

Eight week Course for New Members

Thursday's
February 1, 2018 - March 22, 2018

Week Two: 2/8/2018

Lesson Two: *The Bible*

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The Bible is the most remarkable book in the world. Thomas Carlyle said,

“I call the Bible, apart from all theories about it, one of the greatest things ever written with pen. A noble book! All man’s book!”

It is by far the world’s best seller. Two million copies have been sold each year for the past 100 years. It has been translated into over 2,000 languages and dialects. This is more than any other book.

Alexander Campbell wrote:

"The Bible is to the intellectual and moral world of men what the sun is to the planets in our system—the foundation and source of light and life, spiritual and eternal. There is not a spiritual idea in the whole human race that is not drawn from the Bible. As soon will the philosophers find an independent sunbeam in nature, as the theologian a spiritual conception in man, independent of the ONE BEST BOOK" (*Christian System*, page 3).

I. Names for the Bible

The word "Bible" itself simply means "book." Many religions have their collection of sacred writings, sometimes spoken of as their bibles. To the Christian the Bible means the collection of the Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament recognized and used as the basis and authority of the Christian faith. The Bible uses other terms to identify itself.

A. *Word of God.* "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). Peter states that we are begotten through "the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). This identifies the Bible as the message or word which has come from God.

B. *Living Oracles or Oracles of God.* Stephen speaks of the law given on Mt. Sinai as "living oracle" (Acts 7:38, NASB). An oracle is a message handed down from a divine being or source. This name indicates that this message from Jehovah is a living message from a living God. Paul calls the Bible "The Oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2, KJV). Moses told the children of Israel to keep the commandments of God and to teach their children to observe them also. "They are not just idle words for you—*they are your life*. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess (Deut. 32:47, emphasis added; cf. Heb. 4:12).

C. *The Holy Scriptures.* Paul refers to the Old Testament writings as the "Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:2). This simply means "sacred writings" which is the expression used in 2 Timothy 3:15. The word "scripture" itself means

“writing.” This is the common term used for the Old Testament books by our Lord and His apostles (Matt. 21:42; Mark 14:49; Luke 24:32; John 5:39; Acts 18:24; Rom. 15:4).

II. The Origin of the Bible

A. What the Bible Says about Its Origin

In a court of law the most important evidence as to the author of a will is what the will actually says itself. If the will states that John Brown is its author it takes considerable evidence to prove it otherwise. This principle holds true also in determining who is the real author of the Bible. Let us examine what the Bible says as to its author.

1. *Old Testament.*—Several hundred times the Old Testament writers use such expressions as “Thus saith the Lord,” “Jehovah said,” etc. (Exod. 24:12, 25:1; Ezek. 5:5, 11, ASV). David speaks in 2 Samuel 23:2, “The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.” Jeremiah describes his call to prophesy like this: “And Jehovah said unto me, Behold I have put my words in thy mouth” (Jer. 1:9, ASV).

The apostle Paul speaking of the Old Testament Scriptures said regarding their inspiration: “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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, KJV).

The apostle Peter informs us that the prophets in the Old Testament did not create their own message, “For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21, ASV). It is a well known fact that Jesus and the apostles always considered the Old Testament to be a revelation from God.

2. *New Testament.*—Not only did the Old Testament writers declare that their message came from God but the New Testament authors also claimed that their message was from God. Paul says in Galatians 1:11, 12, “I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”

Peter speaks of Paul’s writing as “Scripture” when he says, “He writes the

same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things which are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the *other Scriptures*, to their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16, emphasis added). The word “Scripture” as used here indicates a special body of writings which was regarded as divinely inspired. The expression “other Scriptures” shows that Peter places Paul’s writing on a par with the Old Testament. Jesus had told His apostles that the Holy Spirit would enable them to recall all that He had ever taught them. The Holy Spirit would also teach them many other things (John 14:26, cf. Matt. 10:19, 20). Paul commended the brethren at Thessalonica because they had received his message “not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the *word of God*” (1 Thess. 2:13, emphasis added).

The unanimous testimony of the Bible is that its author is God. It was written down by men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

B. Other Evidence for the Divine Origin of the Bible

1. *Fulfilled prophecy.*—One of the great proofs of the inspiration of the Bible is fulfilled prophecy. This is predicting accurately a future event that comes to pass hundreds of years later. When this is done, it is strong evidence that the prophet possesses supernatural power. Occasionally someone might make a lucky guess, but when scores of prophecies are accurately fulfilled, the possibility of chance is removed.

Prophecies concerning Jesus—Below is a tiny list of prophecies concerning Jesus and their fulfillment in the New Testament. In reality, there are nearly 400 prophecies in the Old Testament about Jesus that are fulfilled in the New Testament.

	<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Fulfillment</i>
1. Place of Jesus’ birth	Micah 5:2	Luke 2:1–7
2. His forerunner foretold	Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 4:5	Matthew 3:1–3; 11:11–14
3. His betrayal by	Psalm 41:9	John 13:18; Luke

Judas

22:47, 48

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 4. He died with transgressors | Isaiah 53:9, 12 | Luke 23:33 |
| 5. Not a bone to be broken | Psalms 34:20 | John 19:31–37 |
| 6. Buried by a rich man | Isaiah 53:9 | Matt. 27:57–60 |
| 7. His Resurrection foretold | Psalms 16:10 | Matthew 28:1–6 |

These and many other prophecies in the Old Testament bear eloquent testimony to a divine author of the Bible.

2. *Wonderful unity.*—The Bible was written over a period of 1,600 years on three different continents by some 40 human writers. Its human writers by occupation were shepherders and kings, farmers and doctors. The Bible was written in three different languages and covers in its 66 separate books, every subject imaginable. Yet, it is essentially one book! How can this be possible?

This unity may be illustrated by a great orchestra. It may be composed of 100 musicians with a score of different types of instruments. Yet when they play, there is one grand harmony, the reason being that there is one master mind, the conductor who directs and controls all the musicians as they play. God made His great oratorio to play for more than 1000 years, and when one musician became silent, another took up the strain. But it was all one grand symphony—the theme was never lost, and when the last strain dies away, it is seen that through all these glorious movements and melodies there has been one grand theme.

Did each musician compose his own music and play it as he chose? Or was there one composer and director behind it all? The real conclusion is that God is the true author of the Bible and that He directed each writer as He inspired him by the Holy Spirit. This is the answer to the unity of the Bible.

3. Logical proof.—John Wesley had a very brief but interesting way of proving the Bible to be from God. He said the Bible must be the invention of good men or angels; bad men or devils, or of God.

(a) It could not be the invention of good men or angels; for they neither would nor could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ when it was their own invention.

(b) It could not be the invention of bad men or devils; for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell for all eternity.

(c) Therefore, he drew this conclusion, that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration.

III. The Value of the Bible

How important is the Bible to the Christian? What is its value to the lost? We who believe it, know that it is of the greatest importance to both.

A. Its Value to the Lost. The Scriptures state:

1. We are given birth by the Word. “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). James says, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (James 1:18).

2. We are saved by the Word. “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you” (James 1:21).

3. Faith comes through the Word. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17, KJV).

We know that Christ is the one who saves us. The Bible, however, is the source of our knowledge of Christ and of His saving power. Without the Word there would be no knowledge of His redeeming love and hence there would be no faith or obedience on man’s part. This is why the Bible says we are saved through the Word. It is the channel that God uses to bring us to Christ.

B. *Its Value to the Saved.* To the Christian, the Bible is indispensable. There are many ways in which the Scriptures are valuable to the life of a Christian.

1. *The Bible is a means of spiritual growth.* “As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2, KJV). The Bible is to the spiritual man what the food is to the physical body. It is food to his soul. Jesus said “man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). A neglect of the study of the Word makes spiritual weaklings. Paul told the Ephesian elders, “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can *build you up*, and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32, emphasis added).

2. *By the Word of God, believers are cleansed from the defilement of sin.* Jesus told His apostles, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). We know that it is the blood of Christ which cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7; Heb. 9:14). It is through the Word, however, (knowledge of and obedience to it) that we are brought to that blood. The Psalmist posed this question and gave this answer. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word” (Psa. 119:9).

The Word is the means whereby we are kept clean and set apart or sanctified for God’s use. Jesus prayed the Father, “Sanctify them by the truth; you word is truth” (John 17:17).

One man has said, “This Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book.”

3. *By the Word of God, Christians are able to meet the attacks of Satan.* When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, our Lord repelled every thrust by the use of the Word of God (Matt. 4:1–11). Paul told the Ephesians, “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.... Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:11, 17). The Bible is the Christian’s sword in this spiritual battle against sin. The Psalmist also recognized this truth when he said, “I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin

against you” (Psa. 119:11).

4. A thorough knowledge of the Word gives *confidence and courage*.

A man who professed to be an unbeliever had embarrassed many local preachers with his infidel arguments. An evangelist came to town to lead a gospel meeting. This man went to the revival to “do up” the evangelist with every argument. The unbeliever advanced. The evangelist answered every question with a “Thus saith the Lord.” Frustrated and embarrassed, he left the meeting. The next day, a friend asked him how he fared in the debate.

He replied, “Not so well. But I did not go up there to argue with God Almighty.”

IV. How to Read and Understand the Bible

Jehovah is a God of Wisdom. His revelation is a Book of knowledge. God always invites man to come now and “let us reason together, says the LORD” (Isa. 1:18a). This being true, the Word of God should be approached with the same intelligence and thoughtfulness with which one would approach any book of knowledge.

The Bible is a very big book. Actually, it is a library of 66 different books. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. These books are all joined together because they have one common theme. This theme is God’s plan to save man from his sins through Jesus Christ. The first 39 books, the Old Testament, tell us that “Christ is coming.” The first four books of the New Testament tell us that “Christ has come.” The last 23 books of the New Testament tell us that “Christ is coming again.”

The Benefits of Reading the Bible as a Library

1. **You don’t read it consecutively.** No one would ever go to the public library, find the first book in the Dewey Decimal System and read through every book there from the 000s to the 900s. That’s absurd even to contemplate. Yet that’s exactly what we do with the Bible: open it to Genesis and figure we’re going to read all the way through Revelation. Most folks are *done* by Leviticus. Such usage is completely alien to the Bible’s composition and arrangement. Use the Chronological Reading Plan OCC provides. Remember: The books in Scripture were written at least 1,500 years before the printing press was even invented

2. **You read it like you would read any other book.** In the public library, you read the books in the auto mechanics section differently than you do books in the poetry section. You read biographies differently than you read novels. You adjust your interpretation and understanding of those books according to the type of writing they represent.

The books in the Bible are no different. When you understand *types of literature*, for example, you realize that Genesis 1 is making no claims at measurable science; it is instead making glorious claims about immeasurable theology, and doing so in the form of a hymn. Turn to I Kings, however, and you're getting something else: Israel's sordid, scandalous history, with all the warts exposed. And who knows? In the elusive books of Job and Jonah, do we have the Bible's section of novellas?

3. **Figuring out literary types within Scripture is why it helps to read in community.** And by "in community," I don't mean solely with in church small groups. By "community" I mean the collected wisdom of the centuries as men and women have first studied the texts and then written commentaries on them. If you feel you have an insight into a passage that no one else has ever had before, it's probably because your interpretation has been considered previously and regarded as off the mark. Our biblical community has both continuity and congruency.

4. **Each book has its own authority.** When you understand that Scripture is a library, you are freed from the burden of harmonizing books that don't have much harmony. You can allow each text to breathe its own truth. The book of Proverbs, for example, contains some very different messages than the book of Ecclesiastes. Don't force agreement into a place where debate was likely intended. In the same way, the Gospel of John is dramatically different in style and chronology than Matthew, Mark and Luke; you rob John of its purpose and power when you try to make it fit neatly within the framework of the other three. Let John be John ... and give him the authority to tell Jesus' story in his unique manner.

5. **Speaking of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Bible's biography section only has one subject: Jesus.** In this case, Scripture is the *opposite* of a public library. In the library's biography section, there are volumes on all kinds of people, from the famous to the infamous. The Bible has four books in its biography section, but only one subject: the One we know, appropriately enough, as the Word.

Here are a few principles of correct study that will make the Bible

more intelligible and meaningful.

A. *Determine who is speaking.* It may be God or Satan or Balaam's mule or the fool. It is very important to have a correct understanding to know who is speaking the particular statement.

B. *To whom is the Word speaking?* Is the Word speaking to the Christian or the alien sinner? The meaning may be entirely different depending on which it is.

C. *Of what does it speak?* What is the context—What goes before and what follows this particular passage? This simple bit of knowledge will clear up many otherwise difficult Scriptures.

D. *When does it speak?* Ask, Is this passage written for those living in the Patriarchal age, or the Mosaic age, or the Christian age? God has dealt with His people in different ways under each of these periods. It is important to the Christian that he follow God's instructions for him today. This last rule is most important.

Translations of the Bible

The Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The very words used by the inspired writers of the Bible came from the Holy Spirit (2 Samuel 23:2; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13). The Old Testament was first written in the Hebrew language. The New Testament was first written in the Greek language which was spoken in the first century. Today most of us study the Bible in a translation which has been made from the original languages. Because men have translated the Bible, we must be sure we have a correct translation. Not all books which have the words "Holy Bible" on them are the inspired Word of God. It must be accurately translated in order to be God's inspired Word.

What are some of the things we should look for in a Bible to be sure we have a good, accurate translation?

First, one should read the Preface in the front of the Bible to see if it was

translated by a committee of men. If several men translate the Bible they usually will correct the mistakes of one another. If only one person is the translator, his mistakes may not be corrected. It is wise not to use a Bible which has been translated by only one person. Some examples of paraphrases by only one person are Moffatt's, Goodspeed's, Phillip's, McCord's, The Message, and Today's English Version.

Second, one should read the Preface to find out how the translation was made. Did the translators strive to put the original language in today's language, or did they just paraphrase? There is a big difference between a paraphrase and a translation. In a paraphrase, the writer simply says what he thinks the Bible is saying. He does not translate what the Bible actually says. An example of a paraphrase is The Living Bible. It is not really a translation. Therefore, it is not really the Word of God. It is just one man's idea of what the Bible means. One should beware of using a paraphrase as his main study Bible.

Third, one should learn the religious background of the translators. If they came from many different churches, their translation will likely be more accurate than if they all came from one denomination. They will be careful to see their fellow translators do not change the Scriptures to support their denomination. However, if a translation is made by just one religious group, the danger is very great that they will place their doctrines in the translation. A very good example of a religious group inserting its own ideas into a translation is The New World Translation which was made by the Jehovah's Witnesses. It has many errors in it. One should also beware of the various paraphrases, as they often have a theological bias to promote.

Fourth, one should look at the "theological bias" of the translators. For example, if a man holds to the doctrines of John Calvin, it may affect his translation. The secretary of the committee that translated the New International Version of the New Testament was a Calvinist. The NIV is well known for wrong translations which support the false doctrines of Calvinism. Another example of a translation which has a "theological bias" is the Revised Standard Version which was translated by modernists. Modernists are scholars who do not really believe the Bible is inspired of God, or that

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, or that the miracles of the Bible really happened. For example, the RSV translates Isaiah's prophecy that the Saviour would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). The words "young woman" are put in the place of "virgin." This makes a contradiction between the prophecy and its fulfillment in Matthew 1:23. Modernists do not believe in the virgin birth. Thus they deny that Jesus was actually the Son of God. They have changed the text of the Bible to make it agree with their theological bias.

One may want to **read and compare different translations**. However, for one's main study Bible, one should be sure he or she has an accurate translation. Some examples of accurate translations are: the King James Version of 1611, the New American Standard Version of 1995, and the English Standard Version of 2016. The weakness of the King James of 1611 is that it uses old words which have changed in meaning, and also uses old forms of grammar. This makes it difficult to read for those who are not used to it. The most accurate translation is the New American Standard Version of 1995. A NASB Study Bible is a great purchase. A very readable translation, though not as accurate, is the New International Version of 2011. The NIV Study Bible is extremely helpful.

V. The Sacredness of the Word

Since the Bible is a revelation from God, having been written by Holy Spirit inspired men, it should be handled with the utmost reverence. Moses told Israel, "Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving to you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you" (Deut. 4:1-2).

A similar idea is in the last admonition in the Bible. "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" (Rev. 22:18, 19).

Since the Bible is God's Word, man to his own peril adds to it or takes

away from it or neglects it. When all people shall stand before the great white throne, this Word will be one of the Books that will judge them at that time. If we obey God's Word, it will save us. If we disobey, it will condemn us (Col. 3:16). May we heed the word of Paul and let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16a).

QUESTIONS—THE BIBLE

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. The word "Bible" means _____
2. An oracle is _____
3. What is the most important evidence in establishing the authorship of a document?

4. The Bible was written over a period of _____ years on _____ continents by some _____ human writers.
5. John Wesley thought there were only five sources for the Bible. List them.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
6. List three (4) blessings The Word brings to the believer.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

7. The Word brings what blessings to the lost?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

8. Give four (4) rules for understanding the Bible.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

9. The Old Testament was first written in _____

10. The New Testament was first written in _____

11. **Revelation 22:18-19 (NIV)**

¹⁸ I warn _____ who hears the words of the _____ of this _____: If anyone _____ anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. ¹⁹ And if anyone _____ from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the _____ and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.