

Sunday, August 6, 2023 am

Concerning First Principles An introduction to the Bible

Today, being the first Sunday of the month, I typically set aside for first principle lessons. Today, I want to talk about the Bible in its most fundamental way. This is one of the most basic of lessons (perhaps the only thing MORE basic is making the case for the existence of God). For most here (if not all – I hope), what I will say today is nothing new. But I have been thinking about our need to try and study with others.

As we have noted on numerous occasions, we are now living in different times than just a few decades ago. Less than 50 years ago in America, the overwhelming majority of Americans would acknowledge that the Bible is the word of God, and respect it as a foundational standard for society. They may not have followed it themselves, but there was a respect for it and those who adhered to its standards. But now is different. We live in a time where the Bible is villainized and totally ignored by the majority. The number of people who classify themselves as “none” (atheist/agnostic/no preference) continues to rise. While many may claim some degree of “spirituality” (in a more generic sense), they are less interested in “organized religion”.

As a result of this, and many other factors, Bible illiteracy has substantially increased. HOWEVER, I have always believed that while interest in the Bible is declining, there is ALWAYS someone looking. And, I believe (personal), that as our society continues to decline morally and against God, more will begin to search for answers and be willing to engage in a Bible study. Because of this and other factors, IF you are presented with the opportunity to study with someone, we may have to begin with a basic lesson introducing the Bible.

If someone asked you introduce them the Bible, what would you say? That is what this lesson is about. This lesson is intended to establish WHY one should consider its teachings. (NOTE: It is my hope to develop a 6 lesson study to use in trying to reach people. This will be the foundation of the first lesson – TT).

I. Facts about the Bible itself

- a. The word “Bible” means *book* or *scroll*.
 - i. Scripture means “writings.”, and when it is translated “scripture” in the Bible, it is always a reference to “sacred writings” (51x in NT).
 - ii. Our English Bibles typically distinguish between sacred writings and other *writings* (which is a derivative of the same Greek word).
- b. Our Bible consists of 66 books
 - i. When we think of the Holy Bible, we typically think that it is a book that contains God’s message. And that is true, however we must consider that actually, our Bibles consist of 66 different books of varying qualities that we will address in a few moments. Our Bibles have gathered this collection of God’s word into a single document that we call the Bible.
 - ii. The Bible is divided into 2 testaments. The word testament indicates a *covenant* – an agreement between 2 parties. In the Bible, that covenant is the writings based upon agreement between God and His people. The English concept of a “will” would factor into this definition.
 1. The Old Testament – called “Old” because it was the first one, consists of 39 books in our English Bibles. It was written in Hebrew, the language of the Jews, and was addressed to the Jewish nation. There is also some Aramaic, which was a later offshoot of Hebrew. Much like our English language has developed over time, Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the common language. But, Hebrew was still used in Synagogues and Temple in Jewish worship.
 2. The New Testament – which the Bible teaches replaced the Old Testament as God’s law, consists of 27 books. It contains God’s law that we are now under. It was

written in Greek, the common language of the day in the Roman Empire. It was written for everyone (Jews and Gentiles alike).

- iii. Each of these books was originally written on scrolls in their original language. When originally written, the only separation was the books (and I believe the psalms were separated). Today we have chapter and verse divisions to help us more easily locate a passage of scripture. The Bible was divided into chapters by Stephen Langton, an Archbishop of Canterbury (England) in AD 1227. Verse divisions were introduced in AD 1382 by John Wycliffe in his translation of the English Bible.
- c. The creation of the Bible
 - i. Written over a period of about 1600 years (from ~1500 BC - ~100 AD)
 - ii. It was written by about 40 men, in 3 different languages (see above), on 3 different continents (Europe, Asia and Africa).
 - iii. These men came from all walks of life including kings, princes (Moses), shepherds (Moses, David), military leaders (Joshua), scribes (Ezra), fishermen, government officials (Matthew, Nehemiah), a physician (Luke), fishermen, a tent maker and a prominent Jewish leader (Paul), etc. They wrote from palaces, in cities, in wilderness, to prisons.
 - iv. It is written in various different styles – narrative, historical, legal documents, poetry, songs, proverbs, prayers, and prophecies, etc.
 - v. These facts tell us something about why it is the word of God, which we will address in a short while.

II. **Facts about the impact of the Bible on the world**

- a. #1 all-time bestseller, with more than 100 million copies sold or donated each year. In the USA, approximately 20 million Bibles are purchased year. There are bookstores and online stores that are devoted exclusively to its content in one form or another.
- b. It has been the inspiration for visual art, music and literature, including many of our timeless classics.
- c. As of September 2022, the complete Bible has been translated into more than 700 languages, with portions of it being translated into at least 3500 languages and dialects.¹
- d. It has been treated with the greatest of care throughout the centuries, with great efforts made to preserve its content with integrity. Concerning the New Testament, we have more than 25,000 manuscripts and fragments of various parts of the NT, with more than 5,500 in Greek (the original NT language). Also, the overwhelming majority (90+%) of the NT is quoted by various “Christian authors” within the first 3-4 centuries after the NT was completed. The Bible is by far the MOST preserved, copied and critically scrutinized ancient document.
- e. It has survived 1000s of years of every type of assault and is still viewed with relevance by the majority. This, despite natural conditions over time (old things, especially documents, wear out) and persecutions (both physical and critically), attempts to outlaw its distribution, translation and use, as well as major campaigns to destroy it within societies.
- f. It has influenced the founding of many nations including the United States. Our founding fathers and documents considered its moral and ethical teachings. Its impact is so great, that other belief systems (including atheism) have to address its influence.

III. **Inspired by God**

- a. What does inspired mean?
 - i. In its broadest sense the word means to be affected by or influenced by someone or something.
 - ii. When used of the Bible it means that it is influenced by God. 2 Timothy 3:16 uses the word and is translated from a Greek word that literally means, “God-breathed”. The point being,

¹ 8/4/2023. [2022 Global Scripture Access - Wycliffe Global Alliance](#)

the writers of the Bible wrote what God intended for them to write as He DIRECTED them to do so.

b. Why should I believe the Bible is God's word?

i. Why is this important?

1. Because, IF the Bible is from God, then we need to listen to its message.
2. It will help answer some of the pressing questions man has about life: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Do my life have a lasting purpose? Where am I headed? Is there more to me than just this life? Does it really matter what I believe and how I live? Etc.

ii. Its claims of inspiration (explain what that word means).

1. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – directly declares that these writings are inspired by God and profitable to make us everything God would have us to be.
2. Exodus 24:3-4 – Moses spoke “all the words of the LORD and all the judgments...”
3. Isaiah 1:2 – “...For the LORD has spoken”.
4. The expression, “Thus says the Lord” is found about 420 times in the Old Testament. “The LORD said” more than 225 times in both testaments. “The word of God” about 45 times (mostly NT). “The word of the Lord” 250+ times. There are also many other such expressions that point toward the Bible being intended to be understood as the word of God.
5. 1 Corinthians 14:37, *If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.*
6. Galatians 1:12 – Paul declared again, his message came “*through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*”
7. Ephesians 3:3-5, the Lord made know to Paul, “by revelation” (a revealing). The “mystery” of which he speaks is explained as ultimately revealing that God intended to make the gospel available to anyone willing to come to Him (Galatians 3:27-28).
8. 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, Paul explains how we know what God wants us to do – because He has revealed it to us through His Spirit (the Holy Spirit).
9. 2 Peter 3:19-21 – Peter declares that “*holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*”
10. These passages, and many others, show that it was written with the intention it be treated as the inspired word of God.

iii. Its accuracy when dealing with external elements.

1. The Bible is not a book of science, geography or world history. BUT, when it does address such issues, often ahead of verified discoveries, it is ALWAYS proven to be accurate.
2. Science – Acts 17:26 notes that “He (God-TT) has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on the face of the earth.” Human blood is universal and is different from the blood of every other creature. Psalm 8:8 speaks of the “paths of the seas” – written around 1000 BC (~3000 years ago) before modern shipping discovered there are “paths” or currents that will carry ships across oceans more expediently.
3. Geography – the Bible mentions many places and events. Where archaeology has unearthed “Bible lands”, they often discover places, people and events that the Bible spoke about. For years, critics of scripture pointed to numerous places mentioned in scripture that had not been verified. However, as time and technology has advanced, more and more places and artifacts are unearthed that VERIFY not only the existence of such, but also how their manner of life was consistent with times and culture when scripture claims they existed. E.g., the

culture of Israel during the time of Moses (~1500 BC) and David (~1000 BC) was different than when Jesus and His apostles walked the earth (~30-70 AD). Biblical details manifest these differences.

iv. Because of the power of prophecy

1. A powerful proof that the Bible is God's word is the foretelling of events that occurred with such detail that only God could have known such.
2. Example 1: Isaiah 44:28-45:1 – mentions Cyrus would be God's "shepherd" who would declare Jerusalem would be built. Isaiah writes this around 700 BC. At that time, Assyria was the world power of that region. History records that Assyria fell to Babylon around 600 BC (~100 years later). Babylon would capture and destroy Jerusalem over a 20 year period (~606-586 BC). Judah, the nation of God in Jerusalem, was carried far away into captivity. In 536 BC (~165 years AFTER Isaiah's prophecy), Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian empire. Daniel 5:30-31 records this fall. Along with Darius, Ezra 1:1 records how Cyrus, King of Persia issued a decree permitting and even instructing Judah to return and rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. Ezra records this rebuilding. In this prophecy, we find: 1) 165 years of time; 2) 2 world empires fall in that region; 3) The NAMED king who would issue the decree. This prophecy is so powerful that critics say there had to be 2 Isaiahs rather than admit what happened was the hand of God.
3. Example 2: Most people are familiar with the death of Jesus by crucifixion. Recorded in all 4 gospels and mentioned throughout the New Testament. Details recorded about His death are prophesied in great detail in Psalm 22 (by David ~1000 BC) and Isaiah 53 (~700 BC). A study of these passages show that what happened to Jesus was in God's plan long before the events took place.
4. We could notice many other examples of prophecy, both historically and about Jesus. There are at least 48 SPECIFIC prophecies about Jesus recorded in the Old Testament that are directly fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament. This is the minimal number.
5. Prophecy alone ought to convince us to take the Bible seriously, as only God, with absolute control, could foretell such events with that degree of accuracy.

v. Because of its united message –

1. The Bible claims to be true, or "the truth" – John 17:17. Psalm 119:151, *You are near, O Lord, And all Your commandments are truth.* See the above passages that deal with inspiration.
2. Consider the above description of the creation of the Bible. Remember that the Bible was written over 1500 years, by about 40 different authors, in different languages, places and walks of life. YET it presents a united message from beginning to end about God's plan for redeeming man. The writers do not contradict each other as to His message.
3. It centers around Jesus. The Bible tells the story of man's need for and redemption. The central figure of the Bible is Jesus – He died, was buried and arose (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).
 - a. The Old Testament shows how God sinned and how He implemented a plan so that man could be forgiven of his sins.
 - b. The gospels tell the redemptive story of Jesus on earth.
 - c. The rest of the New Testament shows how God's plan through Jesus was established and grew. It gives us directions as to how Jesus can save us and how we can stay saved.

- d. Time will not permit a further development of this right now, but perhaps in a future lesson, we can look at God's overall plan for man's redemption. Acts 4:12 records, "*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*"
4. The ONLY way this united message is possible is if there was an intelligent and controlling source behind all of it. Design demands a designer – the Bible is written in such a way that it is CLEAR God had a hand in its writing from beginning to end.

So much more could be said this, and each of these points could be much further developed, but it is my hope that in this lesson we can see WHY we ought to accept the Bible as God's word. AND, if it is God's word, we need to listen to what it tells us to do. By reading and studying the Bible, we are listening to God. The only question that remains is, will we obey Him? The Bible itself tells us that our eternal destiny depends on it – 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8. How can we help you to better understand His will for you? Think about it!