

Bible Overview

The Bible (from a Latin/Greek word meaning "book") is the bestselling book in the world and has influenced life for billions of people throughout history. Many countries, including our own, have created societies based on the rules, wisdom and values found in it. It is important that everyone have a good understanding of this incredibly important book.

This is a quick overview of the Bible. You can study in great detail any of the topics below and other topics about the Bible but this is intended as a brief introduction.

The Bible is made up of 66 different books, written by 40 different authors over a period of around 1,500 years. The authors included kings, fishermen, priests, government officials, farmers, shepherds, and doctors. The Bible consists of different types of writing including: history or narrative, law or commands, wisdom, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic or about the future, parables or stories with a spiritual lesson, letters and romance. The Old Testament or Jewish Scriptures is made up of 39 books and was originally written in Hebrew and a little Aramaic. The New Testament consists of 27 books and was originally written in Greek.

Many Christians believe that the Bible is the inspired words of God. They believe that the very words of the original manuscripts were directly inspired by God, although he did not change the author's intelligence or understanding while doing so. God worked in a unique way through the author's knowledge, understanding, personality and background to provide His inspired Words to mankind. Consider for a moment the amazing opportunity we have if the Creator of the Universe has methodically provided and preserved knowledge, wisdom and a way of salvation for us in the Bible with the unifying theme of teaching us about Himself and about His redemptive plan for mankind.

Ancient books are different than the books we may be used to. The original writings for ancient books that the writers actually penned including the Bible no longer exist. Confidence regarding how close what we have to what was originally written is measured by number of copies of manuscripts and how close in age the manuscripts are to when the document was originally written. With Plato's writings for example, we have seven copies and the earliest copy is 1,200 years old from the original. For the New Testament, we have about 6,000 Greek manuscript parts, about 19,000 manuscript parts in other languages and the earliest copy is around 29 years old from the original. In regards to ancient documents, the New Testament is very reliable.

When translating the Bible from these available original language manuscripts to English, leading scholars work as teams to find the most accurate manuscripts and carefully translate. As more and earlier manuscripts are discovered, they are compared to previous manuscripts to increase accuracy to small degrees. For example, the King James Version was translated in 1611 and is a good translation but older manuscripts have been found since 1611 and more knowledge has been obtained which increase the accuracy of newer translations.

Since the original languages of the Bible (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek) are different than English, accurate translation becomes a challenge. There are two general approaches to translation (with examples of translations): Word-for-Word (KJV, ESV, NASB) and Thought-for-Thought (CEV, ICB, MSG) and a balance between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought (NIV, CSB, NLT). This is a complicated subject. For more information, see <http://www.gnpcb.org/assets/products/excerpts/1581346433.1.pdf>

When reading the Bible and applying what you read, it is important that you interpret it properly. Some simple rules would be: 1) Know the literature type you are reading. 2) Consider the context. 3) Look for the obvious meaning. 4) Use common sense. There is a lot more information you can study about this.

Additional Introduction Resources:

- Videos: <https://youtu.be/CriU8nV1Ufk> and <https://youtu.be/pFJFwuNTPNo>
- Books: **Knowing Scripture** by RC Sproul and **How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Fourth Edition** by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart