

by Bill Crews

What is the Bible? Is it important? Is it beneficial? Can it be understood? Should it be read and studied? Is it worth the time it would take? Some regard the Bible as vicious and harmful. Some regard it as worthless and a waste of time. Others regard it as the greatest treasure in all the world. Some say it was authored by men, and others say it couldn't have been. What is the truth? Let us consider four points about the book known as the Bible:

What is the physical make-up of the Bible? The Bible is a collection of 66 books, some very short, some very long, beginning with Genesis and ending with the Revelation. The Bible was written by about 40 men over a span of about 1600 years. The oldest part is about 3500 years old, and the youngest about 1900 years old. The Bible has two great divisions -- the Old Testament and the New Testament, or the old covenant and the new covenant. In the Old Testament are 39 books, written from 1500 B.C. to 400 B.C. In the New Testament are 27 books, all written in the first century A.D.

The various books of the Bible have been grouped together in various ways by various men. As we have them in our present-day Bibles they are grouped together according to subject matter. The Old Testament has five books of "Law" (Genesis through Deuteronomy, largely history, but containing the law that God gave to the Israelites through Moses), twelve books of "History" (Joshua through Esther), five books of "Poetry" (Job through the Song of Solomon), and seventeen books of "Prophecy" (Isaiah through Malachi). The New Testament has four books of "Biography" (Matthew through John, usually called "the four gospels," four accounts of the ministry of Christ), one book of "History" (Acts, some of the acts of some of the apostles, the story of the preaching of the gospel or "good news" of Christ and the beginning and growth of the Lord's church), twenty-one "Epistles" or "Letters" (Romans through Jude, written to various first century Christians and churches), and one book of "Prophecy" (the Revelation, written by Christ through the apostle John to the seven churches that were in the Roman province of Asia in Asia Minor to encourage them under their present and impending trials).

In what languages was the Bible written? The Old Testament books were written almost entirely in the Hebrew language by Hebrew men for the Hebrew (Israelite, Jewish) people. The New Testament books were written almost entirely in the Koine (common) Greek (by eight disciples of Jesus to various first century Christians and for all mankind then and after). Several verses in the Old Testament and a few words and clauses in the New Testament were written in Aramaic, the spoken language of the Jews.

The name "The Bible" has been given to this collection of books by men; at first it had the meaning "the books," then the meaning "the book." It is deserving of this description, being the only book of all books that can rightly be called "The Book." Designations found within its pages are these: "holy scriptures," "sacred writings," "scriptures," "oracles of God," "the word," "the word of God," "the truth."

2. What does the Bible claim to be? The Bible claims to be a collection of books from a divine or supernatural being -- one eternal in existence, unlimited in power, infinite in wisdom. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1: 1). "Ah Lord Jehovah! behold, thou hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thine outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17). "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hast formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2).

The Bible claims to be the revelation (uncovering, making known) of God and God's will to man. The universe declares His eternal existence and infinite power. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). "For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). But only revelation could make known His character, His mind, His will for man. "... the world through its wisdom knew not God. .." (1 Cor. 1:21). "For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11; read vss. 12-13). [CONTINUED ON 253303, OR VOLUME 25, ISSUE 33, PAGE 3]