

THE BIBLE, THE WORD OF GOD.

When reading the Bible for the first time, many are like an Ethiopian man who had difficulty in understanding, Acts 8.30-31. It is a complex volume incorporating a library of 66 different books. It includes history and prophecy, ethics and morals, and facts about God and man.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE.

- There are two major sections, the Old and New Testaments. Everything in the Old Testament took place before Christ. The New Testament begins with His birth, and moves on from there.
- The Old Testament has three main sections.
 1. **Genesis to Esther**...History, particularly the history of Israel.
 2. **Job to Song of Solomon**...Poetry.
 3. **Isaiah to Malachi**...The Prophets.

Each section holds valuable lessons for Christians: don't neglect the Old Testament. See Romans 15.4.

- The New Testament has four main sections.
 1. **Matthew to John**...The Gospels...Records of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.
 2. **The Acts of the Apostles**...The story of the spread of the Gospel, and the development of the early church.
 3. **Romans to Jude**...The Epistles, containing Christian doctrine, and standards of Christian behaviour.
 4. **Revelation**. Mainly, future events.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BIBLE.

From a human standpoint, almost forty men were used to write it. This was over a period of around 1600 years in places as far apart as Babylon in the east and Rome in the west. Despite differences of background and location, their messages dovetail. When critics speak of contradictions, invariably they are wrenching statements from their context. The consistency of the Bible's message is one of the evidences that **the Bible is inspired by God. He is the Author.** See 2 Timothy 3.16. The manner of this inspiration is explained by Peter when he says that 'holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost', 2 Peter. 1.21. (The word 'moved' carries the thought of a sailing ship being moved along by the wind). On occasions, the men who wrote had no clear understanding of what they were saying, 1 Peter 1.10-12, a proof that their thoughts were not their own.

The Bible's critics claim that it is at variance with science. **It is at variance with scientific theories, but not with scientific facts.** For example, at a time when it was generally accepted that the world was flat, the Bible spoke of 'the circle of the earth'! Isaiah 40.22.

Proof of its divine inspiration is seen in the fulfilment of its prophecies, particularly, its predictions about the Lord Jesus. His birthplace was prophesied, as were the circumstances of His death, the betrayal, the scourging, the gambling for His clothes and the crucifixion. The Bible was inspired to the letter: see Matthew 5.18. Not only were its concepts inspired by God but the very words that communicate these truths: 1 Corinthians 2.13, '**words**...which the Holy Ghost teacheth'. The writers were given no latitude in their choice of language.

THE THEME OF THE BIBLE.

The central theme of the Bible is The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, John 5.39, Luke 24.27. In particular, His death occupies a prominent place in the Word. There are pictures of it in the books of Moses: for example, the Passover lamb, Exodus 12. There are predictions of it in the prophets, such as Isaiah 53.

His feelings at the cross are laid bare in Psalms like Psalms 22 and 69. The brutal historical facts are recorded in the four Gospels. The rest of the New Testament unfolds the great blessings that flow from His death.

THE VALUE OF THE BIBLE.

- The Scriptures are of great value to the unconverted person, ‘to make...wise unto salvation’, 2 Timothy 3.15. The Bible alone reveals God’s plan of salvation, and hearing it promotes faith in the Lord Jesus, Romans 10.17.
- For the believer, these inspired writings are ‘profitable’ in four different ways according to 2 Timothy 3.16. They also stimulate spiritual growth, 1 Peter 2.2, and effect cleansing in our lives, John 15.3, as well as bringing other spiritual benefits.

‘Give attendance to reading’.

PASSAGES TO STUDY AND QUESTIONS TO ANSWER.

- 1) From which book of the Bible was the Ethiopian reading in Acts 8?
- 2) 2 Timothy 3.14-17. Which phrase suggests that Timothy’s mother had taught him the scriptures?
- 3) Read Acts 20.32. The Word of God is able to ‘build you up’. We use the word ‘edify’ to describe this. The Word will never edify us if we do not read it!
- 4) Look at 1 Peter 2.1-2 again. Notice that in that context Peter wants us to be like babies in the sense of having a healthy appetite for the Word, like a baby craving for milk. Now read 1 Corinthians 3.1-3. The illustration of babies is used again, but in a negative way. Think about the differences in the two passages. Which illustration is true of you?
- 5) Read 1 Corinthians 10.11, then the verses of the chapter leading up to it just to see how Old Testament history contains practical lessons for us.
- 6) Read John 3 to see an illustration of the death of Christ from one of the five books of Moses. Use the margin of your Bible or a concordance to find the incident to which reference is made.
- 7) Which statement from Psalm 22 was quoted by the Lord Jesus on the cross? It would be worth reading the relevant crucifixion chapters in the four Gospels, and to note seven things He said on the cross. We call these the Seven Sayings from the Cross.
- 8) Read John 1 and 1 Corinthians 5 to discover verses that show that the Passover lamb is a picture of the Lord Jesus. Now read Exodus 12 to find any statements about the lamb which illustrate something about Him.
- 9) Read Galatians 3.16 to see the importance of every letter of the Bible, and how the addition of even one letter could make a difference to the meaning of a statement.
- 10) Find illustrations of the Word in the following passages.
 - Luke 8.11
 - Ephesians 5.26
 - Ephesians 6.17.
 - James 1.22-25. This list is by no means exhaustive, and you could add to it by finding passages that refer to the Word as a hammer, or a light etc.