



CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

QUEST LESSON A-2

The Problem: How does God communicate with mankind? As we have seen in our previous lesson, one of the ways is through nature. The things that He has made testify to His existence. Christians generally are convinced that, in a very direct and personal way, God speaks to us through the Bible. But what is there about the Bible that makes it so superior to any other book? How can we be sure that the Bible message was given by God, and not just concocted by a series of human writers? What evidence do we have that the Bible writers were inspired by God? When we say that the Bible is inspired, what do we mean? Did God dictate the words to the men who wrote the Bible books, or did He give them messages which they recorded in their own words? Do archeology and history help us answer the question concerning the Bible's authenticity?

It was back in the sixteenth century that respect for the Bible as the rule of Christian faith and doctrine was especially revived. During the Middle Ages, Bible study was largely reserved for an elite, educated, priestly class. Then came the Christian humanists of the Renaissance and the great Reformers of the sixteenth century. The Bible was translated from Greek and Hebrew into the languages of the people, and anyone who 'could read was able to discover the Gospel for himself.

Martin Luther said: "We must make a great difference between God's Word and the word of man. A man's word is a little sound, that flies into the air, and soon vanishes; but the Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, yea greater than death and hell, for it forms part of the power of God, and endures everlastingly; we should, therefore, diligently study God's Word, and know and assuredly believe that God himself speaks unto us." (A Compend of Luther's Theology, edited by Hugh T. Kerr, p. 10).

Since Luther's day, many scholars have cast doubt on the authenticity and inspiration of the Bible. But modern research increasingly substantiates the principle that the Bible books, as ancient as they are, comprise authentic historical and theological documents which reveal characteristics not possessed by any other literature known to man.

Was Luther right? Can we trust the Bible as, indeed, the Word of God for us today? This is the subject of this lesson.

Objectives

First, it is important to study the kind of book the Bible is. Who were the human authors? In what languages did they write? How was the collection of Bible books put together? How was the Bible handed down through the centuries?

Second, we will consider the various claims the Bible makes for itself.

Third, we will study various evidences that the Bible is inspired by God.

Fourth, we will answer the question: What can the Bible do for you?

I. What Kind of Book Is the Bible?

The Holy Bible consists of sixty-six separate books. In fact, the word "Bible" means "book." The sixty-six books are divided into two major parts: the Old Testament written before the time of Christ, and the New Testament written after the time of Christ.

Old Testament: The greater part of the 39 books of the Old Testament were originally written in Hebrew. A few small portions were written in Aramaic (Ezra 4:8 6:18; 7:12-26; Daniel 2:4 7:28; Jeremiah 10:11). The Jews learnt Aramaic when they were captives in Babylon (605 B.C. and following). Aramaic was the official language of the later Babylonian and Persian empires. It was used as an international language. Although Hebrew was the official written language of the Jews, after the captivity they spoke Aramaic. The spoken language of Jesus and the apostles was Aramaic, even though they read the Scriptures in Hebrew.

The writers of the Old Testament were Jews from many different walks of life. They were farmers, shepherds, diplomats, kings, courtiers, and professional prophets. They were men of different backgrounds and education. The books they wrote are unsurpassed in the period before Christ as spiritual, moral, and ethical writings.

New Testament: The second major part of the Bible is made up of the 27 books of the New Testament. They were all written in Greek. This was the universal language of the Roman Empire at the time of Christ and the apostles, in the first century of the Christian era. The writers were Jesus' apostles and close associates of the apostles. Some of the books are records of the life and teachings of Jesus (the four Gospels). One book describes the ministry of leading apostles after the death of Jesus (Acts). One book is a series of prophetic visions given to the apostle John (Revelation). The rest of the books are letters or epistles written to individuals or groups with the express purpose of leading them closer to Christ.

Chapter and Verse Divisions: The division of both Old And New Testaments into chapters was done in the thirteenth century. Some scholars think that it was the work of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, and others credit it to the Spanish cardinal, Hugo a Santo Caro. Verse divisions were produced by Robert Stephanus of Paris in his 1551 Greek-Latin edition of the New Testament. The chapter and verse divisions sometimes come in the wrong places, providing breaks or interruptions in literary sections which should be studied as units.

The Production of the Bible: The Bible was written by approximately 40 writers over a period of nearly 1,600 years. They used the writing materials which were currently used in their day: leather and papyrus scrolls, reed brushes or sharp-pointed reeds, and ink made from soot and gum. In some cases they did the actual writing themselves; in others, they dictated to a secretary (a scribe or amanuensis).

Preservation of the Bible: From the earliest times, when Moses wrote the first five Bible books (Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), the books were kept in the sanctuary or temple. Priests and religious leaders sometimes kept the writings of the prophets in their private collections, but it was customary to place them in the temple to be preserved for future generations. After the captivity, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Old Testament books began to be put together in a body. By the time of Jesus, these books consisted of a corpus of writings called "the canon." The Old Testament canon was organized into three sections: Law, Prophets, Writings. (See Luke 24:27, 44)

The New Testament body of writings was collected in the early centuries A.D., as Christians came to recognize the authority of books written by apostles or their close associates. The decisions as to which books were authoritative were not made by a church organization or the head of a church. Christians during the first four centuries A.D. came to agree on which books should be included.

Since the early Christian centuries, faithful scribes have copied and recopied the Bible manuscripts, so that today we know that the words of both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament are substantially the same as those written by the original authors. By comparing the thousands of available manuscripts, textual scholars are establishing the best possible text. They assure us that no Bible teaching has been changed because of any carelessness in the copying of manuscripts.

II. What Claims Does the Bible Make for Itself?

As we consider these claims, it is helpful to keep in mind that they are widely distributed throughout the Bible books. Here we have the phenomenon that 40 different writers thought of their messages as having the same divine source.

The Word

1. Who did the Bible writers claim to be the true Author of their books? 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; (compare Ezekiel 1:3; Isaiah 1:1-2; 6:8-9; Daniel 2:193; 2 Samuel 23:1-2; Galatians 1:11-12).
2. What did the Bible writers claim in regard to their ability, under God, to predict the future? Isaiah 46:9-10; Daniel 2:28; Revelation 1:1; (compare Matthew 24; 2 Thessalonians 2).
3. What did the Bible writers claim concerning the Law which they presented as the standard of human conduct? Exodus 20:1-3; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 19:7; Romans 7:7, 12, 14.
4. What did the Bible writers claim in regard to the Person who would make salvation possible? Acts 4:12; 1 Peter 2:21-25; (compare Isaiah 5:5, 10-11).
5. What special power did the Bible writers claim for their messages? Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23; Psalm 119:11.

Explanation: More than 3,800 times Old Testament writers use phrases like, "the word of the Lord came," "thus saith the Lord," "the Lord said." The New Testament writers accepted the Old Testament messages as given by God, and claimed that their own messages were also divinely inspired. (See 2 Peter 3:2, 16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 14:37).

Relevance: If you accept that the Bible writers were honest, sane men, you cannot doubt that their claims were true and their messages came from God.

III. The Unity of the Bible's Message

The Bible writers employ vastly different literary styles. This indicates that God did not dictate the words to them. They wrote God's messages in their own words. Yet there is no contradiction in their messages.

"Though extraordinarily diversified, its sixty-six sections all have one predominant purpose. Some are poetry, others prose. Some are historical, others prophetic. Some are missionary reports, others are church letters or personal correspondence. Yet all speak of the same God, all uplift the same standards of righteousness, all tell of the same plan of salvation, and all look forward to the same day of divine judgment and eternal reward. None contradicts another. This could not just have happened." Arthur S. Maxwell, *Your Bible and You*, p. 45.

The Word

6. What statement did Isaiah make implying that spiritual truth in one Bible book will always agree with that in another? Isaiah 8:20.

7. In what terms did Paul express the need for unity of teaching? Galatians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:10.
8. How did Paul demonstrate the unity between his teaching and that of Moses? Romans 10:6-10; compare Deuteronomy 30:11-14.

Explanation: The first book of the Bible was written by Moses in the fifteenth century B.C. and the last book was written by John the Revelator towards the end of the first century A.D. The writers were men of different cultures, languages and education, yet there is no contradiction in their teaching. There are different emphases in the various Bible books, but all uphold the same spiritual truth.

Relevance: The unity of teaching is one of the strongest evidences of the Bible's inspiration. We can have confidence that God's message of salvation is the same in every age.

IV. The Bible's Endurance

For many centuries there have been attacks on the Bible of one form or another by those who rejected its message. But the Bible has weathered the storms and is still the world's best seller. People like Voltaire and Thomas Paine tried to destroy its influence, but their efforts were a failure.

The Word

9. How long did Isaiah predict the Word of God would endure? Isaiah 40:8.
10. What did Jesus say regarding the endurance of the Word? Matthew 5:18; 24:35.

Explanation: God's Word is immortal. All attempts to destroy it will fail, as they have failed in centuries gone by.

Relevance: The Bible's endurance is the result of the continuing relevance of its message. This is not "proof" of inspiration. But it is additional evidence.

V. The Bible a Book of Prophecy.

As we have seen, the Bible writers claimed inspiration by virtue of the miraculous ability to predict the future. None of them took credit to themselves for this ability. It comes from the one and only true God.

The Word

11. Did Bible writers make successful predictions regarding cities? What cities?
Nahum 2:8-10; Zephaniah 2:13
Isaiah 13:19-22
Jeremiah 17:27; 2 Chronicles 36:19-21
Ezekiel 26:3-7, 12, 14, 21
12. Give one good example of a Bible writer predicting details in the life of an individual. Concerning whom was the prediction made, and what was predicted? Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-4; (compare Jeremiah 50:1-3; Daniel 5:28; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3).
13. Where was the Messiah predicted to be born? Was Jesus born there? Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1.

Explanation: There are hundreds of detailed prophecies in Scripture. The books of Daniel and John the Revelator are great prophetic books which predicted the major events of history right down to the second

coming of Christ. Once having studied those books you will have no further doubt about the divine inspiration of the Bible.

Relevance: Peter wrote, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed" (2 Peter 7:19). Are you willing to join us in searching for the great prophetic messages of Scripture?

VI. Archeological Discoveries Support Bible History and Prophecy.

Many details of Bible history have been proved correct by archeological discoveries, and Bible prophecies have been demonstrated to have been fulfilled. A few brief examples will be given.

The existence of Hebrew writing 3,500 years ago has been demonstrated.

The excavation of Ur in Mesopotamia has established the existence of high level of civilization at the time of Abraham.

The excavation of the city of Ugarit on the Phoenician coast has revealed facts about the ancient worship of Baal which throw light on the Elijah story (1 Kings 17 ff.).

The existence of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, has been established (Daniel 5:1; 7:1).

The Dead Sea Scrolls have established the remarkable accuracy of the accepted Hebrew text of the Old Testament (Masoretic Text), and the early dating of Bible books, the authenticity of which had been doubted.

The discovery of the ruins of Petra in 1812 established the truth of the prophecies regarding the Edomites. (See Jeremiah 49:13, 17; Obadiah 18; Joel 3:19).

The ruins of Tyre and the excavation of ancient Nineveh and Babylon have established the Bible predictions regarding those cities.

The history and geography of the book of Acts has been shown to be thoroughly trustworthy.

Explanation: For further details see such books as Siegfried H. Horn, *The Spade Confirms the Book* and George Burnside, *Buried Evidence*. Horn writes, "The spade of the archeologist has thrown much light on the Bible and its messages, with the result that there now exists greater interest in the Bible lands and in archeological investigations that have been carried on in the Near East during the past hundred years. During that time long-buried records of the past have been uncovered, which allow us to reconstruct to a large extent the history of antiquity, thus giving us a background for the Old and New Testaments." (Preface, *The Spade Confirms the Book*).

Relevance: The Bible is not a book of myths and legends. In terms of history and geography it has been proved reliable.

VII. What Can the Bible Do For You?

It can do for you what it has done for me and millions of others who have accepted its message. It offers a Savior who forgives, changes lives, and provides hope for the future. The Bible was not written just for scholars. It was primarily written for sinners. If you need help, the Bible can supply your need. If you need comfort, the Bible is full of it.

If you crave love and understanding, the Bible will tell you how to find it. If you are sick and dying, the Bible will give you freedom from fear and the assurance of a life hereafter. The Bible is the best book to live by and the best book to die by. |

The Word

14. What did Jesus say His Word will do for you? Matthew 7:24-25; John 5:24.

15. What effect does the Bible have on our way of life when we accept its message? Psalm 119:9; John 15:3; 17:17.

Explanation: The greatest evidence of the inspiration of the Bible is the change in your life as you read it and accept the Savior about whom it speaks. I met a young married woman recently who had been a heavy drinker and smoker. She knew she needed help. She turned to the Bible and its Author, and was given complete deliverance. I met a young man in his twenties who was about to join the underworld as a hired hit man. Instead he found the thrill of Bible study and gave his life to Christ. Today he is a victorious Christian. There is divine energy, transforming power in the Bible message, greater than you have ever known.

Relevance: How can you have this power in your life? Quite simply. Open the Bible, read its message reverently, prayerfully. Seek for the truth in the humble spirit of a learner. The power will begin to flow, and you will know that God's Word is for you.

Review Questions

1. True or False

- a. The Bible books are no more inspired than other good literature.
- b. The Bible message, under God, has great power to change lives.
- c. The Bible writers contradict one another's teachings.
- d. Archeology proves that the Bible is inspired.

2. Discuss: When people are offered a book that will explain to them how legally avoid having to pay taxes they are very enthusiastic. Why are many people not so enthusiastic when they are offered the Bible, which explains how they can live for eternity?