

5. The Bible

Training objective:-

To have a knowledge of the inspiration, infallibility and importance of scripture. To also have some understanding of how it got to us. To be able to utilise study methods and tools and also to develop a regular reading routine.

Study:-

The Bible is unique

- Written over a 1500 year span.
- Written by 40 different authors from many walks of life.
- Written on 3 continents; in a variety of locations, and in 3 different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek).
- Written on hundreds of controversial subjects with complete harmony.
- Read by more people; published in more languages, and more copies made than any other book in history.
- It has more manuscript evidence than *any ten* pieces of classical literature *combined*. It has survived the most rigorous of persecutions.

Definition of the terms 'Bible' and 'Scripture'

- The word 'Bible' is the English form of a Greek word '*Biblia*', meaning "books". The Bible consists of 66 different books. It is divided into the Old Testament, containing 39 books, and the New Testament, containing 27 books.
- The term 'scripture' is from the Greek word '*graphe*', and is used 51 times in the New Testament, each time referring to the Old Testament (however see 2Peter 3:15 and 1Tim 5:17-18 where the New Testament is also regarded as being equally 'scripture').

Chapters and Verses

- The original manuscripts did not contain any chapters or verses. The Jews first divided the Old Testament into portions to aid reading in the synagogue. The Greeks later made verse divisions also with the New Testament. Our present chapters were made by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1227AD.

The inspiration of scripture

The Bible is the written word of God. In the Old Testament alone it records that 'God said' in some way 3,808 times. Read 2Tim 3:16.

- Although there are ways to prove the authority of the Bible (e.g. the thousands of fulfilled prophecies), there is no higher authority to test it against (or else it would be subordinate to that with which you tested it), so here it bears witness about itself.
- This verse explains that scripture is inspired by God. The term used is '*theopneustos*' which literally means 'God-breathed' or 'God-expired'- i.e. the Bible is God's word; His message to mankind
- All scripture is divinely inspired, not just certain parts. This means that we cannot chop out or ignore things we don't like. It also means that scripture is complete- there is nothing missed out that God wanted included, and nothing included that should not have been.
- As all scripture is divinely inspired, it is inerrant, meaning that there were no errors in the original documents (Prov 30:5). The original manuscripts have perished, but

were copied thousands of times meticulously by hand. Minor errors sometimes can happen in the copying and translating process but these can be traced and corrected due to the fact that we now have literally thousands of very old manuscripts descended from the originals, which can be compared to one another for accuracy. From this scholars have established that the current texts we use are over 99% the exact texts of the originals. Where there are textual variants, for instance from scribal mistakes, these are shown in the margins of modern Bibles as 'variant readings'. The recent findings of very ancient biblical scrolls in caves at the Dead Sea have proved the accuracy of the texts that have been handed down, and confirm that what we have in the Bible really is the word of God. The inerrancy of the Bible means that it is correct (as far as the limitations of languages used in writing allow) in every sphere that it speaks into- history, science, biology, geology, mathematics etc.

- Scripture is infallible, meaning, when correctly interpreted according to the context, it will never mislead us- it is completely trustworthy.
- Because all scripture is God-breathed it is useful for teaching with regard to our beliefs (teaching right 'doctrine' and 'correcting' wrong doctrine), as well as with regard to our behaviour (bringing 'instruction' of right behaviour and 'reproof' of wrong behaviour). It is our trustworthy means of testing all personal revelation we receive to see if it really is from God, as we know that God will never go against His own word.

Read 2Pet 1:21

- This verse describes how the inspiration happened- it did not have its origin in the will of man, but the will of God- God was the source and man was just the instrument.
- 'Men spoke from God'- men spoke God's words rather than something from their own imagination. People were 'carried along' (same word used in Acts 27:15,17 referring to a ship driven along by a storm) by the Holy Spirit. God chose to use the vocabulary and literary characteristics of the various writers to express what He wanted to express with the exact words that He wanted. This does not mean that it was a dictation (only some parts were), but rather the words chosen by the individuals in their different styles were fully inspired by God and were just as He wanted. God superintended things in the same way that St. Paul's cathedral was built by Sir Christopher Wren in 1668, and yet he did not lay a stone, but he was the architect and source of it and it turned out just as he wanted it. In the Bible certain Old Testament passages are quoted in places as being spoken by God and in other places the same passages are quoted as being spoken by man (Mt 15:4 and Mk 7:10 quoting Ex 20:12; Mk 12:36 and Mk 12:37 quoting Ps 110:1; Jn 12:39-41 and Acts 28:25-27 quoting Is 6:9-10; Mt 2:15 quoting Hos 11:1 says both God and the prophet said it).

The canon of scripture

- The books which belong to the Bible are called the 'canon' of scripture. The word canon comes from a Greek word meaning 'reed' or 'measuring rod, ruler'. The word came to mean 'standard', and, when applied to the Bible, it means the list of books which are accepted as scripture.
- The church did not decide which books should be part of scripture- God did, when He inspired them to be written; and this inspiration of scripture (i.e. man writing the 'word of God') was recognised by the church from the beginning. At certain times, however, due to heretical teachings and other writings finding their way into the church, it became necessary for the church to make rulings as to which books constituted scripture, in order to preserve the scriptures.

The Old Testament Canon

Who actually wrote down the Old Testament?

The Bible records that the ten commandments were literally written by the finger of God (Ex 31:18; 32:16; Deut 4:13; 10:1-5) and for the rest of the Old Testament **prophets** were commanded by God to record both His words for mankind, as well as His dealings with His chosen nation, Israel:

- Moses - (Ex 17:14; 24:4, 34:27; Num 33:2; Deut 31:24-26).
- Joshua – (Josh 24:26- God must have commanded it as He had warned previously about adding anything to the book of the law (Deut 4:2; 12:32)).
- Samuel - (1Sam 10:25). Samuel and Nathan- (1Chron 29:29)
- Jehu - (2Chron 20:34; mentioned as a prophet in 1Kings 16:7).
- Isaiah - (2Chron 26:22, 32:32).
- Jeremiah - (Jer 30:2)
- Daniel- (Dan 12:4)

How do we know that what the Old Testament Prophets wrote really was the Word of God?

- The Old Testament, written by the prophets uses the words 'the Lord said' or similar some 3,808 times, and so clearly makes the claim of Divine inspiration.
- If an Old Testament prophets made a wrong prediction their punishment was to be stoned to death! - (Deut 18:20-22). Their prophecies have been fulfilled throughout history- (see www.100prophecies.org and www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/prophecy.shtml).
- Prophets authenticated the writings of other prophets- (Josh 1:7-8 validates the book of the law given through Moses; Josh 8:30-35 quotes law of Moses; Is 34:16 calls the law 'the book of Jehovah'; Joel 2:32 quotes Obadiah 17; Micah 4:1-4 quotes Is 2:2-4; Jer 26:17-19 quotes Mic 3:12; Dan 9:1-3 is based on Jer 25 and 29)
- Jesus believed it was God's word. The Old Testament was originally arranged by the Jews in a different order to the way we have it in our Bibles today. Some of the books were combined together, making a total of 24 books. These were arranged into 3 sections as follows:- Law (the five books of Moses); Prophets (included historical books such as Joshua, and Kings); Writings- (mainly inspirational writings such as the psalms, but also prophetic and historical writings, such as Chronicles). This means that the original last book of the Old Testament was not Malachi, but 2Chronicles. In Mt 23:35, Jesus used a phrase 'from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah', meaning from the first martyr (in Genesis 4:8) to the last (in 2Chron 24:21). This phrase summed up His stamp of authority upon the Old Testament Canon. He also pointed (in Luke 24:44) to the 3 main divisions of the original Canon, and said that He was the fulfillment of prophecies in each of these sections. Jesus quoted from 24 of the current 39 Old Testament books, and He regarded it as the word of God (see Matt 4:4), and its teachings to be absolutely true - ('scripture cannot be broken; John 10:35; 'until everything is accomplished'; Matt 5:17-19).
- The New Testament claims it was God's word. It contains 300 quotations from the Old Testament (70 from the law, 170 from the prophets and 60 from the writings). Often when it quotes it says that God was the speaker (Mt 15:4; Acts 28:25) and 56 times claims God as the author of the Old Testament. Besides the 300 quotations there are also 4,105 allusions to the Old Testament in the New.

Writings between Old and New Testament

- From about 435 B.C. there ceased to be any true prophets of God, and for about 400 years there was a silence until John the Baptist. It was as if all of the prophecies were awaiting their fulfillment. Around this time there were various writings known collectively as the '**Apocrypha**' (Greek word meaning 'things which are hidden'). The writings are a mixture of Jewish myths and some historical information. These writings contain some doctrinal, geographical and historical errors. They were never quoted in the New Testament and were not considered by the Jews to be equal with scripture. However, they had use as an example of the literature and history of that period of time, and are still included in Roman Catholic Bibles today.

The New Testament Canon

- In the same way that the prophets had a responsibility to bring God's word to mankind, so also the apostles had a responsibility to teach about the person who was the fulfillment to the Old Testament prophecies- Jesus. The apostles were to interpret and explain how the plan of God announced by the prophets had been fulfilled in Him - (Eph 3:4,5). The whole of the New Testament is written either by apostles, or those closely associated with them. Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would bring to mind Jesus' teaching - (John 14:26, 16:12-14). They were also the witnesses of the bodily resurrection of Jesus.
- The following books were known to have been written by Apostles- Matthew; John; all of Paul's letters; James (called an Apostle in 1Cor 15:7 and Gal 1:19 and acting as one in Acts 12:17; 15:13;21:18; Gal 2:9,12); 1 and 2 Peter; 1,2 and 3 John and Revelation. This leaves 5 books- Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews and Jude. Mark according to early tradition (Papias bishop of Hierapolis c.130, and Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons end second cent.) was the preaching of the Apostle Peter recorded by his fellow worker and interpreter Mark. Irenaeus says that Luke wrote down the gospel preached by Paul and we also know that Acts was written by him (Acts 1:1 refers to his 'former account' about Jesus, which is thought to be the Gospel of Luke especially due to linguistic similarities) fellow-worker of Paul (Phil v.24; Col 4:14; 2Tim 4:11). Hebrews may have been written by Paul but this is not clear. Jude was closely associated with the Apostle James and was also a brother of Jesus.
- The Apostles were aware of their authority to speak the word of God- (1Pet 1:11-12; 2Pet 3:2; 1Cor 2:13; 1Cor 14:37; 2Cor 13:3; Rom 2:16; Gal 1:8-9; 1Thess 2:13; 4:8,15; 5:27; 2Thess 3:6,14; 1Cor 2:9-10,13; Acts 5:3,4)
- The New Testament includes its writings alongside the Old Testament Canon in 2 places. In 2Pet 3:15-16 Peter uses the word 'scripture' to place Paul's letters on an equal footing with the Old Testament. In 1Tim 5:17-18 Paul uses the words 'for the scripture says' and then quotes 2 verses; the first from Deut 25:4 and the second from Luke 10:7 indicating that Luke's gospel is equal to Old Testament scripture.
- When the first apostles died out it was necessary for the church to make a clear list of writings that had the apostolic seal of approval in order to protect the Church from false gospels and false teachings. The writings of the Apostles were used in many different Churches and it was necessary for the Church to recognise the totality of apostolic writings. The earliest list is the Muratorian Canon in AD 175. The early church historian Eusebius (died AD 340) also records a list of canonical books as does the 39th Paschal letter of Athanasius in AD 367 representing the books accepted by Churches in the East. In AD 367 the Council of Carthage representing Churches in the West agreed with this list. This is our present day

Bible. It is important to emphasise that it was God who inspired and chose the books to be incorporated into scripture, and the Church simply recognised and acknowledged these.

Implications:-

- The Bible is accurate, true, authoritative, and is the word of God to mankind. Spurgeon refused to defend it, saying that he would sooner defend a roaring lion!
- To disobey scripture is to disobey God
- Because the Bible is God's word we should live our lives in the light of it, and allow it to govern our actions. We should also not give in to worldly cries that the Bible is irrelevant, or outdated.

Practical Application:-

What book(s) of the Bible are you currently reading?

- How are you studying this book?
- What has God been saying to you through this study?
- Do you find that there are things hindering this time with God?
- If you are having difficulties, try to read a chapter of the Bible each day, and to stick to one book of the Bible at a time.
- Pray beforehand asking God to help you understand the passage and to speak to you through it. Allow time to reflect on the passage and for God to speak.

What resources do you use to further your study of the Bible?

- You could study a theme, or a word with the use of a concordance. Find out how to use a concordance effectively to look up a passage that you know, but cannot find.
- This can also be used during corporate worship when God brings a passage to mind, but it is difficult to find.
- If you have access to a Strong's or Vines' dictionary, find out how individual words can be looked at in their original language to gain a deeper understanding of them.

What are the benefits and dangers of using a Bible commentary?

- **Benefits:-** Clear, precise explanations on the Bible text, with notes on the background.
- **Dangers:-** May not always be a correct interpretation on the text being studied.

What are your short/long term goals in your Bible readings?