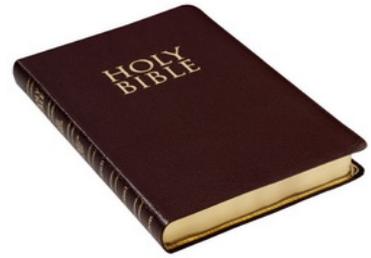


WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

Introduction

1. What do people say about the Bible? There are two basic views:

a. The most common view is that the Bible is a collection of fictional stories: “The Bible is a collection of myths, stories, legends, and documents, written by many different people, who sought to provide some sort of explanation of this mystery and journey that we call life” (Walter Kania, *A Believable Bible: An Enlightening and Inspiring Guide to a Mature Faith*).



b. The Bible is the inspired word God. “The Bible is God speaking. It is more than just a record of what He said in the past; it is also His living and active word for humanity today (Hebrews 4:12). By the power of the Holy Spirit, God still is speaking through the words of sacred Scripture and His voice can be appraised by those who study it diligently (1 Corinthians 2:14-16). The combined sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments form the totality of sacred Scripture; they are the authoritative canon by which those who follow Jesus are called to order their lives (Matthew 7:28-29, 1 Corinthians 14:37-38, 1 John 4:6). The living God authored the Bible through a partnership with the people who wrote the actual words (John 14:26, 2 Peter 1:20-21). Thus, the Bible is the work of both God and God’s people, whom He inspired to write the actual words in the original languages. Even though the Bible was written entirely by human hands, it is ‘God-breathed,’ completely inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 1 Corinthians 14:37, Revelation 1:10-11). Despite the imperfection of the people who actually penned the words of the Bible, it is completely free from error in its original autographs due to the sovereign way in which the Holy Spirit both inspired and supervised the work (1 Corinthians 2:11-13, 2 Peter 1:20-21)” (First Baptist Church, Omaha, Nebraska. www.omahafbc.org/wp/bible/). This is a typical statement that you find on many websites.

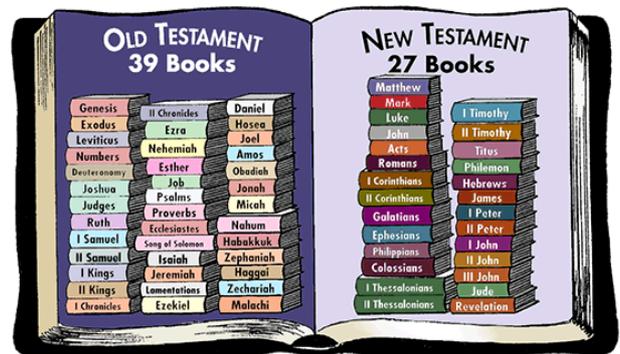
2. In this lesson, we do not intend to offer evidences for the inspiration of the Bible, but to simply look at what the Bible says about itself.

I. ABOUT THE BIBLE

The Bible is a remarkable library of sixty-six books that has survived every attempt to destroy it throughout the ages. It has impacted the morality of man wherever it has gone and continues to transform the lives of millions of people.

A. The Name:

1. The English word “Bible” comes from the Latin word *biblia* and the Greek word *biblo*, which means book, or books. It is believed to have originated from the ancient Egyptian port of Byblos (in modern-day Lebanon) where papyrus used for making books and scrolls was exported to Greece.



2. The Bible is not one book but a library of books that have been accepted as divinely inspired. The books of the Old Testament were compiled by the Jews during the Mosaic Age, and the books of the New Testament were compiled during the first century of the Christian Age. The term “Bible” dates from the fourth century.

B. An overview of the Bible:

1. The Bible consists of a library of 66 books that were written by about 40 different authors over a period of 1500 years. The books were written in three different languages: the majority of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew but some parts were written in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek. Note: in common use during the time of Jesus was a Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint. Some of the authors (especially Paul) frequently quote from this version.

2. The Bible has always been the best selling book in the world. Researcher James Chapman compiled a list of the top 10 most-read books in the world. He created the list by examining how many individual copies of the books had been printed and sold over the last 50 years. The graphic (right) reveals that the Bible leads the countdown by a large margin, with nearly 4 billion copies printed and sold globally in the last five decades. It has been translated into 242 languages and partially into 1157 other languages.



3. The Bible has (i) influenced literature, science, art, and the culture of humanity, (ii) impacted the morality of man wherever it has gone, and, (iii) it is a tremendous source of history of the ancient Middle East.

C. The Bible’s survival is remarkable:

1. In 175 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes (ruler of Syria), tried to destroy the Jews by destroying their temple and their sacred Scriptures. He Failed.
2. In A.D. 303, Diocletian (Roman Emperor), tried to destroy Christianity through cruel persecutions and by burning the Scriptures. He failed. In less than 25 years, Christianity became the recognized religion.
3. In the 18th century, Voltaire, a French infidel, predicted that Christianity would be swept from existence in 100 years. His prediction failed. Voltaire died in 1778 but Christianity survives.

The Hammer and the Anvil
(John Clifford)

“Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith’s door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime”
When looking in, I say upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.
“How many anvils have you had,” said I,
“To wear and batter all those 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 skeptic’s blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unhammed – the hammers gone!”

II. THE BIBLE’S CLAIMS CONCERNING ITSELF

The Bible claims to have originated with God, to be verbally inspired, and relevant for every generation.

A. The Bible claims to have originated with God:

1. The books of the Old Testament are referred to as “scripture” (**Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:15-16**) and “oracles of God” (**Acts 7:38; Romans 3:2**), and the New Testament books are also referred to as “scripture”: Paul refers to the gospels of Matthew and Luke as scripture (**1 Timothy 5:18 <> Luke 10:7; Matthew 10:10**), and Peter refers to Paul’s epistles as scripture (**2 Peter 3:15-16**). Paul also states that what he writes are “the commandments of the Lord” (**1 Corinthians 14:37**).

2. The scriptures are given by the inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:15-16). This means that all the writings of both testaments, though written by men, originate with God.
 - a. Peter says of the Old Testament writers: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).
 - b. Paul says of himself and the other apostles: “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God 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 that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:11-13). Consider, too, John's statement: “We [the apostles] are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6).
3. “All” scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). This means that every word, not just thoughts or ideas, is given by God (known as “plenary inspiration”).

B. The Bible claims to be the *verbally* inspired word of God:

1. The phrase “Thus says the Lord” and its equivalents can be found over 2000 times in the Old Testament (e.g., Jeremiah 1:9; 10:1-12). The point is that these men understood that they were delivering the *words* of God, not thoughts or ideas. Zechariah wrote, “Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the **words** which Jehovah of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from Jehovah of hosts” (Zechariah 7:12). This illustrates the entire process of inspired revelation: (i) the Lord sent words, (ii) the Holy Spirit gave the words to the prophets, (iii) the Prophets spoke the words.
2. Paul wrote, “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The word Paul preached was *the word of God*; not the thoughts or ideas. Paul makes this very clear when he says, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God 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 that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). Through the Spirit, God revealed His mind to the apostles and prophets. They spoke these revealed things using **words** taught them by the Spirit.

“Verbal Inspiration is the work of God through the Holy Spirit so directing men in their choice of the subject matter and in their choice of words that their writings contain, written accurately, exactly what God desired, and all that He desired, them to contain. It is the doctrine of the superintendence, or guidance; that is, God so guided in the writing of the books of the Bible that the words are His words in the style of the writers. Verbal Inspiration is the opposite of Inspired Concepts” (H. S. Miller, General Biblical Introduction, p. 24; cited by Ferrell Jenkins, Introduction to Christian Evidences, p. 51).

C. The Bible claims to be relevant for every generation:

1. As long as men sin, the message of the Bible is relevant because it alone reveals the solution to sin and the way of salvation (John 3:16; Romans 1:16-17; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:14-38).
2. As long as men recognise their need for true happiness, the Bible is relevant because it reveals the path to true happiness (Matthew 5:2-12).
3. As long as men recognise their need for divine guidance, the Bible is relevant because it provides “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3; cp. 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

III. OUR RESPECT FOR THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus had absolute confidence and respect for the authority of the scriptures – Jesus’ attitude ought to be our attitude.

A. Jesus had absolute respect and confidence in the scriptures:

1. Jesus considered God’s word as truth (**John 17:17**).
2. Jesus considered the authority of the Scripture as final and binding, and could not be set aside (**John 10:35**).
3. Jesus considered every commandment, even the least, worthy of obedience (**Matthew 5:17-18**).

B. We, too, ought to have the same attitude toward the scriptures:

1. Jesus’ teachings are binding upon all Christians (**Luke 21:33**).
2. It is essential to abide in the doctrine of Christ to remain in fellowship with God (**2 John 1:9**).
3. All that we do must be done by Jesus’ authority (**Colossians 3:17**).
4. We must remember that all that the apostles taught are the revelation of the Spirit (**1 Corinthians 2:10-13**), the commandments of Christ (**1 Corinthians 14:37**).

Conclusion

1. In this brief lesson we have considered the question, “What is the Bible?” Some consider the Bible to be nothing more than a collection of myths and legends, and others consider it to be the inspired word of God. The Bible is actually a collection of sixty-six books that were written and compiled over a period of 1500 years. It claims to have originated with God, to be verbally inspired, and relevant for every generation.
2. The Bible is the word of God and it is essential to read and study it because it alone is the truth; it reveals all that we need to know to find salvation and all that we need pertaining to the things of this life.
3. One might ask, “How can I know for certain that the Bible is God’s inspired word?” In this lesson we have simply presented the claims of the Bible, not the proofs of those claims. For those interested in examining the evidences for the inspiration of the Bible, I recommend “Evidence That Demands A Verdict” by Josh McDowell.

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