



A Course

*In*

**GENERAL  
BIBLE**

**PART SIX**

Prepared by the  
Committee on Religious Education  
of the  
**American Bible College**

A COURSE  
*IN*  
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Pineland, Florida 33945

## Chapter One

# THE BOOK OF BOOKS

The noted author Sir Walter Scott called the Bible "the Book" and this lesson is the story of how "the Book" of God's redeeming love came to the English-speaking world. "The Book" holds prime importance in Christianity and it holds a unique position in the life of English-speaking people. Our cultural, political, social and religious histories have been powerfully influenced by the English Bible. To appreciate the English Bible, we must have some knowledge of the Bible's origin: how it was preserved; how it came to us; how it is different from other literature; who the men were who struggled to make God's Word available to their generations.

**1. How the Bible Got Its Name.** Ancient peoples used many kinds of material for writing. Stone was perhaps the first and most everyone knows that the Ten Commandments were first written on stone, (Ex. 31:8). Later, especially in Assyria and Babylonia, the main writing material was clay. Wood was also used in early times. While leather (lamb skins, chamois) is not specified in the Old Testament there is little doubt that it was the principal writing material used by the Hebrews. A scribe's knife which was used for making corrections is mentioned in Jeremiah 36:23. The Talmud (the Jewish traditional laws) required explicitly that the Scripture be copied on animal skins. The most common writing material during the New Testament period was papyrus and it was on this that the original New Testament documents were written.

Papyrus was used as early as 3,500 B.C. in Egypt, and was made from the pith of the papyrus plant. Thin strips were cut and laid side by side; then a second layer was laid crosswise of the first and joined together by moisture and pressure. Drying and polishing completed the process. As pith was called **biblos** papyrus rolls came to be called *biblos* or *biblion* by the Greeks. In the Greek, the whole Bible was called *ta biblia* meaning "the books" but when the word passed into the Latin language it was considered as singular and so *biblia* came to mean "the book." From *biblia* came the English word **Bible**.

King Eumenes II of Pergamum, (197-158 B.C.) desired to build a world-renowned library but the Egyptian king stifled his plans by cutting off his supply of papyrus. The king thus produced his own writing material by perfecting the method of the treatment of

skins, which became known as vellum or parchment. Animal hides of calves, antelopes, sheep or goats were stretched and dried; the hair and skin were removed; then both sides rubbed smooth with stone. Finally the parchment was cut folded in the middle and put in quires. From the Fourth century through the Middle Ages, the Bible was penned on vellum or parchment.

**2. What the Bible Is.** The Bible has two main divisions: the Old and the New Testaments. The word "testament" as used in the Bible means "agreement or covenant." Thus the structure of the Bible indicates to us that God has made two significant covenants or agreements. The first expression of the covenant hope was made in the Garden of Eden with the promise that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3). The promise that God gave to Noah after the great flood is another expression of this covenant, (Gen. 9). Abram epitomized the covenant relationship between God and his people. God agreed to make Abram a great nation if he would leave his home and follow Him. Abram obeyed and became Abraham, the father of the Hebrews, later called Israel. The outward symbol of the covenant relationship between God and his people from Abraham on was circumcision. The covenant or agreement was renewed with Isaac, Jacob and each following generation.

The covenant became more explicit at Sinai when God's law was given through Moses and the Israelites entered formally into a covenant with God. Moses "took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said all that the Lord has said we will do and we will be obedient. And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Ex. 24:7,8). With King David, the covenant included the promise, "Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee, thy throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). But when the Davidic line ended in 589 B.C. with the fall of Judah, it became necessary for Judah's religious leaders to re-evaluate the meaning of the covenant.

It was through Jeremiah that God disclosed the meaning of the "new covenant." It was to be an inner,

spiritual bond between God and his people, written "upon their hearts", (Jer. 31:31-33). Why was it necessary for a new covenant? The people who had promised to do all that the Lord has said, did not live up to their agreement and so they violated their covenant. Their failure made it evident that if man was to have fellowship with God it must be some other way than keeping the law. Christ came to establish the New Covenant through his life, death and resurrection. In the upper room at the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup and said, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament (covenant), which is shed for many" (Matt. 26:27-28). Just as the old covenant was ratified with blood. So was the new, the difference being that the blood of Christ, which "cleanses us from all sin." This was something that the sacrifices of animals could not do. So we see that the two divisions of the Old and New Covenants are not meaningless designations in our Bible, but represent a major theme of biblical revelation.

**3. What the Bible is not.** The Bible is not a book of philosophy where theories concerning the existence and character of a Supreme Being are set forth. Yet all theories remain unsatisfactory without "the fear of the Lord" which "is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10).

The Bible was not written as a textbook of science although it is scientifically correct. "The war of science and religion", writes L. D. Johnson, "is now largely a curious historical phenomenon. Most scholars do not think it necessary to defend the Bible against science, for they do not see the two as in conflict. They do not suppose that the Bible is the source of all knowledge, scientific as well as religious. They realize that the Bible, the divinely inspired record of God's revelation of himself through his people and supremely through his Son, is written in the thought forms of the people of its time. Through the inspired Word, God gave some scientific facts that has been permitted to be verified by later scientific methods.

"Perhaps an example will illuminate the point. The writer of the eighth Psalm celebrated the wonder of God, who, having made the splendor of the heavens, 'the moon and the stars', still is mindful of man. [The Bible's language metaphors are not mathematical statements.] The man who wrote that psalm did not know as much about astronomy as many sixth graders in the public school today. But he knew God, and he knew to make the great affirmation, which science can neither prove nor disprove that the Creator of this vastness is aware of and concerned about man."<sup>1</sup>

The Bible is not just a history book. It is not intended to be a survey of ancient history since it focuses on

only one rather small nation - the Hebrews. From the affairs of these people, the Bible records those events that reveal to mankind, his sinfulness, God's nature and His purposes in redemption. The writers of both Testaments wrote all God wanted because God directed them to do so and they recorded only the events that God wanted, which showed just what God wanted in his work, carrying out his purpose and revealing his nature by what he did. We may say that the Bible is a book of God's dealings with man. We can illustrate the selection of events by recalling Abram's journey from Ur to Canaan. From a historical viewpoint this was only one Semitic clan, among many who migrated westward. But from the standpoint of biblical revelation as well as man's redemption, the importance of this event lay in the fact that God chose Abraham to be the bearer of the covenant. Another example of the selecting of events is the record of King Omri and his son Aham. Omri was a strong king who built Samaria and brought prosperity to the Northern Kingdom. The neighboring nations were impressed. The famous Moabite Stone records Omri's subjugation of the Moabites and an Assyrian inscription refers to Israel as "the land of Omri" 150 years after Omri's death. Yet the Bible accorded to him only 13 verses, while devoting 6 chapters to Ahab, a much less important king from a historical perspective. The reason is clear. King Ahab and his Phoenician wife, Jezebel, were principals in the struggle between Baalism and the true worship of God as represented by the prophet Elijah. Again, very little was written about Jesus' early life, rather the Gospel writers majored on the last weeks of Jesus' death and resurrection. Why? John tells us that these events were selected and written down so that we "might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31). John also states that Jesus performed other signs in the presence of his disciples, but these were not recorded. The Bible covers a long period of history - a period sufficiently long to demonstrate clearly God's purpose both by judgment and by deliverance. James Berkely notes that God used each crisis to make himself known to his people with deepening understanding. God's lesson had to be learned by Israel in the processes of history, in the hard school of experience, in the slow, oft-repeated hard knocks of tragedy.

The Bible does not teach religion as such; it rather records God's dealings with mankind and shows man how he may come into eternal fellowship with Him. The ultimate question of the Bible is, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is He?" (Matt. 22:42). While it gives evidence to our doctrines and theology, it does not formulate a system of either. The Bible shows us a God who is a Revealer of himself first through the Patriarchs, the Prophets and finally in Jesus. The Bible

is the supreme record of God's self-revelation, "nor will God ever say more to the world than he has already said, and herein recorded. . . . This does not mean that God has nothing else to say to the world, nothing else to reveal, for, in a sense, he has merely begun; but that which he will say and reveal in the future will be the outgrowth of the truth in Jesus. Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the understanding of the ever-expanding truth in Christ, we must always be in the process of laying hold but never mastering the full significance of his revelation. The Bible, accordingly, takes its place in Christian experience to lead on and to encourage in the ceaseless quest for light and life."<sup>2</sup>

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1. J.D. Johnson, **An Introduction to the Bible**, p.12-13.
  2. J McKee Adams, **Our Bible**, p.40

*END OF SAMPLE*