

How to Study the Bible
(Lesson 3)

Introduction:

1. In our study of inspiration (Lesson 2), we showed that the Bible is a collection of 66 books written in 3 languages by about 40 people over a period of approximately 1500 years.
2. Lesson 3 is a study of "how the Bible came to us."
3. In addition to understanding that the Bible is inspired, Bible students need to know how we have the Scriptures in their present form.

Discussion:

I. MANUSCRIPTS OF THE BIBLE

- A. The original documents recorded by the inspired writers are called "autographs."
 1. No autographs exist today.
 2. The Old Testament autographs may have been lost when the temple was destroyed.
 3. The New Testament autographs were probably written on papyrus that became fragile.
- B. Copies of the original documents are called "manuscripts."
 1. These copies were produced by "scribes" who are mentioned many times in the Bible.
 2. Thousands of manuscripts and fragments still exist.
- C. A sufficient number of manuscripts have been preserved to provide a reliable text of the Bible in its original languages.
- D. With a reliable text of the Bible compiled, the next step is to translate it into other languages.

II. TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE (Different types are available)

- A. There are "denominational translations."
 1. Religious groups produce these for the purpose of incorporating their own doctrines.
 2. Ex.: New World Translation, The Book of Mormon
- B. There are "paraphrases."
 1. Individuals produce these by writing the Bible in their own words.
 2. They are easy to read, but they include the personal beliefs of the translators.
 3. Ex.: The Living Bible by Ken Taylor, The New Testament in Modern English by Phillips
- C. There are "committee translations."
 1. Groups of scholars who specialize in the Bible's languages translate these from the original text.
 2. Ex.: King James Version, American Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, New American Standard Bible, New King James Bible, New International Version

III. COMMITTEE TRANSLATIONS (Different types are available)

- A. There are "literal translations."
 1. In these, the original text is translated as literally as possible.
 2. Ex.: King James Version, American Standard Version
- B. There are "revisions."
 1. In these, older translations are updated and revised.
 2. Ex.: Revised Standard Version, New King James Bible, New American Standard Bible
- C. There are versions produced by translators who adhere to the "dynamic equivalence" method.
 1. One such version states in its preface that the translators were concerned about being true "to the thought of the biblical writers."
 2. Attempting to reveal the thoughts of the inspired writers makes such versions susceptible to error.
 3. Ex.: New English Bible, New International Version

Conclusion:

1. When selecting a Bible, we must understand that no translation of the Scriptures is perfect.
2. However, the most reliable is a committee translation that remains true to the original text.
3. God does not want His Word to be changed (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19).