

Chapter 1

The Word of God

GOD'S LOVE LETTER: Because He loves us far more than we realize, the God of the Bible has done all He can to reveal Himself to us. After sin came to this world, God did not leave us alone in our lost state, alienated from Him. Through the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit He comes to us, showing us His character, revealing His will, and urging us to accept the salvation He has provided.

In giving the Bible, God did not use a staff of human secretaries to take word-for-word dictation. Instead, He shared His thoughts with the Bible writers. The prophets then wrote these revelations from God in their own words. Thus, while many people were involved in the production of the Bible, it has just one Author.

The chief reason for reading the Bible is to get better acquainted with its one Author. The ultimate purposes of Bible study are to show us the way of salvation, to lead us into a personal relationship with the God who loves us, and to an acceptance of His sacrifice for our sins.

KEY THOUGHT: The Bible is the authoritative revelation of God's will, the standard of character God sets for human beings, the test of our experience, the revealer of true doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17, NKJV).

What claim do Bible writers make concerning the source of their messages? What does the Bible do for those who accept its inspiration? 1 Thess. 2:13.

The Bible does not attempt to prove that it is the Word of God, but it claims divine authorship. The proof of this claim lies in what it does for those who accept it.

What other "Word" is pointed to as the revelation of God? John 1:1, 2,14.

"The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man."-Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. vi.

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Complete the following statement using the table of contents of your Bible to find the answers: The Bible is a collection of God's inspired writings, its first books having been written about 1500 B.C. and its last book about A.D. 100. There are _____ books in the first section, which is known as the Old Testament, and _____ books in the New Testament, making a total of _____ books in this collection. The Bible is unique, however, in that the men who wrote it did not merely write their own ideas. In 2 Peter 1:21 we read that these holy men of old "spake as they were moved by the _____."

About 40 different writers served as God's penmen in the production of the Bible. These individuals lived and wrote in such widely scattered localities as Sinai, Babylon, Jerusalem, and Rome. God inspired various classes of writers. He used princes and paupers, heroes and herdsmen.

Revelation must have supernatural quality. It comes from outside our world rather than springing from human creativity. It comes to inform, motivate, and change us-to tell us how we can be saved. Salvation does not originate with us. It comes from God. But it is worked out in our experience. Christ came from heaven, was born into the human family, and worked out salvation within human history. In the same way divine thoughts have come to us through the minds of prophets, who gave them human expression. The Bible is fully human, but also fully divine.

The Bible's impressive harmony, in spite of its great diversity in authorship, time, and places written, is one of the unmistakable evidences that it is what it claims to be-the Word of God.

What do the following Bible passages have to say about how the Bible came into existence and who its source is?

2 Tim. 3:16 _____

1 Pet. 1:24, 25 _____

Other evidences that the Bible is inspired:

- Jesus accepted it as such, placing it above human traditions and opinions (Mark 7:7-9).
- Bible predictions of events that already have taken place have proven to be accurate (Luke 24:25-27).
- The Bible has the ability to change hearts and lives as no other book can (Ps. 119:11, 33-40).
- The Bible endures in spite of the severe attacks of its critics (Isa. 40:8).

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The majesty of divine revelation. The grandeur and mystery of the themes presented in the Bible serve to inspire faith in it as the Word of God. The way it speaks so simply and yet meaningfully to the needs and longings of our hearts and charms the minds of the highly educated while enabling the humblest of persons to understand the way of salvation demonstrates the work of the Holy Spirit in giving the Bible and helping us apply it. The more we search the Bible, “the deeper [will be our] conviction that it is the word of the living God, and human reason [will bow] before the majesty of divine revelation.”-Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 107, 108.

An unerring standard. Because God does not change (Mai. 3:6), the revelation of His character in the Scriptures is unchanging. Because He provides only one way of saving lost men and women, the portrayal of that way in the Scriptures never can be changed or superseded. Because the Scriptures are the Word of God, they summon each of us to salvation and obedience. In a world of flux and change, of shifting values and conflicting claims of truth, they remain the one unerring standard.

What is inspiration? What convinces you most that the Bible is fully inspired?

The joy of personal discovery. Tremendous joy comes from discovering the hidden treasures of the Word of God. The reward we receive is worth far more than the effort it takes to discover it. That the effort itself becomes joyful is illustrated by Jesus’ parable of the hidden treasure. (See Matt. 13:44.) The man who discovered the treasure became so thrilled about his discovery that he joyfully sold all that he had. The effort it took to sell his things was no burden because he eagerly anticipated the final results.

What attitude is essential to understanding the Bible? Prov. 28:5.

The teaching of the Holy Spirit is essential in Bible study.

Because Jesus said that the Holy Spirit guides us into truth (John 16:13), we should never study the Bible without asking for His enlightenment. We should lay aside all preconceived opinions and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth. His guidance is essential in Bible study.

As we approach the study of the Scriptures, we must remember their unique character. Ordinary means of investigation are inadequate. God provides special “glasses” for us through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14, 15), thus opening our minds to see His truth.

Five helps in understanding the Bible better:

1. Careful and prayerful reading (Isa. 34:16).
2. Meditating on what we read (Josh. 1:8).
3. Comparing scripture with scripture (Isa. 28:10, 13).
4. Willingness to obey what we have learned (John 7:17) .

Although we must compare scripture with scripture, we should seek to understand fully what a passage says before we move on to other passages. We must not make the passage say something that God never intended it to say. “We should take one verse, and concentrate the mind on the task of ascertaining the thought which God has put in that verse for us. We should dwell upon the thought until it becomes our own, and we know ‘what saith the Lord.’ “-Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 390.

What does Hebrews 4:12 indicate will take place as you take time to understand and apply what you are studying?

The Bible has withstood the attacks of the critics. No book has been subjected to more careful, critical scrutiny than has the Bible. But in spite of the attempts being made to destroy the Bible, it still is recognized to be what it claims to be-the Word of God.

What source did the prophets claim as giving authority to their messages? Dan. 2:27-30; Hag. 1:13.

The Old Testament prophets announced that the messages they presented had come to them from God, and the people to whom they gave them recognized their true source. Jesus used the Scriptures as the authoritative means of answering Satan’s charges and temptation. (See Matt. 4:4.)

Why people reject the authority of the Scriptures. One reason why many find excuses for rejecting the authority of the Bible is that they do not want to practice what it teaches. A man asked his priest to help him learn about the Bible. The priest was delighted and suggested that he begin by learning “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:39). The man never returned. Meeting him on the street one day, the priest asked why he had not come back to learn more Scripture. “Well,” the man replied, “it’s because I have not yet learned the verse you gave me.” “What!” the priest said. “Do you mean to say you could not quickly learn the seven words I gave you?” “No,” said the humble parishioner, “I can say the words. That’s easy. What is hard is loving the neighbor who is causing me so much trouble.” The Scriptures’ authority in our lives increases or decreases in proportion to whether we practice what we learn about God’s will for our lives.

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What is the norm by which truth is to be tested? The Bible truths are to be the norm by which all supposed truth is to be tested. (See Isa. 8:20.) When human concepts or discoveries seem to disagree with the Bible, it is not the Bible that is on trial, but human speculations. So-called contradictions between science and the Bible most often result from human speculations that many times quickly are repudiated by additional discoveries or theories.

What will help me come to the Bible with a humble, teachable attitude that will keep me from misinterpreting what it says?

Why is daily Bible study so important to the Christian? Acts 17:10,11; 2 Tim. 3:16,17.

What do the passages that follow teach about the importance of Bible study?

Ps. 119:105 _____

Matt. 4:4 _____

Rev. 1:3 _____

Building faith. Those who hear and do that which Christ teaches are like the man who built his house on the solid rock. (See Luke 6:47-49.) The floods mentioned in these verses represent the tests and trials of life. Faith that stands life's tests is built on careful and prayerful study of the Word of God.

The Word reveals the Word. Wrongly viewed, even a Bible doctrine (for example, the destruction of the wicked) can present a false picture of what God is like. But studied with prayer and humility and with the Holy Spirit's immediate guidance, each Bible teaching becomes a picture that helps us see God more clearly. In a special way the Bible reveals God to us in Christ. Christ in turn is the clearest revelation of God's character that the world has ever seen. He is God's thought made audible. He is God's character made tangible. He is God's mind made understandable.

Christ suggests that as we "diligently study," we will find that "these are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39, NIV). We find Him to be the core, content, and context of these writings. In coming to the Bible, we discover the Holy Spirit's mission is to lead us to Jesus and to glorify Him. (See John 16:13,14.) Because Bible writers wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, their focus also was on Jesus. Yet, to one unenlightened or not guided by the Spirit, the Bible remains closed. To experience the power of the Scriptures, we must allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to encounter Christ and be led to glorify Him.

What can I do in a practical way to make sure that my Bible-study time is being employed most effectively?

FURTHER STUDY: What do the following passages add to our understanding of Biblical inspiration?

Rom. 1:16 _____

Isa. 28:9 _____

What does Bible study do for us?

John 5:24 _____

The subject of inspiration and revelation remains an issue of much theological discussion in the Christian world. Seventh-day Adventists reject the concept of a double source of revelation—the Bible and tradition. We accept the Bible and the Bible only as the rule of our faith and practice.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss how you can most effectively share this teaching about the Bible with people who fit into the following categories:

- a. Those who do not believe that the Bible is inspired.
- b. Those who believe that only portions of the Bible are inspired.
- c. Those who believe that every word in the original manuscripts was dictated by God, and that it is without error.

2. Why do people generally spend more time watching television than studying the Bible?

3. Should we study the Bible to prove what we believe or to get better acquainted with the Author? What reasons would you give for your answer?

SUMMARY: The Bible is God's inspired Word given to us in such a way that we can see that it comes from Him. In this Word, God provides all that we need to understand in order to have eternal life and to witness for Him.