

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Bible

What is the Bible—this Book that has far and away been the bestseller of all history and has been translated into more languages than any other book?

*Bible* means "book." But what kind of book is the Bible? Some suggest it is a record of man's religious striving toward and encounters with God—an essentially human book. Until the latter half of the last century, however, the historic Christian church had always seen the Bible as far more than this namely, as the written Word of God. There was no doctrine on which there was greater unity among Christians. Not until recently have widespread doubts been raised.

The question of the Bible is a crucial one because it involves the whole issue of revelation. How can we know God exists? How can we know about Him, even if he *does* exist? It is clear that our finite minds cannot penetrate his infinity. Job asked, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7) The answer is, only as God takes the initiative in revealing Himself.

God has revealed Himself in several ways. Nature and creation are proofs that God exists and that he is powerful (Rom. 1:19-20). God has revealed Himself through history, particularly in his dealings with Israel and the nations surrounding her. Such Old Testament expressions as, "Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God" (2 Chron. 33:13), reflect recognition of God because of his activity in the affairs of men and nations,

God's revelation came to man not only through events themselves, but through the words of the prophets who interpreted the events. "The word of the Lord came to me," and, "this is what the Lord says," are recurring phrases throughout the Old Testament (cf. Ezek. 6:1; 7:1; 12:1; Zech. 8:1; Ex. 4:22; 1Sam. 2:27) of what is called propositional revelation.

God's fullest revelation came in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, The writer to the Hebrews summarizes it this way: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1-2).

### Written Record Needed

But what about people who were not present and so did not see God's involvement in history or the events surrounding Christ's incarnation, life, death, and resurrection? To reach all men, obviously, a written record was needed. God has given this to us in the Bible, through which he has revealed himself.

The Bible consists of two sections: the Old Testament or Covenant, consisting of thirty-nine books, and the New Testament or Covenant, consisting of twenty-seven books. In the Hebrew Bible, the books of the Old Testament are arranged in three divisions—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

In the Septuagint, a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek made during the third century B.C., the books are arranged according to similarity of subject matter. The Pentateuch or the Law, or five books of Moses, is followed by the historical books. Then come the books of Poetry and Wisdom and, finally, the Prophets. This is

the order of the books in most Christian editions of the Bible today. The writing of the Old Testament covered a span of a thousand years.

The twenty-seven New Testament books are in four groups: the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, twenty-one letters, and the Revelation. These books were written within the span of a century. The earliest documents were the first letters of Paul, which, along with perhaps the letter of James, were written between A.D. 48 and 60, and the Gospels and other books between A.D. 60 and 100.

How did the Bible come to be written? Two clear statements from the New Testament answer this question: "Understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21); "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

### **Given by Inspiration**

The Bible originated in the mind of God, not in the mind of man. It was given to man by *inspiration*. It is important to understand this term because its biblical meaning is different from that which we often give it in everyday language. The Bible is not inspired as the writings of a great novelist are inspired, or as Bach's music was inspired. Inspiration, in the biblical sense, means that God so superintended the writers of Scripture that they wrote what he wanted them to write and were kept from error in so doing. The word *inspired* (2 Tim. 3:16) actually means "outbreathed" by God. Inspiration applies to the end result—the Scripture itself—as well as to the men whom God used to write the Scripture.

This does not mean that the human writers of Scripture were practically machines through whom God dictated. Nor does it mean that they were human typewriters whom God punched. On the contrary, their full personalities entered into their writings. Their individual writing styles are evident, for instance. Their backgrounds also are often apparent in what they wrote. But though their human capacities came into play, they were superintended and borne along in a unique way by the Holy Spirit. Because of this, the Bible is called "the Word of God" (see such passages as Mark 7:13 and Hebrews 4:12).

It is clear that some material in the Bible came directly from God; it could not otherwise have been known by the human mind. Genesis 1-2 is an example of this sort of material, which must have been made known to Moses supernaturally. In other cases, men recorded events which they themselves witnessed; e.g., John wrote about his approach, with Peter, to the empty tomb on the first Easter morning (John 20:3-10). Some writers used records that were already in existence, as Luke did in writing his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4). In other instances, God put into men's mouths the very words they should speak, or told them what to write: "This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: "Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you." (Jer. 30:1-2)

To say that the Scripture is inspired is not to say that all of the attitudes and ideas mentioned in the Bible are directly from God. Some of the record includes the words of evil and foolish men and even of Satan himself. Such parts are not revelation as such,

nor are they the words of God, yet they are recorded in Scripture by God's intention and inspiration.

In the Book of Job, for instance, the words of Jehovah, the words of Satan, the speeches of Job's three friends, and the words of Job himself are given. All are not equally authoritative, but inspiration guarantees that what each one said was accurately recorded.

It is a striking fact that however the words came to be recorded, all Scripture is viewed by the writers as from God. Paul speaks of Scripture as "the very words of God" (Rom. 3:2). Most significant of all, the apostles and our Lord Himself quoted the Old Testament—not merely as the counsel of a particular patriarch or prophet, but as the counsel of God given through the writers: "You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David" (Acts 4:24-25).

Other passages speak of God as if he were the Scriptures. For example: "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (Rom.9:17; cf Ex. 9:16). Warfield pointed out that these instances of the Scriptures being spoken of as if they were God, and of God being spoken of as if He' were the Scriptures, could only result from a habitual identification of the text of Scripture with God speaking. It became natural to use the terms "Scripture says," and "God says," synonymously. In other words, "Scripture" and the speaking of God were seen as identical.

### **Extent of Inspiration**

The question of the extent of inspiration is frequently raised and is an important issue today. The terms *plenary* and *verbal* inspiration are used. *Plenary* means "full." When used in connection with inspiration, it means that all of Scripture is inspired—not merely some parts. Some take the position that the only inspired and therefore inerrant parts of the Bible are those having to do with spiritual issues and salvation. These people maintain that to apply the claim of inspiration, and consequently inerrancy or trustworthiness, to matters involving human history or the physical world science is to encounter insuperable barriers.

Some scholars hold that the Bible "contains" the Word of God rather than is the Word of God. This view, however, confronts us with a serious problem. How can we know what Parts of the Bible are trustworthy and what parts are not? How do we know which aspects have to do entirely with salvation and which are "only" matters of history? Often the two—salvation and history—are inextricably intertwined. For instance, if the Cross and the Resurrection are not historical events, of what value are they in salvation?

Moreover, if the Bible's references to the physical world and to history are not trustworthy, on what basis can we be sure that those portions dealing with salvation are trustworthy? If we are going to pick and choose the parts of the Bible we can believe, we must depend on personal subjective judgment. On matters involving eternal destiny, this is a shaky basis on which to proceed.

There have been three bases of religious authority. The first is tradition, or the authority of the church, to which Roman Catholics have adhered. The second is human reason, which liberal thinkers have adopted. The third is the Bible itself, which evangelicals have always recognized as authoritative. To take this third position is not to

deny the value of tradition and of human reason, but to submit them, in case of conflict, to the authority of Scripture.

Evangelicals do not deny that there are problems in reconciling some statements of Scripture with what historical data we possess. But the evidence of modern archeology has, with few exceptions, confirmed the Bible record, so it would not seem unreasonable to postpone judgment on the questions still in doubt.

The term *verbal inspiration* indicates that inspiration extends to the words of the Bible themselves, not only to the ideas. We have already seen that God did not "dictate" the Scripture mechanically, but guided and superintended the writers within the framework of their own personalities and backgrounds. This guidance would of necessity include their choice of words, since thoughts are composed of words, much as a bar of music consists of individual notes. To alter the notes alters the music. Verbal inspiration holds that God, by his Spirit, has guaranteed the authenticity and reliability of the very words that were written, without depriving the writers of their individuality. A Christian who has a high view of inspiration is, of all people, sincerely interested in using modern tools in textual study to determine the original text.

The inspiration of which the Scripture speaks applies only to the text as *originally produced by the writers*. There have been some errors in copying, though they are fewer and less significant than one would think.

We have observed that the Bible is the Word of God' it does not merely *contain* the Word of God, as many believe.' Others say the Bible *becomes* the Word of God to an individual when the person has an "existential encounter" with God in his reading of Scripture—when the truth of a passage makes a powerful and indelible impression on him. Those who hold this The Bible position are often in strong reaction to "dead" orthodoxy—to the profession of evangelical beliefs unaccompanied by evidence of the believer's having been changed by God's power.

**The Holy Spirit and Cosmic Christ consciousness must be considered in doctrinal issues. One entreats the altar for wisdom, MALACHI**

### **Holy Spirit Illuminates**

Scripture must be illumined in the heart of an individual by the Holy Spirit before it becomes meaningful to him. Before the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the Father and the Son had revealed divine truth. When Peter answered our Lord's climactic question, "Who do you say I am?" with, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by *My Father* in heaven" (Matt. 16:15-17, italics added). When Jesus was talking to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, he "explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself." As he sat with them, "their eyes were opened and they recognized Him" (Luke 24:27, 31). "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (24:45, italics added). In telling the disciples about his going away, he said, "But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

God reveals by the Spirit what he has prepared for those who love him (1Cor. 2:9-10). The illuminating work of the Spirit of God is necessary if we are to know anything

about God. What the Holy Spirit illumines is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17). It does not *become* the Word of God; it is the Word of God.

A television set, sitting in the corner but not turned on, is still a television set. I won't get any images or sound until I turn it on, but it is a television set, whether turned on or not. It doesn't *become* a television set when turned on.

So too the Scripture is the Word of God, whether anybody ever responds to it or not. The Holy Spirit must illumine Scripture in a person's heart before it becomes meaningful, but what he illumines is the Word of God, not something less. It doesn't become something it wasn't before.

Having seen that the Bible is the Word of God, we must now consider the principles of interpreting and understanding it. Considerable confusion has resulted because people have oversimplified the kinds of biblical interpretation as either "literal" or "figurative." Those who take the Bible literally are made to look foolish by their apparent denial of any use of figures of speech in the Bible. Those, on the other hand, who take it figuratively often appear to be capricious in evading the clear meaning of statements they do not want to accept.

The fact is that some parts of the Bible are to be taken literally and other parts figuratively.

The key question is, what did the writer intend his readers to understand? We must ask to whom the passage was written. Is the promise or command, for instance, one that has universal application or one that has limited reference? Often there are primary and secondary applications. A primary application has to do with the person or people directly addressed. A secondary application relates a scriptural principle to those to whom the passage is not applied directly.

It is important to consider the context in which a Bible statement is made. What is the primary teaching of the passage? Statements must not be lifted out of context in such a way as to cause misunderstanding. A skeptic once triumphantly asserted, "The Bible says, 'There is no God.'" he was considerably deflated when reminded of the context: "The fool says in his heart: There is no God" (Ps. 14:1).

### **Literal or Figurative?**

It is important to decide accurately if a statement is literal or figurative. The Bible uses such literary forms as poetry, allegory, and parable. Though there are passages on which there is strong difference of opinion, it is usually no more difficult to distinguish between figurative and literal statements in the Bible than in a daily newspaper. The statement: "Two people were killed in an accident on Main Street" is obviously literal. "He shot home from third in the last half of the ninth with the winning run under his arm, and the crowd went mad" is readily recognized as figurative language. A player does not "shoot" home or carry runs under his arm. And the fans in the bleachers, though they may get excited, do not become insane.

A final word about Bible study. Simply using a good dictionary to investigate the full meaning of the words of Scripture will reveal surprising riches. Try it! And consult several translations. It has been said that the Scripture is its own best commentary. Often a verse or a passage becomes clear when studied in the light of other Bible statements on the same subject. Though humanly the Bible has many writers, in the final analysis there

was only one Author—God Himself. As we compare Scripture with Scripture, we are guarded against becoming unbalanced in our views. We need to study individual books and we also need to trace themes through the whole Bible. This is the difference between biblical theology and systematic theology. One scholar compares biblical theology to "the profusion of nature in which the various plants and flowers are scattered with a bountiful hand in 'ordered disorder.'" he compares systematic theology to a botanical garden "where plants and flowers are gathered and arranged according to species. " Both kinds of arrangements are useful; both have their place in a study of botany. Both kinds of Bible study are useful too.

### **The Canon of Scripture**

A separate question from that of inspiration is that of the canon, i.e., which writings, or books, are recognized as inspired? It is important to realize that a book did not become inspired by being included in the canon. Inclusion in the canon was merely recognition of the authority the book already possessed.

We do not know exactly when the Old Testament canon was completed. The Old Testament itself says that collections of "authorized" books were put in the sacred buildings—the tabernacle and then the temple. Hilkiah rediscovered the Book of the Law there (2 Kings 22). The Jews recognized as their Scriptures certain books that recorded Jehovah's dealings with Israel.

In our Lord's time, the Old Testament was viewed as a completed collection. He and the apostles referred to this collection as "the Scripture." Most of the books of the Old Testament are quoted in the New Testament, always as authoritative.

In tracing the canonicity of a particular book—that is, its recognition as one of the inspired writings—we must keep three questions in mind: (1) Is it mentioned by the early church fathers in the Christian literature of the first centuries of our era? (2) What attitude do these early writers take toward the inspiration of the book? (3) Do they regard it as part of a canon, or list of books recognized as inspired?

The definition of the canon was important in the early church because claims were being advanced for many writings which were patently spurious, and because heretics were attacking the validity of the genuine Scriptures. The canon, as we know it today, became fixed when Athanasius (A.D. 297-373), patriarch of Alexandria and considered the father of orthodoxy, listed the books of the New Testament in his thirty ninth Paschal Letter (A.D. 367).

The canon of the New Testament was also confirmed at a church council held in Carthage in A.D. 397. The council used three criteria in recognizing canonicity. First, was a book apostolic in origin? The Gospels of Mark and Luke were accepted, for example, because they were recognized as the work of close associates of the apostles. Second, was the book used and recognized by the churches? Third, did the book teach sound doctrine?

It is on these bases that the orthodox Protestant church today does not receive as canonical the twelve books of the Apocrypha<sup>1</sup> which the Roman Catholic Church accepts. The Jews never recognized these books as part of their Old Testament.

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<sup>1</sup> 1-2 Maccabees, 1-2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Song of the Three Holy Children, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and the Prayer of Manasses

To accept the Bible as the Word of God today is not fashionable. Some, even within the professing church, deny its The Bible reliability. Generally, attacks on Scripture follow certain lines. Perhaps the foremost is that of contending that the Bible is incompatible with twentieth-century science. Many conflicts are said to exist between scientific facts and statements in the Bible. There are, admittedly, some problems. But the following Considerations usually bridge what on first sight may seem a yawning chasm.

### **Understanding the Bible**

First, the Bible speaks in *phenomenological* language—that is, it describes things *as they appear* to be rather than in precise scientific terms. To say the sun rises in the east is a phenomenological statement. Technically; we know the sun does not really "rise," but even the *Naval Almanac* uses the term sunrise, and we would not charge the almanac with error. The Bible has been understandable in all cultures and throughout history because of the phenomenological way it actually describes things. It does not at all claim to be a science textbook, but where it touches scientific matters, it does not give misinformation.

Second, when Bible information is incomplete, it is not necessarily incorrect. Science is always building on previous knowledge. Advancement on incomplete theories does not mean the theories were incorrect.

Third, we must always guard against making the Bible say things which, on closer examination, it really doesn't say. And it is most important to determine whether, in a given instance, the Bible is speaking figuratively or literally.

Fourth, we must carefully investigate to see whether the supposed conflict is between biblical teaching and scientific facts or simply between an *interpretation* of Scripture and an *interpretation* of the facts. Often an interpretation at variance with biblical truth is more philosophic than scientific.

Fifth, it would be foolish to "freeze" the points of conflict and assume the Bible wrong. The Bible has not changed in 2,000 years, but science admittedly is a moving train. To have reconciled the Bible to scientific views current a century ago would have been to make Scripture obsolete today! Far better to admit an apparent conflict and await the development of additional evidence.

That there is no basic conflict between science and Scripture is suggested by the fact that modern science was born and developed largely by earnest Christians. Believing in a personal God as Creator, they were convinced that the universe was orderly and therefore capable of meaningful investigation. In scientific research, they felt they were thinking God's thoughts after Him. There can be no ultimate conflict between truth of biblical revelation and that discovered by science, for all truth is from God and is therefore consistent. In our day, when some 90 percent of all scientists who have ever lived are alive, many outstanding scientists are also earnest Christians.

### **Datement Problems Explained**

In another line of attack it is contended that the Bible is not reliable historically and that there are "internal" contradictions in parallel accounts of the same-event. Some

apparent numerical errors may be due to mistakes in transmission of the text over many years. Recent archaeological discoveries, however, show that the ancients' system of dating explains many numerical problems. If one king, for example, ended his rule and another began ruling in a given calendar year, both were given credit for ruling the entire year. Also, it is important to remember that the biblical writers often used round figures which, though not precise, are at the same time not incorrect.

Admittedly we do not presently have complete explanations for all seeming Bible discrepancies. But it would be unscientific, in light of modern archaeological discoveries, to adopt the prevalent assumption that the Bible is wrong until proven right, rather than the reverse. An ever increasing number of excavations from Egypt to Babylonia have told us more clearly the life and history of Bible lands. Thousands of records etched in stone tablets dating back to 3,000 years before Christ have been quarried and subsequently translated. Alan R. Millard, senior lecturer at the University of Liverpool, states; "All of these discoveries have increased our knowledge of the world in which the Bible was written, so they enable its distinctive message to stand out more boldly. Rightly interpreted, the Bible and archaeology can only enrich each other."

We do not "prove" the Bible by archaeology. The Holy Spirit confirms in our hearts the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God.

We can with confidence affirm with the hymn writer:

The Bible stands like a rock undaunted  
Mid the raging storms of time;  
Its pages burn with the truth eternal,  
And they glow with a light sublime.  
The Bible stands though the hills may tumble;  
It will firmly stand when the earth shall crumble;  
I will plant my feet on its firm foundation,  
For the Bible stands!

—Haldor Lillenas

"Your Word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands in the heavens" (Ps. 119:89).