told her Bible school teacher it is the wife of an apostle. No, it is not. An epistle is simply a letter.

The epistles are: Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1st and 2nd Peter, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, and Jude.

They are letters written to churches and individuals by followers of Jesus. They occupy a position of great importance because they explain how people in those primitive churches were to apply the teachings of Jesus in their everyday lives, and how they were to live together as united, caring, growing churches. They are therefore of tremendous significance to us, because we need the same guidance. They relate to the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John by explaining how we can put Jesus' message at the center of our lives.

The Book of Revelation

The last book of the New Testament and of the Bible is the book of Revelation. It is largely a book of prophecy. This exciting book, often mysterious and difficult to the modern reader, was a message to persecuted Christians of the first century. That even if they should die for their faith, theirs was the victory. Through Christ they could not fail: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." That is the message of this book.

This then introduces to us the Bible as a Book of Books—a library of religious literature. This information helps us to find our way through the Bible more readily. We are more capable of knowing where to go to find something in the Bible.

Now we leave the first major diagram and enter on a study of the second. So it is time to turn the page.

The Incomparable Book

The second diagram is titled "The Incomparable Book." The aim of this second part of the lesson is to present information to you which shows the Bible is a unique book unlike any other.

We highlight the information by providing it as an answer to a few questions. We are really looking at the background to the writing and the bringing together of the books of the Bible.

How Long Did It Take to Write the Bible?

The first question relates to the length of time that passed from the time the first book of the Bible was written until the writing of the 66th or last book. Well, the first writer was probably Moses. Some think Job may have been written even earlier than the books written by Moses. But we will assume Moses wrote first. He lived about 1500 years before the coming of Christ. Again, some date this somewhat later, but many centuries before Jesus at any rate.

The final book, the book of Revelation, was written around 96 AD. This means that almost 1600 years passed between the writing of the first and last books of the Bible.

The timeline at the bottom of the page helps us see the cavalcade of events that passed as the Bible was being written. A book or two here, then a break of decades or even centuries before more books were written. Great lives such as those of King David, Alexander the Great, and even Jesus Christ lived out on earth. Empires rose and fell. Immediately we can see the uniqueness of the Bible.

Evidence That the Bible Was Written Over a Long Period of Time

There are two or three things we can point to as simple evidence that the Bible was written over a long period of time. It is worth our noticing these because from time to time people play around with the idea that some wise guy, with the help of a few co-conspirators, worked up this book to make it look as though the first half was much older than the second—and that the first four told many things that happened in the second. The only problem with the theory is that it couldn't possibly be true.

At least 200 years before Jesus was born, a group of scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, translated the Old Testament out of the Hebrew language into the Greek. By this time this collection of writings was already ancient. Its uniqueness was the reason it was translated into the language carried to many countries by the great Greek Alexander. It was called "the Septuagint Translation."

The point is simply this: if it was translated at this early stage—more than 200 years before the first book of the New Testament was written—it is obviously of much greater age than the New Testament.

Another way to see that the Old Testament is much older than the New is to consider the ancient scrolls found in a cave above the Dead Sea in 1947. These are called "The Dead Sea Scrolls." Many of these scrolls turned out to be copies of Old Testament books. Some of them date from 50 years before Jesus was born.

Do you realize that those scrolls contained books like the book of Isaiah—information about where and in what period of history Jesus would be born, what His purpose was, how and why He would die, and the good things He would make possible for mankind? Even the men who copied the scrolls were probably dead before Jesus was born.

Then it is possible for us to make "historical cross-checks" to prove that the Old Testament was written in earlier times than the New Testament. You will find, for example, that the language of Genesis and Exodus, and the world that it depicts, is very different from the language of, let's say, the book of Esther—and these in turn are quite different from the language of the New Testament books.

The first books reflect the language and the world of the Semitic people and the Egyptians, whereas the book of Esther reflects a Persian background, and the New Testament books betray a Roman background.

There are many such ways in which we can see the genuine antiquity—or the oldness—of the Old Testament as compared with the New.

How Many Writers Were Involved?

But on to the second question. How many writers were involved? Well, there were about 40. Something like 32 writers for the Old Testament and 8 for the New. The reason I say this is approximate is that we can't always be sure how many books to credit to the one writer. But if not 40, the number was close to it.

How many people realise the Bible was written by so many people? And what were the occupations of those 40 people? They were a most interesting assemblage. They included such diverse occupations as shepherds, farmer, king, fisherman, doctor, tentmaker, and tax collector. Some of them were highly educated; others were described by their enemies as ignorant and untutored. But to the pens of those men we can trace the consistency and best-seller of the centuries.

Where Was the Bible Written?

Where was the Bible written? Again we can consider facts unknown to most people in this land of Bibles. A map is provided to help you see where the Bible was written. Most of the Old Testament was written in the area still commonly referred to as Israel, where the Israelites are today, and down toward the Sinai Peninsula. However, some of it was also written to the east or to the right of that map in Babylon or modern-day Iraq.

The New Testament was written largely further to the west. Some books were written in Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey. Other books were written further west in Europe. Incidentally, Europe begins with Greece and extends west, whereas across the Dardanelles (or Aegean Sea) we have Asia beginning with Turkey. Some books were written in Greece and others in Rome, Italy, further to the west.

So you can see that the Bible was written over a vast area of the ancient Mediterranean world. The distances involved—cultural as well as geographical—are of even greater significance when we remember that this was centuries before the invention of the steam engine, the jet engine, the telephone, the typewriter, or even the printing press.

The Unity of the Bible's Message

In this series of studies we will be emphasizing the unity of the Bible's message—the fact that from beginning to end it really has one message that is of chief concern. Now if this is true, the Bible is without an equal. To have been written over such a long period of time by so many different people of greatly differing backgrounds, in such diverse parts of the world, yet to tell just one central message is something men on their own would have been incapable of doing.

“Someone has well said: Whence but from heaven, man unskilled in arts, In several ages born, in several parts weave such agreeing truths? Or how, or why Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie? Unasked their pains, ungrateful their advice, Starving their gain and martyred in their price.”

As we proceed in the following five lessons to see just what the message is, I think you will understand why we conclude that men didn't write the Bible without help. But that it is better to say, along with a New Testament writer: “Holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

You now may take the evaluation sheet and attempt to answer mentally the questions on it. As necessary, look back at the diagram or even turn back the tape when you've done that and think you can do a reasonable job with the questions, put the booklet and tape aside, take your pen or pencil and attempt the answers.

We'll pick them up when we drop off the next lesson. I hope you found this first study profitable and interesting, it's been a fairly short one. I look forward to being with you for the next.