Bible Translations and Types

Teacher Background

The word, Bible, comes from the Greek *ta biblia*, which means "the books." While many people regard the Bible as a single book, it is in fact a library of books which were written over a period of approximately 1500 years. The Bible tells how God was revealed to the Jewish people first, then to all people through Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us about how God acts in human history. It is the inspired Word of God. The languages in which the books of the Bible were written were Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Most of the Old Testament books were written in Hebrew.

For Christians, the Bible is divided into the Old Testament (containing 46 books) and the New Testament (containing 27 books). The word, testament means covenant or agreement. The Old Testament was put together by the Hebrews and the New Testament was collected and preserved by early Christians after the time of Christ.

The word, Gospel comes from an Anglo-Saxon word and means "Good News." It means the good news proclaimed by Christ and given to us in written form by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There are no original manuscripts of any books of the Bible in existence today. We have only copies. The oldest copy is the Book of Isaiah, which is in Hebrew and dates from about 100 B.C. It was found in a cave near Jericho in 1947 and is part of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The oldest New Testament manuscripts we have date from approximately A.D. 350. The contents of the Bible developed in three stages:

**Oral Stage**
Stories handed down through the generations by word of mouth (almost all of the Book of Genesis is from oral accounts, or what we call the oral tradition). The more important stories were memorised and told on special occasions.

**Writing Stage**
As time went on, people began to write things down. Writing was difficult and very few people could read. For hundreds of years both the oral tradition and the written word existed side by side. Some parts of the Bible were written to meet a particular need of the community, Jewish or Christian. Not all oral traditions were written down.

**Editing Stage**
Material was chosen which best represented the religious traditions of the people. The oral and written accounts could have differed slightly, so editing was done to bring unity between the two. The contents of the Bible came from this last stage. These three stages of development existed for the most part simultaneously, though the oral stage came first and the editing stage came last. Many different human authors wrote the Bible over a period of approximately 1500 years. God inspired these human authors. It was not the intention of these authors to write a book that would be entered into "The Bible," as we know it. The whole thrust was to preserve the traditions of how God interacted with humanity.

Since the Bible is not one book, but a library of books, there are many different kinds of writing in it e.g. prose, proverbs, parables, prophesy, prayers, poetry, narrative hymns, legends, legal documents, letters, sermons, songs, stories, etc. This is called Literary Form.

In order to be able to understand a passage of the Bible one must be aware of:

- In what form it was written, e.g., prose, poetry, history, etc. (Literary Form)
- Why it was written.
- When it was written.
- What the whole book is about
- What each word means
- How it fits with other parts of the Bible on the same subject