**A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE (Part 1)**

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2Tm.3:16-17). This verse reminds us of the Divine origin of the Bible. The phrase, “inspiration of God,” literally means ***“God-breathed.”*** The idea behind this phrase is, “God-uttered,” because as we speak, we pass air over our vocal cords – i.e. we “breathe.” Sometimes, we even incorporate that idea into our own speech. When we say, ***“Don’t you breathe a word of this,”*** we are using the same figure of speech as is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Notice also Acts 9:1, where Saul was ***“still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.”***

But despite the fact that the Bible is the very word of God, there is a great deal of ignorance about its contents. Sadly, this is even true among professed Christians! Many people simply find the Bible to be “intimidating.” After all, it’s a rather large book, and deals with a time far removed from our own. It mentions some very strange customs, and is even misappropriated by those who would mishandle its contents to justify all kinds of aberrant behavior. Therefore, I think it is a good idea to give an overview of its contents, and perhaps some background information, which can make this book less intimidating. So, let’s try to do that right now…

The Bible contains 66 books, and was written by about 40 men, over a period of 1600 years. And yet, there are no contradictions in it – what an amazing feat! By contrast, I have read religious tracts written by one person, who contradicts himself from one page to the next! Yet with the Bible, we have one continuous story, starting with creation, and ending at the Judgment Day. Where Genesis stops, Exodus begins, each book gradually unfolding the story of man’s redemption from sin.

In 2 Timothy 2:15, the apostle Paul spoke of “rightly dividing the word of truth.” And while I realize that there is much more to this than knowing the difference between the Old and New Testaments, the fact remains that the Bible does divide itself into these two primary sections. Then, within these two major divisions, each “Testament” has three subdivisions.

The Old Testament contains the first 39 books of the Bible. It also has a decidedly Jewish focus. The reason for this is that God’s plan for our redemption included the setting apart of a special people from whom our Savior would come. This “core promise” is first mentioned in Genesis 12:1-3. In those verses, God promised to give Abraham “a land” (v.1); and to make him into “a great nation” (v.2); which would ultimately lead to ONE descendant from whom “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (v.3; cf. 22:18). This latter promise is sometimes called “the seed promise,” and is a reference to Christ, who indeed has blessed all nations with the “good news” of salvation (cf. Ga.3:16, 19).

Some have said that “The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.” This means that God had one overall plan, which culminated in the revelation of the New Testament. However, there were elements of that plan which were prophetically disclosed along the way – in the Old Testament.

As noted, the Old Testament can be sub-divided into three sections. First, there is a “historical” section, consisting of the first 17 books (Genesis – Esther). The first five of those focus on law, and the remaining twelve on history. Second, there is a “prophetical” section, which is the last 17 books (Isaiah – Malachi). The first five are “major prophets,” and the last 12 are “minor prophets” (so described because of the size of their writings). Sandwiched between these two sections is the “devotional” section, consisting of five “books of wisdom” (Job – Song of Solomon). Job deals with suffering. Psalms is primarily a book of prayer. Proverbs is a book of wise, pithy sayings. Ecclesiastes deals with the meaning of life. And the Song of Solomon deals with the love between a man and woman.

The New Testament contains the last 27 books of the Bible. The focus now expands from being decidedly Jewish to a worldwide focus. Indeed, the gospel plan of salvation is to be preached to “all nations,” and “every creature” (Mt.28:19-20; Mk.16:15-16). This was in accord with God’s plan to bless “all the families of the earth” (cf. Gn.12:3). The promised “seed” has come (Ga.3:16, 19), and the “good news” of redemption is now available to all men (Ac.2:38-39).

We shall continue this study in next week’s bulletin…

--Lanny Smith