

Session 1

God Speaks to Us

What Is the Bible? What Does It Say About Itself?

The Baptist Faith and Message

The Scriptures (1963)

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. It reveals the principles by which God judges us and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and religious opinions should be tried. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures (2000)

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. (The Baptist Faith and Message—2000).

These statements of faith concerning the Bible are very similar but were produced thirty-seven years apart in slightly different contexts but the differences are not significant

for this seminar. They are printed together so that the reader may study them further if he or she wishes.

God Reveals Himself.

God cannot be known by human reason, though we can infer many things about Him from Creation and nature (Ps. 19 and Romans 1:19-20). No one can be known except as one reveals him or herself to others. You might measure me or anyone else and describe my body and the color of my eyes, but you cannot know who I am or who anyone else is until the person moves and speaks and puts his or her thoughts into observable actions. Even then, we cannot know anyone else completely except as they reveal their innermost thoughts, feelings and attitudes to others.

God is personal in nature and He has revealed Himself to us in His Word. His Word comes to us in two forms; in written form in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, and in the Person of Jesus Christ. For us, the Bible reveals much, but not everything, about God, through people to whom He chose to reveal Himself, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, in historical events and in personal encounters. He has revealed Himself as the living Word in the person of Jesus; but we may also know Him by personal experience. Our concern here is how God has revealed Himself in His written Word, the Bible.

What is the Bible?

The Bible is the record of God's revelation of Himself to the human race. It is not a complete record, but as God revealed Himself in various ways and through various events to chosen people, they understood something about God from that revelation and then recorded it from their perspective (Heb. 1:1-3 NIV ¹ *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,* ² *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.* ³ *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven).*

The Bible is the revelation **of God from God through people to people**. I Peter 1:20-21 tells us: ²⁰ *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.* ²¹ *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit;* and II Timothy 3:16 adds: ¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

It is therefore a divine-human book, not dictated by God but inspired by Him so that the writers expressed the ideas and information He wanted them to write.

The Process by which the Bible was written

Since the Bible is a written document, produced by people inspired by God to write down the record of His revelation of Himself to mankind, we may wonder and even marvel at the unity of a book written by about 40 different people over a period of about 1,500 years. It seems that the process includes Revelation from God Himself, inspiration to a chosen writer, the writing of the text under God's guidance, the reading of the text by the recipients, the illumination of the minds of the first readers, the understanding and interpretation of the recipients and their faith response to that understanding. Let us consider each of these parts of the process in turn.

A. The revelation from God Himself

- a. God begins with the desire to make Himself known to His people. He takes the initiative in this process. It begins with His will and purpose to reveal something about Himself to the people whom He created for fellowship with Himself. Sin became a hindrance to that fellowship, but God had a plan for restoring it which He desired to reveal to His sinful people.
- b. He chose to use several different ways to reveal Himself to His people. Sometimes it was through a dream or a vision, sometimes by means of miraculous intervention in times of danger. Sometimes it was through punishment for wrong choices. He used many different means to accomplish the purpose of revealing Himself and His purpose to those He chose to be His instruments of revelation.

B. The inspiration of a chosen writer

- a. One of the first people to receive inspiration from God to write down what God had revealed was Moses. Moses is credited with writing the first five books of the Bible. As a group they are referred to as the books of the Law, or The Torah, or the

Pentateuch. God inspired Moses to write about the Creation, the fall of mankind into sin, the results of that sin, including Cain's murder of Abel, the story of the flood and the rescue of Noah and his family, and the building of the tower of Babel and the scattering of people over the face of the earth and their deaths as a result of their sinfulness. We are not told how God revealed these matters to Moses, but we believe that he wrote exactly what God wanted him to write.

- b. Moses continued to write, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, about God's revelation of Himself to Abraham and his descendants, their move to Egypt and their escape from there and their establishment of a nation in the Land of Canaan. This is all basically history, but within that history, God spoke to others and revealed more of Himself to them as well, but Moses was inspired to write it down while others did not.

C. The writing of the text under God's guidance

- a. As Moses learned from God, he wrote down what he learned. Sometimes this was direct revelation from God who wrote the Ten Commandments on the two tablets of stone and sometimes it was indirect, as the story of Abraham and God's promise of a son to him and Sarah. Sometimes God spoke directly to Moses as when He told him what to say to Pharaoh or what to do as they kept the Passover. God and Moses communicated face to face (Ex. 33:11; Deut. 34:10). Moses then wrote down what he felt that God wanted him to record.
- b. Other writers did not usually communicate with God so directly, but often would write, "The Word of the Lord came to me saying : . . ." (Jer. 1:4 and many other places; Ezek. 3:16 and many other places). Each of the prophets spoke for God to the people. In the books of poetry, the writers all wrote of their emotions and desires as to the Lord Himself.
- c. Each writer was inspired to write using his own style and skill and personality as he was led by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16: *All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired)* and 2 Peter 1:20 . *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*)

D. The reading of the text by the recipients

- a. Each of the writers of scripture wrote for a particular group of people. Knowing as much as possible about the intended recipients is important for understanding the writer's message. We ask: What was God's message to those who received it and what were their circumstances and how did they understand it?
 - b. The reading of the text by the first recipients included the usual knowledge of the language of the text but also the background of the writer and why he was saying what he did to them in the text.
- E. The illumination of the minds of the first readers
- a. As the recipients read what was written, their minds needed to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit to understand the message of God. We call this enlightenment "Illumination." God's Holy Spirit gave the recipients the understanding He intended for the message He wanted the people to understand.
 - b. The Holy Spirit illuminated the minds of the recipients to understand God's message. The presence of the Holy Spirit in this process is very essential. Those who try to understand it simply with their human intelligence almost always mis-interpret it.
- F. The understanding and interpretation of the written texts
- a. Those who received the written Word of God had to use their skill in understanding the language in which it was written including their understanding of figurative language and figures of speech.
 - b. They also had to interpret the meaning of the text for them in their situation.
- G. The faith response to that understanding
- a. Those who received the Word were then called on by God to apply the truth in the message to their personal or national lives.
 - b. This same process applies to all who read these texts today. We pray for illumination of their meaning in order to understand the message to the first recipients as nearly as we can and then, after we understand the message to them, we must also respond to that same message as it applies to us today.

The Bible has been described as follows:

THE BIBLE CONTAINS

The mind of God, the state of man, the way of life, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers.

Read it to be wise. Believe it to be safe. Practice it to be holy.
It gives light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer
you.

IT IS

The traveler's map. The soldier's sword. The Christian's chart.

HERE

Paradise is restored; heaven is opened and the gates of hell
described.

CHRIST IS THE THEME

Our good is its design and the glory of God its end purpose).

IT SHOULD

Fill the memory, rule the heart, the hands and feet.

Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully.

IT IS

A mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, a river of pleasure, a garden of flowers.

It is given to us in life; will be opened in judgment and remembered forever.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

Approach the Bible prayerfully, expectantly, earnestly and reverently.

God's very life is in His Word.

Read it regularly and thoughtfully and you will learn to love the Bible and it will
prove to be bread for your soul.

(Much of this is taken from the Gideon Bible presentation.)

What Are the Bible's Divisions?

- I. The Bible is divided into two major sections:
 1. The Old Testament (39 books)
 2. The New Testament (27 books)
 - A. The Old Testament is divided into five parts in most languages:
 1. The **Law** (five books of Moses also called the Pentateuch, or the Torah)
 2. The books of **History** (Joshua through 2 Chronicles)
 3. The books of **Poetry** (Wisdom literature) (Job through Song of Songs)
 4. The **Major Prophets** (Isaiah through Daniel)
 5. The **Minor Prophets** (Hosea through Malachi)
 - B. The New Testament is also divided into five parts:
 1. The Four **Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)
 2. The **Acts** of the Apostles (**History**)
 3. The **Epistles of Paul** (Romans through Philemon)
 4. The **General Epistles** (Hebrews through Jude)
 5. The **Revelation (Prophecy)**

Divisions of the Hebrew Bible: (The Old Testament)

- A. **LAW**--Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (5)
- B. **PROPHETS** (21)
 - (a) FORMER--Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings (6)
 - (b) LATTER--Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 minor prophets (15)
- C. **WRITINGS** (13) (Sometimes referred to as **Psalms** but including all the others as well.)
 - (a) POETRY: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations (6)
 - (b) HISTORY: Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, I & II Chronicles (7)

What Does the Bible say about itself?

Exodus 24:4 *Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said.*

Deut. 4:1-2 *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 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. 17:19 *And it (a copy of this law) is to be with him (the king), and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.*

Josh. 1:8 *Do not let this book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

Psalms 19:7-10 *The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

Ps. 119:11, 89, 105, 140 *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. . . . Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. . . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. . . . Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.*

Is. 40: 8 *The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.*

Jer. 15:16 *When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.*

- Jer. 23:29** *“Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”*
- Jer. 36** (This chapter deals with king Jehoiakim's burning of Jeremiah's scroll and how Jeremiah re-wrote it at God's command.)
- Matt. 5:17-18** *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*
- Luke 21:33** *Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away.*
- Luke 24:44-46** *And he said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’*
- John 5:39** *You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*
- John 16:13-15** *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.*
- John 17:17** *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*
- Acts 2:16ff** (This passage records Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost and his use of the Old Testament Scriptures as the authoritative word of God in that sermon.)
- Acts 17:11** *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

- Rom. 15:4** *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*
- Rom. 16:25-26** *Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him--to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen.*
- 2 Tim. 3:15-17** *. . . and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the men of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*
- Heb. 1:1-2** *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*
- Heb. 4:12** *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*
- 1 Pet. 1:25** *. . . >the word of the Lord stands forever.' And this is the word that was preached to you.*
- 2 Pet. 1:19-21** *And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*