

The Story of the Good Old Book:

The Word Of God

*"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path." Psalms 119:105*

The Bible; Its Origin, History, and Place in the World

The Bible contains proof in itself of its divine origin. No other book can answer the questionings of the mind or satisfy the longings of the heart as does the Bible. It is adapted to every age and condition of life, and is full of that knowledge which enlightens the mind and sanctifies the soul.

In the Bible we have a revelation of the living God. Received by faith, it has power to transform the life. During all its history a divine watch-care has been over it, and preserved it for the world.

How, When, and Why Written

After the flood, as men became numerous, and darkness was again settling over the world, holy men wrote as they were moved by the Spirit of God. Thus God spoke to His people, and through them to the world, that a knowledge of God and of His will might not perish from the earth.

For centuries this work went on, until Christ, the promised Seed, came. With Him, and the blessed message of light and salvation proclaimed by Him and by His apostles, the Scripture record closed, and the Word of God was complete.

Original Writings and Translations

The Old Testament Scriptures were first written in Hebrew, upon scrolls, or rolls of parchment, linen, or papyrus. These were later translated into Greek, the oldest translation being known as the Septuagint, or "Version of the Seventy," made at Alexandria, for the Alexandrian Library, by a company of seventy learned Jews, under the patronage of Ptolemy Philadelphus, about 285 B.C. The original order for this translation is said to have been given by Alexander the Great, who previously, upon visiting Jerusalem in 332 B.C., had learned from the prophecy of Daniel that Grecia was to overthrow the Persian kingdom. See Josephus's "Antiquities of the Jews," book 11, chap. 8, par. 5. This was the version in common use in the time of Christ.

The New Testament was all originally written in Greek, except Matthew, which was first written in Hebrew, and later translated into Greek.

Gutenberg Printing The Bible

At an early date, Latin translations, both of the Septuagint and of the Greek New Testament, were made by different individuals, and the more carefully prepared Latin Vulgate of Jerome, the Bible complete, was made A.D. 383-405.

Printing and the Bible

Printing, however, being yet unknown, copies of the Bible could be produced only by the slow, laborious, and expensive process of handwriting. This necessarily greatly limited its circulation. Worse still, its illuminating and saving truths were largely hidden for centuries by the errors, superstitions, and apostasy of the dark ages. During this time the common people knew little of its contents.

But with the invention of the art of printing about the middle of the fifteenth century, and with the dawn of the great Reformation in the century following, the Bible entered upon a new era, preparatory to the final proclamation of the gospel throughout the world.

Luther Translating The Bible

Not a little significant is the fact that the first book printed from movable type was the Bible in Latin, which came from the press of John Gutenberg, at Mentz, Germany, in 1456, a copy of which, in 1911, was sold in New York City for fifty thousand dollars, the highest price ever paid for a single book.

The Bible in Native Tongues

Thus far, however, the Bible had been published only in ancient tongues, now little understood by the common people. Without the Word of God in their hands, the good seed sown among them was easily destroyed. "O," said the advocates of its pure teachings, "if the people only had the Word of God in their own language, this would not happen! Without this it will be impossible to establish the laity in the truth."

And why should they not have it in their own tongue? they reasoned. Moses wrote in the language of the people of his time; the prophets spoke in the tongue familiar to the men whom they addressed; and the New Testament was written in the language then current throughout the Roman world.

The translation of the Bible into English by John Wycliffe, in 1380, was the chief event in the beginning of the Reformation. It also prepared the way for the revival of Christianity in England, and the multiplying there of the Word by the millions, for all the world, that has followed.

To make such a translation at that time, says Neander, "required a bold spirit which no danger could appeal." For making it Wycliffe was attacked from various quarters, because, it was claimed, "he was introducing among the multitude a book reserved exclusively for the use of the priests." In the general denunciation it was declared that "thus was the gospel by him laid more open to the laity, and to women who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy; and in this way the gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden underfoot of swine." In the preface to his translation, Wycliffe exhorted all the people to read the Scriptures.

A sense of awe and a thrill of joy filled the heart of the great German Reformer, when, at the age of twenty, while examining the volumes in the library of the university of Erfurt, he held in his hands, for the first time in his life, a complete copy of the Bible. "O God," he murmured, "could I but have one of these books, I would ask no other treasure." A little later he found in a convent a chained Bible. To this he had constant recourse.

But all these Bibles here, as elsewhere, save in England, were in an ancient tongue, and could be read only by the educated. Why, thought Luther, should the living Word be confined to dead languages? Like Wyclif, therefore, he resolved to give his countrymen the Bible in their own tongue. This he did, the New Testament in 1522, and the Bible complete, the crowning work of his life, in 1534.

Impressed with the idea that the people should read the Scriptures in their mother tongue, William Tyndale, likewise, in 1525, gave to the English his translation of the New Testament, and later, of portions of the Old Testament Scriptures. His ardent desire that they should know the Bible was well expressed in the statement that if God spared his life he would cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than was commonly known by the divines of his day.

The first complete printed English Bible was that of Miles Coverdale, printed at Zurich, Switzerland, in 1535. Matthew's Bible, Taverner's Bible, and The Great Bible prepared at the suggestion of Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex, appeared soon after. Thus the light of truth began to shine forth once more; but not without opposition.

Burning of Bibles

As Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes under King Zedekiah showed their contempt for God by burning the writings of Jeremiah, and confining the prophet in a dungeon (Jer. 36:20-23; 38:1-6), so now men sought to stem the rising tide of reform by burning the Bible and its translators.

Bible burning was inaugurated in England by the destruction of copies of the Antwerp edition of Tyndale's New Testament, at St. Paul's Cross, London, in 1527, followed by the burning of a second edition in 1530. A little later there were wholesale burnings of the writings and translations of Wyclif, Tyndale, Basil, Barnes, Coverdale, and others.

Burning Of Bibles At St. Paul's Cross, London

Forty-three years after the death of Wycliffe, or in A.D. 1428, by order of the Council of Constance his bones were dug up and burned. Oct. 6, 1536, by order of Charles V of Germany, Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake at Vilvorde, near Brussels. "If Luther will not retract," wrote Henry VIII of England, "let himself and his writings be committed to the flames."

Such, under the spiritual tyranny that ruled in those times, was the fate of many who stood for God and His Word.

The Word Not Bound

But the Word of God could not be forever bound. In attempting to prevent its circulation men soon discovered that they were undertaking a work beyond their strength.

The Bible had taken deep root in the hearts of the people. What kings and prelates had sought to suppress and destroy, kings and prelates now began to foster and supply.

In his "Stories From English History," pages 196, 197, Henry P. Warren says: "Henry, by Cromwell's advice, ordered a translation of the Bible to be made in English, and a copy to be placed in every church. There had been English translations before, but they had not been in the hands of the people generally, and had only been read secretly and in fear.... Cromwell then appointed Cranmer and the bishops to revise the Bible, and publish it without note or comment; and in the year 1539 a copy of the English Bible was chained to the reading-desk of every parish church. From that time the Bible has never ceased to be printed and sold freely."

The Chained Bible

Says Charles C. Coffin, in his "Story of Liberty," page 44:

"The people listen to the reading with wonder and delight. They begin to think; and when men begin to think, they take a step toward freedom. They see that the Bible gives them rights which hitherto have been denied them,—the right to read, to acquire knowledge. Schools are started. Men and women who till now have not known a letter of the alphabet, learn to read; children teach their parents. It is the beginning of a new life, a new order of things in the community—the beginning of liberty."

The Bible to All the World

Finally great Bible societies were organized in England, America, and many of the countries of Europe, for the purpose of giving the [019] Bible to the world,—to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people in its own language. Since its organization in 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society, up to 1912, had published the Scriptures, or portions of them in 440 languages and dialects, with a total of 53,274,516 entire Bibles, 84,059,610 New Testaments, and 89,816,644 portions of the Bible, or a grand total of 227,150,770 copies.

British And Foreign Bible Society House, London

The total issue of the American Bible Society in the first ninety-six years following its organization, or from 1816 to 1912, amounts to 96,219,105 copies. It now publishes the Bible in over one hundred languages.

These, while the largest of their kind, are but two of the twenty-seven Bible societies now disseminating the Scriptures.

Thus is the world being provided with the Word of God, preparatory to the giving of the closing gospel message to all mankind, the ending of the reign of sin, and the advent of the Lord in glory. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matt. 24:14.

The Value Of Bible Study

The Forbidden Book. "God's Holy Word was prized when 'twas unsafe to read it."
The Bible is God's great textbook for man. It is His lamp to our feet and light to our path in this world of sin. The value of Bible study cannot therefore be overestimated.

Considered from a literary standpoint alone, the Bible stands preeminent. Its terse, chaste style; its beautiful and impressive imagery; its interesting stories and well-told narratives; its deep wisdom and its sound logic; its dignified language and its elevated themes, all make it worthy of universal reading and careful study.

As an educating power, the Bible has no equal. Nothing so broadens the vision, strengthens the mind, elevates the thoughts, and ennobles the affections as does the study of the sublime and stupendous truths of revelation. A knowledge of its principles is an essential preparation to every calling. To the extent that it is studied and its teachings are received, it gives strength of character, noble ambition, keenness of perception, and sound judgment. Of all the books ever written, none contains lessons so instructive, precepts so pure, or promises so great as the Bible.

There is nothing that so convinces the mind of the inspiration of the Bible as does the reading of the Bible itself, and especially those portions known as the prophecies. After the resurrection of Christ, when everything else seemed to have failed to convince the disciples that He had risen from the dead, He appealed to the inspired Word, and "expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:25-27), and they believed. On another occasion He said, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Luke 16:31.

As a guide, the Bible is without a rival. It gives a calm peace in believing, and a firm hope of the future. It solves the great problem of life and destiny, and inspires to a life of purity, patience, and well-doing. It fills the heart with love for God and a desire to do good to others, and thus prepares for usefulness here and for a home in heaven. It teaches the value of the soul, by revealing the price that has been paid to redeem it. It makes known the only antidote for sin, and presents the only perfect code of morals ever given. It tells of the future and the preparation necessary to meet it. It makes us bold for the right, and sustains the soul in adversity and affliction. It lights up the dark valley of death, and points to a life unending. It leads to God, and to Christ, whom to know is life eternal. In short, it is the one book to live by and die by.

As the king of Israel was instructed to write him a copy of the law, and to read therein "all the days of his life," that he might "fear the Lord," keep His word, and thus prolong his days and the days of his children (Deut. 17:18-20), so ought men now to study the Bible, and from it learn that fear which is the beginning of wisdom, and that knowledge which is unto salvation. As an aid and incentive to this, "Bible Readings for the Home Circle" has been prepared and published.

Bible Readings; Their Value and Use

Briefly stated, a Bible reading consists of questions asked concerning some subject, and answers to them from the Bible. In other words, Bible readings mean a topical study of the Bible by means of questions and answers.

In either receiving or imparting knowledge, there is nothing like the interrogation-point. Nothing so readily quickens thought or awakens interest as a question. Children would learn little if they asked no questions, and he would indeed be a poor teacher who asked and answered none.

Knowing the value of this means of awakening thought, arousing interest, and imparting information, God, in His wisdom, inspired those who wrote the Bible to ask many questions, that He might set us to thinking and studying about the great themes with which it deals. See Job 38:4, 7; 14:14; Ps. 8:4; Mal. 3:1, 2, 8; Ex. 32:26; 1 Chron. 29:5.

But God not only asks questions; He answers them. The following may be cited as a few short Bible readings, taken, both questions and answers, directly from the Bible itself:—

“What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?

“Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” Ps. 34:12-14.

“Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?

“They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.” Prov. 23:29, 30.

The Value Of Bible Study

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place?

“He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” Ps. 24:3-5. See also Psalm 15 and Isa. 33:14-17.

The Bible itself, therefore, sets the example of giving instruction and of imparting most valuable information by means of asking questions and answering them.

The readings in this book as originally prepared were contributed by a large number of Bible workers, whose experience in giving Bible readings had taught them the most effective methods of presenting the different subjects treated. Over one million two hundred and fifty thousand copies of the book as thus prepared have been sold.

The work has recently been thoroughly revised and rewritten, much enlarged, entirely re-illustrated, with the readings classified and carefully arranged according to topics, by a large committee of able critics and Bible students. So extensive has been the revision, and so much and valuable the new matter added, that the present work is practically a new book, although retaining the same name and the same general plan as the former work. Thus prepared, it is once more sent forth on its mission of light and blessing.

As a help in enabling the reader quickly to discover the words which most directly answer the question asked, they are generally printed in italic, unless the entire scripture quoted is required for the purpose.

“Bible Readings” will be found an excellent aid to private, family, and public study of the Word of God.

(This introduction has been taken from Bible Readings from the Home Circle)