

Lesson 1

THE BIBLE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I.

BEFORE THERE WAS A BIBLE

The Bible is without exception the most wonderful book in existence! It is superior to all other literature. The word “Bible” means “the book.” It is truly “the book,” containing the choicest gems of thought not found in any other book. David, the sweet singer of Israel, declared in Psalms 119:129:

“Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.”

Millions of people down through the ages have read, loved, and obeyed the teachings of this precious Book and have rejoiced in its promises. Its truths enrich the soul, and are to be desired above “*much fine gold,*” being “*sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb*” as the Psalmist says in Psalms 19:10.

However, from the time of Adam until Moses there appears to have been **no written revelation from God**. There are three significant facts, together with other evidence, that may serve to establish this:

1. There is **NO RECORD** of any inspired writings prior to the days of Moses.

Although there were righteous people prior to Moses, such as Noah, Abraham, and Joseph with whom the Almighty had frequent verbal communication, we do not read that any one of them was ever inspired to write anything for God.

2. There is **NO REFERENCE** to such writings.

Our Lord frequently referred to the Old Testament Scriptures in the familiar words “It is written.” The most natural inference is that, had there been any sacred writings in the days previous to Moses, some reference would in like manner have been made to them by men like Noah and Abraham or some of the later prophets, or even by our Lord. But, no reference whatever is made to any supposed inspired writings before Moses.

3. There are **NO REMAINS** of them.

Surely *if there had been such writings they would have formed a part of the “Word of the Lord” which “endureth forever”* just as our own Scriptures have been. But, there are no remains, nor is there the least trace of any such writings.

All this is the more remarkable when we remember that uninspired writings of various kinds, having more or less vague references to God, were undoubtedly in existence at a very early age. Thousands of these specimens have been discovered in Egypt and Babylonia, in the form of clay tablets with signs or letters impressed upon them; also ancient stones, with similar

signs representing writing cut upon them. Among these specimens is the code of Hammurabi, who lived at least three centuries subsequent to the age of Abraham. These laws bear some resemblance to the Mosaic laws but apparently are some of the remnants of those pure laws which, in the early days of the world's history, God had communicated **orally** to Man, but which, in course of time, had been partly forgotten and partly corrupted.

Evidently those were days in which God was pleased to make known His will **verbally**, in a direct and personal manner, to individuals, as to Adam, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job and his friends. This period of time in which God spoke directly to the fathers or heads of the families is known as the Patriarchal Period. This period lasted from Adam to Moses.

II.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IT IS

A few facts about the Bible are essential for one's understanding of the greatest book ever written:

1. *The Bible is a library of books.*

It is the greatest collection of books available to man. There are sixty-six books in all, thirty-nine in the part known as the Old Testament, twenty-seven in the part known as the New Testament. The word "Bible" is derived through Latin from the Greek word *biblia* (books), specifically the books that are acknowledged as canonical by the Christian church. In these various books of the Bible we find law, history, narrative, poetry, prophecy, letters, proverbs, parables, apocalypses, in fact examples of almost every literary form known to man.

2. *The Bible is a library of related books.*

Despite the fact that the sixty-six books which go to make up The Book were written by many different authors such as a great deliverer, a shepherd-warrior-king, a priest, a wise and wealthy king, a statesman, herdsmen, fishermen, a medical doctor, a tax collector, etc. These books were written over a period extending from about 1500 B.C. to about A.D. 100, and most of the writers were unknown to one another. The amazing fact is that the completed whole is a **single story** with a **single theme**, namely, **redemption through Christ Jesus**. As someone said, "*In the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed; in the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.*" Everything in the Old Testament pointed forward to Messiah (Jesus Christ); everything in the New Testament points back to Him. The Central Figure of all human history is Jesus Christ.

3. *The Bible is a collection of selected books.*

The books of the Bible did not just "get together" in some mysterious manner without rhyme or reason. The inclusion of the various sixty-six books in the Canon was determined first by popular acceptance and use, and then by Christian scholarship directed to the specific problem of a final determination of the Canon. The essential criterion for this determination was the contribution made by each book to the history of redemption as worked out on earth in the Messianic Line—the genealogy that

began with the “first Adam” and terminated with the “second Adam” the Lord Jesus Christ. (Cf. I Cor. 15:45-49). Behind all of this effort had to be the divine providence of God in order to preserve His will for all mankind.

4. *The Bible presents itself as the Spirit inspired word of God.*

Men under the control of the Holy Spirit wrote every word of the Bible. Thus the Bible is inerrant and infallible. It is divine rather than human, the words of God rather than the words of men. The inspiration is both “**plenary**” and “**verbal**.” “**Plenary**” is an adjective that means “entire, absolute, or complete as embracing all the parts or members.” “**Verbal**” is an adjective that means “pertaining to words; concerned with words rather than the ideas they convey.” The Bible is not inspired in some of its parts but in all of its parts. It is not inspired merely in thought and doctrine, but even in the selection of words used in the original autographs. In 2 Pet. 1:20-21, Peter said, “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.” (NIV) Paul said, “*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim 3:16-17 NAS). Paul also wrote, “*but just as it is written, Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words*” (I Cor. 2:9-13 NAS) Therefore, the Bible is the perfect, complete, all-powerful and the final revelation of God for Man.

5. *Even though the Bible is a library of books, it is still one Book.*

We err when we think of the Bible as the source of two or three different religions. It is the record of the progressive revelation of the one true religion as the Spirit through three successive Dispensations actualized it. (The word “dispensation” has reference to the system by which God dispenses His gifts and graces throughout any particular period or age: cf. Eph. 1:10 and 3:2). The Dispensations changed – from the family to the national to the universal – as the type of priesthood changed. **The Patriarchal Dispensation** was the age of family rule and family worship, with the patriarch (paternal head) acting as **prophet** (revealer of God’s will), **priest** (intercessor), and **king** for his entire progeny. (The Book of Genesis gives us the history of the Patriarchal Dispensation.) **The Jewish Dispensation** was ushered in with the establishment of a national institution of worship (first the Tabernacle, and later the Temple) and a **national priesthood** (the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood). **The Christian Dispensation** had its beginning with the abrogation of the Old Covenant and the ratification of the New Covenant by one and the same event – **the death of Christ** on the Cross (although the Jewish Institution was permitted to remain as a social and civil institution some forty years longer, that is, down to the destruction of

Jerusalem and the dispersion of its people by the Roman Empire, A.D. 70). These successive “ages,” therefore, embrace the successive stages in the revelation of true religion as set forth in the Bible. Refusal to recognize this fundamental unity of the Bible as a whole can result only in confusion, presumption, and ultimate rejection of the Author of the Bible – God.

6. *The Bible is pre-eminently the Book of Life.*

The pages of the Bible are replete with “human interest” stories covering every phase of life as man lives it. While portraying the virtues of the great heroes of the faith in all ages, not for one moment does it turn aside to hide their frailties. It never deceives Man. It tells him bluntly that he is in sin, in a lost condition, and in danger of perishing in hell; at the same time it offers the remedy (the blood of Christ, John 1:29; I John 1:7), and the means of applying the remedy (the preaching and acceptance of the Gospel, I Cor. 1:21; Rom. 1:16; Acts 2:38; I Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 1:8; I Pet. 4:17).

III.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IT IS NOT

The knowledge of **what the Bible is not** will do much to clear away the false issues that have been raised in recent years in the form of alleged “conflicts” between the Bible and science.

1. *The Bible is not a textbook of science.*

It was never the intention of the Bible writers to produce a scientific textbook. The Genesis account of the Creation, for example, was not intended to be a scientific presentation: its author makes no attempt to give us an explanation of the **how** (the method) of Creation (and it must be remembered that the **how**, rather than the **why**, of things, is the specific area in which true science operates: outside that area it is no longer science). The writer of Genesis wrote with a purpose that was simply and solely **religious**: to impress upon man the truth that the cosmos and everything in it is the handiwork of the **Will and Word of the living God** (cf. Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26; Psa. 33:6, 9; Psa. 148:1-6; Heb. 11:3).

One writer warns us against trying to turn the Bible into a scientific textbook when he wrote:

“It (the Bible) is not, then a treatise on man.....as he is physically, astronomically, geologically, politically, or metaphysically; but as he is, and ought to be, **morally and religiously.**”

There never was a time in the history of human thought when Biblical teaching and scientific theory were in greater accord than they are today. Should it not be so? God has written **two books**: one is the **Book of Nature** in which He has revealed His “everlasting power and divinity” (Rom. 1:20; Psa. 19:1); the other is the **Book of Redemption** in which He has made known His immeasurable love and compassion for Man (John 3:16-18; Eph. 2:4-7; James 5:11; I Peter 1:3). **Science** is Man’s attempt to interpret the **Book of Nature**, and **theology** is Man’s attempt to interpret

the **Book of Redemption**. Therefore, there may be **apparent conflicts** between **these two interpretations**, because the interpretations are of men and men are fallible. But by virtue of the fact that **both Books are from God**, they **cannot be contradictory** in their contents. Hence, the Bible has no apology to make to science, nor has it anything to fear from science, for the obvious reason that it does not have any reason to fear truth under any guise, or in any branch of human knowledge. It needs to be pointed out that it is a **mistake** to treat Genesis as a textbook of science by resorting to fantastic “interpretations” to make its content conform to the latest scientific theories. The Book of Genesis has nothing to fear from, nor any need for accommodation to, human theory and speculation.

2. *The Bible is not a history of the human race.*

It is rather, the history of one genealogical Line, that is, the Line that flowered and terminated in Messiah, the redeemer. Therefore, the Bible is the history of the unfolding of the Plan of Redemption.

The Bible is not concerned with the story of the human race as a whole, but only with the particular segment of the race which was destined to bring forth Messiah, the One through whom the Plan of Redemption for mankind was to be effectuated. In Genesis chapter 4 we are given, but only partially, the antediluvian genealogy of the Cainites, and in chapter 5 the antediluvian line of the Sethites, the account culminating in the story of Noah and the Flood. After the death of Abel, it was Seth and his progeny who were appointed to carry on the genealogical Line that was to culminate in Messiah.

The Bible is the history of Messianic Line only, the Line that was to bring forth “in the fullness of the time” (Gal. 4:4) the world’s Redeemer. This Line is traced from Adam to Noah, through Seth, in the fifth chapter of Genesis; and after a brief diversion to give us the story of Noah and the Deluge, the Line is traced on down from Noah to Abraham (Gen. 11).

With the Call of Abraham, the history became narrowed down to the story of the fleshly seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the children of Israel, as they were known in Old Testament times. God literally separated this people from the rest of mankind and gave them the responsibility to do five things:

- (1) To preserve the knowledge of the living and true God.
- (2) To preserve the knowledge of the moral law (Gal. 3:19 – “the law” was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come).
- (3) To prepare the world for the advent and ministry of Messiah.
- (4) To build up a system of metaphor, type, allegory and prophecy designed to identify the Messiah at His appearance in the flesh.
- (5) To give the Messiah as Prophet, Priest, and King to the world.

3. *The Bible is not a book of philosophy.*

In the branch of philosophy known as philosophy of religion, specialized attention is given to the subjects of God, freedom, and immortality. Immanuel Kant declared that these are the three fundamental subjects of philosophy in general. However, at its

best, philosophy is strictly human speculation; hence it is not, and cannot be, a substitute for religious faith.

IV.

HOW IS THE BIBLE ORGANIZED?

As we have pointed out already, the Bible is a collection of sixty-six books and divided into two testaments, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. Different writers from different walks of life and different periods of time wrote the Old Testament books in Hebrew with a few passages in Aramaic. The writers of the New Testament wrote their books in Greek.

The Old Testament record begins with a very brief account of the creation of the universe and closes about four hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ. During this period of four hundred years there was no written revelation given by God.

The flow of history through the Old Testament moves along peaks of history because it is not the purpose of the Old Testament to be a history of mankind. It is the history of one genealogical line, the particular segment of the race, which was destined to bring forth the Messiah. That flow of history moves along the following lines:

Creation of the universe	
Fall of man	
The earth-covering flood	
Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), sons of Jacob (fathers of the chosen nation)	
The History of Israel	
Exile in Egypt	430 years
Exodus and wilderness wanderings	40 years
Conquest of Canaan	7 years
Era of Judges	350 years
United Kingdom—Saul, David, Solomon	110 years
Divided Kingdom—Judah and Israel	350 years
Exile in Babylon	70 years
Return and rebuilding of the land	140 years

The details of this history are explained in the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. Those books are divided into five different categories:

History and Law (The Pentateuch) 5 books (Genesis – Deuteronomy)

History 12 books (Joshua – Esther)

Drama, Poetry, Proverbs (Wisdom Literature) 5 books (Job – Song of Solomon)

Prophecy, History (Major Prophets) 5 books (Isaiah – Daniel)

Prophecy, History (Minor Prophets) 12 books (Hosea – Malachi)

After the completion of the Old Testament, there were four hundred years of silence, during which God did not speak, or inspire, any written revelation. That silence was broken by the arrival of John the Baptist (the baptizer) to announce the coming of the Messiah. The New Testament records the rest of the story from the birth of Christ to the culmination of all history and the final eternal state.

While the Old Testament focuses on the history of Israel and the promise of the coming Savior, the New Testament's twenty-seven books focus on the person of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom (the church). These books are divided as follows:

Biography/Gospels (The life of Jesus) 4 books (Matthew – John)

History (The establishment of the church) 1 book (Acts)

Letters (Christian living) 21 books (Romans – Jude)

Prophecy (The victory belongs to God) 1 book (Revelation)

The four Gospels give the record of the birth of Christ, His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Each of the four writers view Christ from a different perspective:

Matthew looks at Christ through the perspective of His kingdom

Mark views Christ through the perspective of His servanthood

Luke looks at Christ through the perspective of His humanity

John views Christ through the perspective of His deity

The Book of Acts tells the story of the impact of Christ, His life, death, resurrection and ascension resulting in the coming of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the church (which is the kingdom). The story continues through the early years of gospel preaching by the apostles and brethren and shows the establishment of churches in Judea, Samaria, and throughout the Roman Empire.

The twenty-one epistles were written to churches and individuals to explain the significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ, with its implications for the life and service of His followers until He comes.

The New Testament closes with Revelation, which shows God and His church in war with Satan and his servants and the victory belonging to God and His cause of righteousness. All of God's faithful servants enter the eternal glory prepared for them; and all the ungodly are consigned to hell to be punished forever.

To understand the Bible, it is essential to comprehend the sweep of that history from creation to consummation. One must keep in focus the unifying theme of Scripture. The one constant theme unfolding throughout the whole Bible is this: God for His own glory has chosen to create and gather to Himself a family of sons and daughters to be subject to Him in the eternal kingdom; to praise, honor, and serve Him forever; and through whom He will display His wisdom, power, mercy, grace, and glory. To gather them He must redeem them from sin. The Bible reveals God's plan for this redemption from its inception in eternity past to its completion in eternity future. Paul sums this up beautifully in the following passage:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.” (Eph 1:3-14 NAS)

TO SUM IT UP

My prayer is that the magnificent and overwhelming theme of the redemption of sinners for the glory of God will carry you with captivating interest from beginning to end of this story. This story is from God to you; and it is all about **you**. It tells you why God made you, what you were, what you can become in Christ, and what He has prepared for you in eternal glory.

The Bible is the only book which has the power to save your soul (Romans 1:16; James 1:21). This great book stands as the unbreakable anvil that has and will withstand all the hammer blows of infidelity. John Clifford expressed this so beautifully in his poem.

“The Hammer and The Anvil”

“Last eve I passed a blacksmith’s door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
When looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.”

“‘How many anvils have you had,’ said I
‘To wear and batter all these hammers so?’
‘Just one,’ said he, then said with twinkling eye,
‘The anvil wears the hammers out you know.’”

“And so, I thought, the anvil of God’s word
For ages skeptics blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed—the hammers gone!”

Questions

1. How would you establish that there appears to have been no written revelation from God before Moses?

2. Why is the Bible considered a library of books?

3. Why is the Bible a library of related books?

4. How did the Bible become a collection of selected books?

5. What is meant by “plenary” and “verbal” inspiration?

6. Although the Bible is a library of books, how is it “one book?”

7. Why is the Bible pre-eminently the Book of Life?

8. Why is the Bible NOT a textbook on science?

9. Explain why the Bible is not a history of the human race.

10. Explain why the Bible is not a book of philosophy.

11. According to the Bible Library list the divisions of the Old Testament and give the first and last book of each division.

12. According to the Bible Library list the divisions of the New Testament and give the first and last book of each division.
