

THE NATURE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE BIBLE

Why do we need to spend time on this? Well, if the Bible is *just* human literature, no different from Shakespeare, that will affect and control your attitude, approach, and actions toward it. What is the Bible?

1. The Nature of the Bible

The Bible is the **written** revelation of God, perfectly given through the original human authors, sufficient and clear for its purposes.

- A. While there are parts of the Bible that were given by dictation (Exod 20:2–17), the vast majority of Scripture was not. God **prepared** the human authors for their task through their character, training, and experiences (Exod 2:1–10; Psalm 23; Jer 1:5; Gal 1:15). God had the right man in the right place at the right time with the right “equipment” so that His message would be correctly given.

Light that passes through stained glass windows is affected by the stain. Some then say that for God’s Word to come through man is therefore “stained” and not the pure Word. But, what if everything about that man was perfectly formed so that God’s Word would be exactly communicated through that particular “color”? This is the biblical view!

- B. Having prepared the human author, God then gave **revelation** through him. Revelation is the *unveiling* or *making known* information about God and His purposes that was previously unknown.
- 1) Through this written revelation you can truly know God and His will.
 - 2) God reveals His character and will through statements of truth (called *propositions*). That is the only way truth can be clearly and understandably revealed.
 - 3) God makes His revelation known through human language.
 - 4) Because God has revealed information about Himself and His purposes to you, you must learn and know it as God has revealed it!
- C. God “breathed” His revelation through human authors so that it is **inspired**.
- 1) Inspiration means God-breathed, and is the result of the Holy Spirit moving a human author to write His revelation (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). The Spirit’s work involved **protecting** the human authors from error and **guiding** them in the selection of words consistent with their individual personalities and stylistic differences.
 - 2) The *words* are God-breathed, not merely thoughts or ideas (Matt 5:18). Furthermore, *all* of the words are God-breathed, not merely those referring to salvation (2 Tim 3:16).

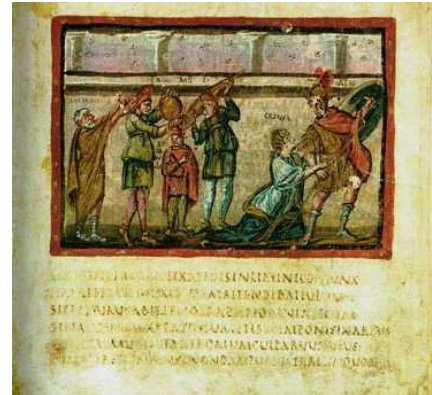
- 3) The **original** writings were without **error** (cp. 1 Cor 14:37 with 1 Cor 2:13). Everything the Bible says is exactly the information God wanted written. The result was revelation written by men having God's authority.
- D. The Bible as God's Word has absolute authority (Matt 5:17–18; John 10:35). Therefore, so that God's people can know and obey it He has providentially **preserved** it (Deut 6:6–9; Ps 119:152, 160). "Preserving" means protecting it from becoming either entirely lost or hopelessly garbled.
- 1) It is important to note that God preserves His Word not *miraculously* but *providentially*. Miraculously means God is actively and directly involved in something so that natural laws are suspended.
 - a. If preservation occurred miraculously, *every* Hebrew and Greek copy would be the same—there would be no differences between any of them. However, this is not the case; no two manuscripts agree at all!
 - b. If preservation occurred miraculously, *every* translation done in *every* language would be a perfect translation—there would be no translation mistakes. However, this is not the case either!
 - 2) God has *providentially* preserved His Word from being entirely lost or hopelessly garbled. Providential means that God works in and through "natural" laws (cf. Ps 148:8). God preserved His Word as men copied and translated it. What this means is that the essential message is found in all the copies, manuscripts, and translations that are existing and known.

So, to review and clarify, with regard to the Bible...

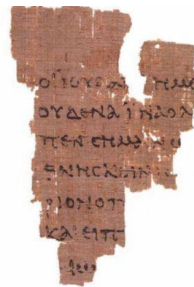
Inspiration is <u>miraculous</u>
Preservation is <u>providential</u>

Since we don't have the original manuscripts, how can we know if "our Bibles" are genuine and authentic? This isn't really that difficult to answer as it may seem!

- a. The Roman poet Virgil lived around the time of Jesus and the apostles. None of the original manuscripts *he* wrote exists today. The oldest copy that we have is from the AD 400s, and only seven exist. Men who study these kinds of things do not doubt that Virgil wrote works of poetry, just because they don't have the originals. The copies of his works are accepted as genuine.
- b. Compare this with both the OT and NT manuscripts that number in the **thousands!**



The earliest OT manuscripts we have are called the Dead Sea Scrolls (produced between 150 BC and 70 AD).



The earliest NT manuscript fragment is from about 125 AD.



The earliest *complete* manuscripts of the OT and NT are around 300 and 350 AD.

From the standpoint of ancient manuscripts—both quantity and quality—the Bible is the best proven book of ancient times.

- 3) God has preserved His Word so you could know it and obey it!

- E. The Bible’s central message (creation, the Fall into sin, provision of salvation, and how things will end) is **clear** and understandable to most people. The “normal joe” believer is able to understand the basics of what God reveals in the Bible. The technical word describing this is *perspicuous* (the perspicuity of Scripture; Ps 119:105, 130).
- F. In the Bible God has revealed everything we need to know for salvation, for trusting Him perfectly, and for living a life that glorifies Him (Luke 16:31; Acts 20:32; 2 Tim 3:14-17).
- 1) This means that the Bible alone is **sufficient** for its intended purposes. The Bible doesn’t need anything to “help” it.
 - 2) Because the Bible is absolutely sufficient, we need to let the Bible speak for itself rather than making it say something *we* want it to say! This means we need to interpret it correctly—which we’ll cover later.

Let’s review and summarize what we’ve learned about the nature of the Bible—

- ☞ **Preparation** – God made the human authors *ready* for their task
- ☞ **Revelation** – God *made known* truth about Himself and His purposes
- ☞ **Inspiration** – the Bible is *God’s very Word* by His protection and guidance of the human authors
- ☞ **Preservation** – the Bible is providentially *protected* from loss by God
- ☞ **Perspicuous** – the Bible’s central message is *clear and understandable*
- ☞ **Sufficient** –the Bible is a *finished and complete* revelation, *able to do* what God intends it to do

2. Description of the English Bible

There are **39** books in the OT, **27** books in the NT, for a total of **66** books.

A. The names and order of the Books

The Protestant English Bible is arranged in the following order—

1) Old Testament

a. **Pentateuch**

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

b. **Historical** Books

- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- 1, 2 Samuel
- 1, 2 Kings
- 1, 2 Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Esther

c. **Poetry** (or, Wisdom books)

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon

d. **Prophecy**

Major Prophets

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Lamentations
- Ezekiel
- Daniel

Minor Prophets

- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

2) New Testament

a. Gospels

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- John

b. History

- Acts

c. Epistles

Pauline Epistles

- Romans
- 1, 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1, 2 Thessalonians
- 1, 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon

General Epistles

- Hebrews
- James
- 1, 2 Peter
- 1, 2, 3 John
- Jude
- Revelation

If you do not know the books of the Bible from memory, do it! This is a tremendous help in learning God's Word.

B. Bible Translations

- 1) As very few can read Hebrew or Greek perfectly, we need **translations** of the Bible in our language to know and obey the written revelation God has given.
- 2) Today we have a unique situation—there are a *lot* of English translations to choose from! Answering the question, “Which translation should I use?” is one that is thus not the norm in human history. Because of this we need some guidelines!
 - a. The **purpose** or objective of a translation is to provide the Scriptures in your language so you can know and obey God’s Word.
 - b. The **basis** of a translation is the thousands of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts. A good translation takes the time to carefully examine and weigh these to provide the best “foundation.” Remember, *translations* are not the final authority! Comparing one translation by another translation is *not* the correct way to see if it’s a “good” translation.
 - c. The **practice** of translation is to convey the meaning of God’s Word from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts into your language. The translator must “stick” to the message of the original manuscript—he does not have the liberty to make the translation convey a different meaning. Sounds simple—but it’s not!
- 3) In light of this, there are many Bible versions that are good, but unfortunately many that aren’t so good—they’re too “loose” with the meaning or they are controlled by a theological agenda and so don’t correctly convey the meaning in spots.

Some important factors to consider—

- a. Is the translation based on the best manuscripts?
 - b. Does it accurately convey the meaning?
 - c. Is it doctrinally sound?
 - d. Is it understandable?
- 4) While you should have one “primary” Bible for regular use, you should also use several good translations of the Bible for study purposes. This will help you “hear” it better, as well as “see” the meaning better from a different way of translating the phrase or passage.

For a survey of English translations made from the first by John Wycliffe in the 1300s to current day, see Appendix A.