



BEGINNING TO EXPLORE THE BIBLE





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*Richard E. Wilson © 2006
P.O. Box 781448
San Antonio, TX 78278
Web Site:
www.reflectingthesavior.org.*

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For those who regularly read and study it, the Bible becomes an exciting and lifelong expedition of discovery. While the expedition is never ending and the discoveries are never ceasing, the study of God's word is intellectually educating, personally enlightening, and spiritually fulfilling.

To those who are unfamiliar with it, the Bible often represents a great mystery too vast to endeavor to solve. People often express an interest in learning about the Bible, but one of the barriers to reading and studying the Bible is finding an overview before study is begun. The pages that follow provide an outline, background, and explanation that will help enable one to feel comfortable in reading and studying the Bible either alone or in a group. The exploration is divided into four sections:

Section One----How the Bible Is Organized

Section Two----How the Bible Is Written

Section Three—Genealogies—from monotony to meaning

Section Four----Versions of the Bible

HOW THE BIBLE IS ORGANIZED



We are all familiar that the Bible is divided into two testaments. The Old Testament covers the period of time from the creation to about 400 BC. The New Testament begins with the birth of Christ and continues through the first half of the first century A.D.

The Old and the New Testaments are made up of books written by authors who lived in different times and places, and some who even wrote in different languages. The books of the Bible are orderly arranged and taken together tell a single story--

God's story.

THE OLD TESTAMENT



The Old Testament is the backdrop for the New Testament. The Old Testament tells of the *creation*, the *relationship* of God and man, and the *foretelling* of the coming of the Messiah. An understanding of the Old Testament is necessary before one can grasp the full meaning of the New Testament.

The Old Testament is organized into four sections:

- The books of Moses (The Pentateuch);
- The history of Israel;
- The books of Wisdom (Poetical books); and
- The books of Prophecy.

The summary of the books that follow includes a brief descriptive statement of each and something that may be familiar about some of them.

The Pentateuch



Genesis—means “in the beginning.”

- Creation—chapters 1-3
- Patriarchs
 - » Adam & Eve—the garden and the fall into sin
 - » Cain & Abel—murder in the first degree
 - » Noah—the flood
 - » Abraham—father of nations
 - » Jacob (Israel)—father of 12 sons, the 12 tribes of Israel
 - » Joseph—brothers sold him into slavery, but he keeps faith in God, becomes ruler of Egypt, and forgives his brothers.

Exodus--some 350 years later

- Moses—called by God to lead the Jews from Egyptian slavery
- Aaron—Moses’ brother and his spokesman
- Joshua—Moses’ military leader

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy--the Books of Law

- **Leviticus**—Book of instruction
- **Numbers**—wandering in the desert
- **Deuteronomy**—legal—Ten Commandments, God’s love for His people.



History of Israel

Joshua, Judges, Ruth—Theocratic Books, 1405-1043 BC

- Joshua—the conquering military leader enters the Promised Land
- Samson—strength and weakness in a time when judges ruled
- Ruth—a love story, “Wherever you go, I will go.”

Samuel, Kings & Chronicles—Monarchical Books, 1043-586 BC

- » Samuel—crowns the first king
- » Elijah, and Elisha—prophets extraordinaire
- » David—kills Goliath, becomes king, commits adultery, then murder, has trouble at home; yet is, “A man after God’s own heart.”
- » Solomon—wisest of all men; still foolish enough to lose it all
- » Captivity—kings evil ways lead to destruction and exile.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther—Restoration Books, 605-536 BC

- Return from exile
- Esther—first “Miss Universe,” lessons in how God works

Books of Wisdom (Poetical books)



Job—one man's spiritual strength and unyielding faith.

Psalms—songs of praise and prayer

Proverbs—wise teachings, e.g. “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (*Pr* 22:6)

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path. (*Pr* 3:5-6)

Ecclesiastes—meaning of life—what endures and what does not e.g. “everything has a season, a time to be born and a time to die.” *Ecc* 3: 2

Song of Songs—marital relationships, romance.

Books of Prophecy—
_____visions of the prophets who lived during
Israel's history.



Major prophets—

major because of the length of the books. Familiar passages:

Isaiah—e.g. *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* (Isaiah 9:6)

Jeremiah—e.g. *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.* (Jeremiah 23:5)

Ezekiel—e.g. *"the Sovereign Lord say: I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations."* (Ezekiel 5:8)

Daniel—handwriting on the wall, lions' den, fire in the furnace

Books of Prophecy—
visions of the prophets who lived during
Israel's history. (continued)



Minor prophets—

minor because the books are shorter. A few *selected prophecies* with references to the fulfillment of them:

Hosea 11:1 "...out of Egypt I will call my son." (See *Matthew 2:15*)

Joel 2:28:32 "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." (See *Acts 2:21*)

Micah 5:2 "'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.'" (See *Matthew 2:5-6*)

Malachi 3:1 "I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way before you." (See *John 1:27*)

THE NEW TESTAMENT



Four hundred years have passed between the end of the Old Testament and beginning of the New Testament. The New Testament may be divided into four sections:

- The Gospels—Four portraits of Jesus, each written to different audiences and with a special purposes.
- Acts of the Apostles—story of the Apostles, especially Peter and Paul after the ascension of Jesus.
- Epistles of the Apostles—Letters of instruction written by the Apostles
- Revelation—book of prophecy.



The Gospels—

four portraits of Jesus, the Christ, tell the
“good news.”



- **Matthew**—written by Matthew (known also as Levi), one of the twelve Disciples. Originally written in Hebrew about A.D.70, the book was directed to the Jewish Christians and intended to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.
- **Mark**—written in about A.D.55-60 by John Mark, a companion of Peter. Mark writes to a Gentile audience and describes Jesus as a man of action reflecting the preaching and personality of Peter with whom he traveled.
- **Luke**—was written as a full documentary of Jesus life to a Greco-Roman audience (Hellenistic world) based on interviews with eyewitnesses and servants. Luke was a physician and companion of the Apostle Paul. He wrote the book between A.D.50 and 63.
- **John**—The last of the Gospels, written as late as A.D.90, the Apostle John provides his eyewitness account. John's purpose for writing is “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life through his name.” (*John 20:31*). Unlike the other three Gospels, John's account is not chronological.



Acts—

of the Apostles



The author, Luke, provides the basic history of the spread of Christianity during the first thirty years following the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The book describes the activities of the Apostles with a key focus on Peter and Paul. Peter is associated with the *formation* of the church. Paul's travels are dedicated to the *spread* of the church.

Together with the Gospels, Acts completes the historical accounts of the New Testament.



Epistles—

letters written by the Apostles of Jesus Christ.



Letters of Paul

Romans—written “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.” (*Romans 1:7*)

1 and 2 Corinthians—“To the church of God in Corinth.” (*1 Corinthians 1:2*) Corinth was located on the isthmus west of Athens and mainland Greece.

Galatians—“To the churches in Galatia.” (*Galatians 1:2*) Galatia was in north central Asia Minor.

Ephesians—“To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.” (*Ephesians 1:1*) Ephesus was a port city of western Asia Minor.

Philippians—“To the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.” (*Philippians 1:1*) Philippi was an ancient city located in northeastern Greece.

Colossians—“To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse.” (*Colossians 1:2*) Colosse was a city in Asia Minor located about 110 miles east of Ephesus.

1 and 2 Thessalonians—Thessalonica was a city in Macedonia and the center of Roman administration was there.

1 and 2 Timothy—Timothy was a colleague of Paul’s on missions to Thessalonica and Corinth.

Titus—Titus was also a fellow worker with Paul that Paul left in Crete.

Philemon—a resident of Colossae, Philemon was the owner of the slave Onesimus in whose behalf this letter was written.



Epistles—

letters written by the Apostles of Jesus Christ.
(continued)



General Epistles

Hebrews—written by an unknown author to the Jewish Christians who were lapsing back into Judaism. *“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”* (Heb. 11:1)

James—Probably the author was the brother of Jesus. *“be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only,”* (James 1:22 KJV)

1 and 2 Peter—the Apostle Peter wrote these letters.

1, 2 and 3 John—the Apostle John wrote these letters.

Jude—Jesus had a brother named Judas who is thought to be the author. (This is not the Disciple, Judas, who betrayed him.)

Revelation



The Apostle John tells how he received revelatory visions from Christ and brings these visions to life in vivid detail.

As with all prophetic writing in the Bible, John's vision is communicated using symbolism. Symbolism in the Bible is usually difficult to interpret. The following passage illustrates both the vivid detail of John's vision and the symbolism he uses.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

(Rev 22:1-5 NIV)



HOW THE BIBLE IS WRITTEN

The Bible is like a gold mine. We know it is full of riches, but finding the nuggets takes a trained eye. The eye becomes trained to *extract* the richness the Bible holds only through reading and studying it.

Another way to describe the Bible is as a “literary concentrate.” Compared to contemporary writing styles, there are few descriptive words; emphasis is understated; physical characteristics, passages of time, family relationships, and traits of personal character are usually brief and often obscure. Events are not always explained in the depth or eloquence we have come to expect from modern day writing; and years may pass in the blink of a single word. Much of the study of the Bible is dedicated to unleashing the concentrate so the true and complete meaning of God’s word may bloom. As someone once said, “We must work out of the Bible what God has worked into it.”

This section of the exploration will illustrate some of the literary efficiency of the Bible and how, with careful and observant reading, the eye may be trained to magnify the golden nuggets it contains to allow understanding to increase and life enriched.

There are many examples of literary efficiency in the Bible, but here we will look at only a few:

- Passage of Time

- Physical Characteristics

- Relationships

- Imbedded Facts



Passage of Time

- Measuring time—The Bible often does not express the measurement of time; but time can be measured by placing several passages together: e.g. How long did it take Noah to build the ark?

“After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.” Genesis 5:32

“So make yourself an ark of cypress wood” Genesis 6:14

“Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth.” Genesis 7:6

- Elapsed time—months or even years may elapse in a single sentence; e.g.

1. (a) *“Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, ‘I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.’”* Genesis 29:18

(b) *“So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.”* Genesis 29:20

2. (a) *“[Judah] married her and lay with her; she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, who was named Er.”* Genesis 38:2-3. (At least nine months elapsed.)

(b) *“Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.”* Genesis 38:6 (In three verses [38:3-6] about 20 years elapsed.)



Physical Characteristics

Physical characteristics are described in the Bible with little elaboration. There are few words of emphasis. When physical characteristics are mentioned at all it is because they are extraordinary.

- “[Abram] said to his wife Sarai, ‘I know what a beautiful woman you are.’ ” *Genesis 12:11*
- “Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.” *Genesis 39:6*
- “The man of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful.” *Genesis 26:7*
- “[David] was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features.” *1 Samuel 16:12*
- “He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist.”
The king said, “That was Elijah the Tishbite.” *2 Kings 1:8*
- “John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.” *Matthew 3:4*

Relationships



Relationships are important in understanding the Bible, yet they are not always described with the directness we expect from modern day writing. Here are a couple of examples:

- Abraham was Lot's uncle, but the Bible says it this way, "Terah became the father of [Abraham], Nahor and Haran. And Haran the father of Lot..." *Genesis 11:27*
- Jacob married his cousins, Leah and Rachel. "Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father, Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother." *Genesis 28:2*



Imbedded Facts

Sometimes important facts are found within the context of another subject. For example, Peter's personal life is not mentioned in detail in the Bible, but there are certain facts about him that are revealed within the context of other events. The following passage from Matthew tells of Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law. This is the only place in the Bible that reveals to us that Peter was a married man.

"When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him."

Matthew 8:14-15 NIV

GENEALOGIES—from monotony to meaning



One of the distractions people often encounter when reading the Bible is the monotonous account of genealogies. The genealogies seem to be nothing but a long list of names that are difficult to pronounce and include too many people that were not mentioned or prominently mentioned elsewhere. In the early stages of Bible study, genealogies should be passed through quickly to avoid becoming bogged down. But as biblical knowledge increases these names have a special significance in understanding the Bible.

Genealogies may be useful tools. Here are three:

Dating events.

Identification.

Revealing the prophecies of the Messiah

GENEALOGIES—from monotony to meaning (continued)



Dating events

Job lived within the historical period of Genesis. The timeframe is evidenced by the genealogy found in *Genesis 36:10-11 (NIV)*.

“These are the names of Esau's sons: *Eliphaz*, the son of Esau's wife Adah, and Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath. The sons of *Eliphaz*: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam and Kenaz.” (Italics added.)

Eliphaz is a son of Esau. In Genesis, Eliphaz has no prominent role. But he is prominent in Job as one of Job's friends.

“When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him.” *Job 2:11 (NIV)*

Identification

Notice in the Job passage the designation “Eliphaz the Temanite.” Notice also in the Genesis passage that Eliphaz had a son named Teman. Teman was a king and subjects of his kingdom were known as Temanites. Putting all of this together, then we know that Eliphaze, Job's friend, is the same as the Eliphaze in the Genesis genealogy.

VERSIONS



In earlier years, many of us were exposed to only one version of the Bible—the King James Version. The King James Version is the English translation of the Bible that was commissioned by King James in the late 1500's and completed in 1611.

The books of the Bible were inspired by God. They were originally penned in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. Great care was taken in the translation of all the versions of the Bible to ensure accuracy while achieving the primary objective of the translation.

The most obvious objective of a translation is to express the Bible in a different language. Over periods of time, words take on different meaning and sentence structures change. As a result updated translations become desirable. The following pages list some common translations with a brief description of the original intent for each.

The Roman Catholic Church uses a Bible that has seven books that are not included in the Protestant Bible. These seven books are not considered by Protestants to be inspired by God.

In addition to literal translations, there are some writings that are *paraphrases* of the Bible. Paraphrases should not be confused with versions of the Bible. Rather they are a restatement of the author's thoughts using different words than the original authors used.

VERSIONS--

a summary



<u>VERSION</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>ORIGINAL PURPOSE</u>
King James (KJV)	1611	“...there should be one more exact translation of the holy Scriptures into the English tongue...”
American Standard (ASV)	1901	A variant of the English Revised Version (ERV) published in 1881-1885, the ASV embodies the preferences of the American scholars associated in the work of the ERV. A major reason for the ERV and subsequent ASV was to update many forms of expression which had become archaic—the use of “thou,” “thee,” “thy,” “thine” and verb endings, “eth” and “th,” etc.—while still remaining generally intelligible. The greatest problem, however, was presented by English words still in constant use but now convey a different meaning.
Revised Standard (RSV)	1952	A revision which seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible as it had been known and used through the years yet addressing all the reasons which led to the revision of KJV in the nineteenth century.

VERSIONS--

a summary (continued)



<u>VERSION</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>ORIGINAL PURPOSE</u>
Amplified Bible (AB)	1964	Written to reveal, together with the single word English equivalent to each key Hebrew and Greek word, any other clarifying shades of meaning that may be concealed by traditional word-for-word method of translation. The main purpose is to bring full meaning of the key words in the original text in an English version of the Bible.
New International Version (NIV)	1978	The goals of the translation are to be accurate and clear and with a literary quality to prove suitable for public and private reading, teaching, preaching, memorizing and liturgical use.
New King James Version (NKJV)	1982	The stated purpose of the version popularly known as the King James was "to make a good [translation] better." The translators of NKJV perceived their work as a continuation of the labors of the early translators. The most obvious changes are the replacement of pronouns thee, thou, and ye, with you and your; and the deletion of obsolete verb ending of -eth and -est.

VERSIONS--

Roman Catholic Bible



The Roman Catholic Bible contains all of the books of the Protestant Bible and is assembled in the same order, but with seven additional books. All seven of the books are in the Old Testament. Tobit, Judith, and 1 and 2 Maccabees are incorporated with the historical books, Wisdom, and Sirach are with the books of wisdom (Poetical books), and Baruch is included with the books of prophecy.

The additional seven books are not considered by Protestants as inspired Scripture and are therefore excluded.

VERSIONS--

paraphrases



VERSION

DATE

ORIGINAL PURPOSE

Living Bible

1972

A restatement of the author's thoughts using different words than the original authors used. The state purpose of the Living Bible is "to say as exactly as possible what the writers of the Scriptures meant, and to say it simply, expanding where necessary for a clear understanding by the modern reader. The Living Bible paraphrases both the Old and New Testaments."

The Message

1993

"This version in a contemporary idiom keeps the language of the Message current and fresh and understandable in the same language in which we do our shopping, talk with our friends, worry about world affairs, and teach our children their table manners. The goal is not to render a word-for-word conversion of Greek into English, but rather to convert the tone, the rhythm, the events, the ideas, into the way we actually think and speak." The Message to date includes the New Testament, Psalms, Proverbs, and Job.

A Journey of Discovery



Bible reading and study is a lifelong expedition. It will begin an exciting journey of discovery—a journey that will reveal how the books of the Bible, orderly arranged and taken together, tell a single story—

God's story.