

The Word of God: The Foundation of Knowledge



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“The heart of the prudent gets knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (Proverbs 18:15).

Some 2,500 years ago the Hebrew prophet Daniel clearly foresaw an unprecedented knowledge explosion. “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase,” he wrote (Daniel 12:4). How astonishingly true of our world!

We live in a dynamic information age largely driven by scientific communications and the digital revolution. The demand to be informed is relentless. Popular magazines routinely carry articles on how to cope with this constant barrage of information.

But what is sadly lacking is the basic knowledge so essential to humanity’s overall well-being. In an unparalleled period of information overload, the world is desperately troubled because of its fundamental lack of basic understanding and common sense.

Well over 2,000 years ago God warned, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).

“We are drowning in information, but starved for knowledge,” observes trend-spotter John Naisbitt. What a paradox: The more information we acquire the less essential knowledge we seem to absorb—often with dire long-term consequences. God’s warning through Hosea certainly rings true!

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING—OR MEANINGLESS INFORMATION?

As an insightful editorial in a popular national newspaper put it: “With nearly 1,000 new books published in the U.S. each week, the pressure to stay informed weighs heavily. *But there is a difference between information and wisdom*” (emphasis added throughout). The current figure in Britain is about 300 new books published *each day*, not to mention the massive amounts of information available around the world through new technologies.

Clearly, *understanding* and *information* are not synonymous. Wrote former British foreign secretary Francis Pym: “The images we see on television reflect only the symptoms and consequences of a problem . . . When we see world events described by commentators,

that does not lead to understanding, but only to an emotional reaction and the acquisition of casual knowledge.”

So, in spite of this massive proliferation of information, a void exists. Informative knowledge alone won’t do. American writer Saul Bellow articulated this fundamental problem: “Information is to be found in daily papers. We are *informed* about everything, we *know* nothing.”

This is where the Bible enters the picture. The inspired Word of God stands as the solid source of all *right* knowledge. The Bible provides the proper *framework* of the essential knowledge through which all other useful information is *properly understood*. Without this crucial foundation, we live in a confused muddle—constantly inundated with an avalanche of information we cannot fully grasp or understand.

But, when we have the right foundation, the Eternal God reveals exciting and profound spiritual knowledge to those who believe and obey Him.

What does the Bible tell us about “knowledge”? We begin our formal study with several key passages.

Is God concerned about what we know? What are the results of lack of right knowledge?

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).

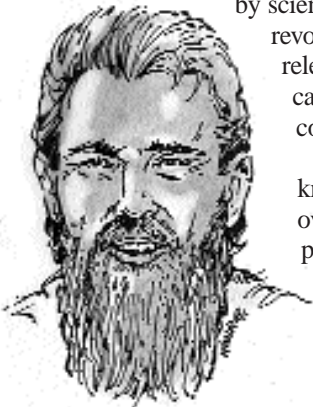
Though we have greater access to the Bible than did any previous generation, we pay scant attention to its contents—with devastating results. Solomon warned us: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

But what special knowledge is missing?

“There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land” (Hosea 4:1).

“The priests no longer asked, ‘Where is the Lord?’ Those who handled the law had no real knowledge of me” (Jeremiah 2:8, Revised English Bible).

At creation God gave mankind the capacity to acquire material knowledge. Indeed in our time we have amassed it in previously undreamed-of abundance. What concerns God is our pitiful lack of basic *spiritual* knowledge. How accurate was the apostle Paul’s perception that far too many tend to be “always



Daniel

learning and never able to come to knowledge of the truth"! (2 Timothy 3:7).

What are the consequences of ignoring revealed knowledge?

"Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you . . . Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6).

Ignoring or rejecting revealed spiritual knowledge alienates us from God, cutting us off from His guidance. God's law, the primary source of the understanding of how we should live, operates as a *spiritual* force in the world (Romans 7:14). Whether we recognize it or not, that law is *self-enforcing*. Humanity pays a stiff penalty for breaking it; we see the evidence dramatized every day in media reports of human suffering (compare Jeremiah 2:19).

The Bible defines sin as lawlessness (1 John 3:4)—breaking or rejecting God's law—and then spells out the penalty for lawlessness. In the end "the wages of sin is death"—perishing forever (Romans 6:23; Matthew 10:28)—but the immediate consequence is the misery we see in the world. God, however, desires to give everlasting life in the Kingdom of God to all who will respond to His instruction. (For more details, please request our free booklet *The Road to Eternal Life*.)

BASIC KNOWLEDGE EVERYONE NEEDS

"Why, when we're so much better educated, do we know so little?"

—Simon Heffer

American professor E.D. Hirsch Jr. grasped the essential nature of our knowledge problem. He commented, in the preface of his book *Cultural Literacy*: "To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world."

Beyond the basic material knowledge we need for survival, each of us needs *spiritual* understanding and insight into that special knowledge revealed only by God Himself. Without a substantial spiritual foundation, our basic natural understanding will always fall short of showing us how to live fulfilled, truly abundant lives in the here and now—not to mention the incomparable prospect of everlasting life in the Kingdom of God!

Acquisition of knowledge is automatic with human beings. It is a function of our five senses. The core of the problem is whether our acquired learning fits into the framework revealed by God.

How should we evaluate our human achievements? What is God's perspective?

"Thus says the LORD, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches'" (Jeremiah 9:23).

Lest this be misunderstood, God is not against our having wisdom or riches. The Bible tells the story of many righteous people who were wise and wealthy. But they had—and the point made here is that we also should have—higher standards than merely intellectual or material ones.

On the other hand, what does God commend people for?

"But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD" (verse 24).

To know God: This is the much-needed knowledge the world rejects. It has its origins in real humility. Only humble men and women can look beyond themselves to grasp the values God reveals.

What did Jesus Christ tell His disciples about the value of spiritual knowledge?

"But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matthew 13:16-17).

Knowing God's Word is priceless knowledge! It is the true foundation for understanding all other knowledge and counteracts the false information we see about us.

MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION ABOUT GOD AND THE BIBLE

"Disinformation has been around since the serpent sold Eve on the fateful apple."

—Elizabeth Pond

Except, perhaps, for the supposition that it was an apple, writer Elizabeth Pond had the right perspective in a feature article in *The Christian Science Monitor*. She added: "Just what is disinformation? Simply put, it is the deliberate planting of false or misleading political information to influence either public or elite opinion. It is not just *misinformation*, or mistaken information . . . It is *planted* information with the source secret or disguised." This view is borne out in the Bible.



Humanity pays a stiff penalty for breaking God's law. We see the evidence dramatized in media reports every day.

Our time is marked by a *massive ignorance* about what the Bible *actually says*. We see that some writers and speakers can say almost anything about the Holy Scriptures and convince some people to believe them.

We are told variously that Judas Iscariot was innocent of Christ's blood, that shoplifting is not a sin, that Jesus' parables are morally disastrous, that He studied yoga in the Far East, that Paul is the real founder of Christianity, ad infinitum—all distorted ideas advanced in recent years by misguided religious thinkers.

This is the age of *spiritual disinformation*. People won't and don't read the Bible for themselves. Many are content to accept the views and opinions of so-called experts who are often quite biased in their perspective.

WHY MAN REJECTS THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Who is the ultimate source of all misinformation and disinformation—whether about scriptural or secular knowledge?

“. . . The god of this age *has blinded [the minds of those who are perishing]*” (2 Corinthians 4:4).



The Bible reveals that Satan is the god of this age, and at this time this is his world.

have to come to terms with the truthfulness of Christ's personal witness. He stated as fact: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18).

As a direct result of the deception described by the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 4:4), how does the Bible depict the spiritual plight of the present age of man?

“. . . *Jesus Christ . . . gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age . . .*” (Galatians 1:3-4).

Again, the King James Version translates the key phrase as “this present evil world.” So the god of this world has blinded its inhabitants through his many deceptions (compare 1 John 5:19). Yet we are promised that divine deliverance is available to us.

Who are we talking about? Who is really responsible for this massive world-encircling deception?

“*So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world . . .*” (Revelation 12:9).

Satan is a fallen archangel. As the righteous Lucifer (meaning “Light-bringer”) he had been present at the very throne of God, but he turned from God's way to a diametrically different way of life, and he was eventually consumed with vanity, jealousy and greed. Two chapters in the Bible deal with the devil's origin and his subsequent rebellion against God (carefully compare Isaiah 14:12-15 with Ezekiel 28:11-16).

How extensive is Satan's influence?

“. . . *The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*” (1 John 5:19).

Most people assume that the world is a pretty good place or at least neutral in its influence. But the Bible reveals that Satan is the god of this age, and at this time this is *his* world. Tragically, his deception is so widespread that few realize the extent to which the world has accepted his disinformation and distorted knowledge.

How did Satan approach Eve (“the mother of all living”) in the Garden of Eden?

“*But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

God revealed true *spiritual knowledge* to Adam and Eve. Then Satan, in the guise of a serpent, caused Eve to doubt their very Creator's truthfulness. She persuaded her husband to join in the subsequent act of disobedience—eating the forbidden fruit. God had said, in effect, to Adam: “You should not have listened to the voice of your wife” (Genesis 3:17). Satan had misrepresented God! He lied to Eve about her ultimate fate. “You will not surely die,” said the serpent (compare verses 1-7).

In deceiving Eve, what assurances did the devil offer her?

“*For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*” (verse 5).

This much of Satan's manipulation of Eve is true. Their eyes were opened to the knowledge of good and evil. “Then the LORD God said, Behold the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil” (verse 22). This unfortunate trend of rejecting God's instruction, established right at the time of our human beginnings, has continued unabated to the present day. The world is filled with both truth and error, both good and evil. The devil cunningly mixes right with wrong. Often people can't discern the important difference. God has to *reveal* it. For that revelation, His Word is essential. It is the *foundation* of all true knowledge!

What was one of the reasons that Jesus Christ entered the world?

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy [render powerless, New American Standard Bible] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

Jesus Christ’s death provided the perfect sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He paid the death penalty for us and offers humankind the gift of eternal life. This act defeated Satan’s purposes and was the essential first step of salvation upon which more spiritual knowledge could then be added.

HOW TO GAIN GODLY KNOWLEDGE

Who is the source of all right knowledge?

“For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6, New International Version).

God is the great Educator! In a real sense salvation is largely a matter of education. The world is filled with false values, so there is an obvious need to recapture biblical values. Reliable knowledge of these true values comes from only *one source*—God’s Word, the Holy Bible. God communicates His standards to us through the Scriptures.

Yet it must be said here that, although God’s Revelation, the Holy Bible, is the foundation of all right knowledge, it does not contain *all* knowledge. Other useful fields of human knowledge may be built upon that sure and sound foundation.

All deceptive knowledge—knowledge *not* built upon God’s Word—will ultimately fail and disappear.

What is one vital key to obtaining the knowledge of God?

“My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (verses 1-5).

To treasure and earnestly seek God’s way sums up the essence of this passage. Jesus Christ echoed this sublime principle in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). The New Testament is built on the Old Testament, which in turn points forward to the New. The one is incomplete and inadequate without the other. King David wrote that “*all* Your commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:172). Obedience and righteousness complement each other.

To obey God, what other quality do we desperately need?

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge . . .” (Proverbs 1:7).

The fear of God is not the fear of the world or the fear of man, which “brings a snare” (Proverbs 29:25). A major aspect of the fear of God is to trust and place your confidence in Him.

So often our fears are unnecessary. God tells us: “I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass? And you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth” (Isaiah 51:12-13).

God is our Creator. He made us and our environment. We owe our very existence to Him. We should fear the consequences of ignoring His teachings, instructions and commandments revealed through His Word.

What group of people especially needs the fear of God?

“The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion” (Proverbs 1:1-4).

Our young men and women—the next generation—will soon shape the future. Only the sure knowledge of the Bible can help them cope with the challenges of the new millennium. How thankful we should be that we and they have a reliable spiritual guide that was “written down for future generations” (Psalm 102:18, Revised English Bible).

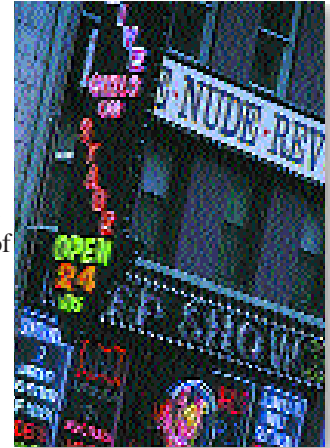
GOD’S KNOWLEDGE REVEALED IN TWO PARTS

“The Christian community has a divided mind about its textbook”

—John Wenham

Most people are aware that the Bible is composed of written material presented in two sections, traditionally labeled the Old Testament and the New Testament. In some respects this terminology is misleading because it has subtly led some to reject large parts of God’s revelation. The Old Testament is judged to be of less value or even obsolete by some theologians and religious leaders because it is older.

Many are the misconceptions concerning the Hebrew



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Bible. British author and Bible scholar John Wenham wrote: “We have had so much erroneous teaching for so many years that even intelligent people often really believe that the two Testaments represent two irreconcilably opposed points of view; the Old Testament being a God of wrath and the New Testament a God of love” (*Christ and the Bible*, p. 19).



Malachi

Some conclude that the Old Testament was old—and thus obsolete or worn out—and it therefore has been replaced by the New Testament. The designations “Old Testament” and “New Testament” are found in a few places in some Bible translations, but the word translated “testament” is also the word for “covenant.” These scriptures talk about the Old and New Covenants (to be fully explained in a later lesson)—*not* about the books of the Bible.

If you had lived 2,000 years ago and had asked the apostles Peter, Paul and John about the “Old Testament” or the “New Testament,” they would have had

no idea what you were talking about. These terms were coined by men long after the biblical books were written. The first use of “New Testament” for the Greek Scriptures is not found until a century or more after the deaths of the apostles.

So much of the Bible consists of the Old Testament. In fact, the vast majority of God’s Word is made up of those Hebrew Scriptures—nearly 80 percent of the Bible’s 773,000 words. Moreover, the New Testament contains some 600 quotations from and references or allusions to the Old.

In that light, does it make sense for much of the modern Christian world to view the Old Testament’s contents as somehow inferior or conflicting with the New? Is it logical to disregard the history of God’s revelation, His revealed way of life and the promises these Hebrew Scriptures contain?

As Walter Kaiser says in his book *Towards Discovering the Old Testament*, “the church spurns three-fourths of God’s inscripturated revelation—a massive amount of biblical teaching—if she persists in constructing all of her theology from the NT, while

Glossary

Apostle: An exclusive ecclesiastical role historically held by very few; literally “one sent,” but for a particular purpose: to deliver a message. In the New Testament this refers to a special envoy or messenger of the gospel; a special messenger from God (Luke 11:49; Revelation 18:20); more specifically the original 12 (Peter, John, Andrew, etc.) plus Paul, Barnabas and a few others. Jesus Christ is called the Apostle (Hebrews 3:1).

Gospel: The *good news* of God’s everlasting kingdom to be established on earth after Christ’s return and how we may be a part of that kingdom. This message was central to the teaching of Jesus Christ and the apostles. The term is used about 100 times in the New Testament.

Knowledge: The broad range of information held by a person; an attribute of God (Romans 11:33); what we need to know about God (Hosea 4:6).

Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel; called “latter” to distinguish these three and their respective books from the books of the “former” prophets: Samuel and Kings.

Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel; called “major” to distinguish these three and their respective books from the 12 “minor” prophets. *Major* is used in the sense of longer books and *minor* in the sense of shorter.

Pentateuch: The Greek term for the first five books of the Bible, the five books of Moses (*penta* means “five”). This term came into use when the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament) began to be translated into Greek about 300 B.C.

Recorder: An enumerator, secretary or archivist; the king’s official secretary (2 Samuel 8:16). In the ancient world a recorder was a member of a professional class of literate men who were trained for official service in royal administration.

Revelation: The disclosure of God’s Word and plan to mankind. In the Bible this refers to making obscure things clear; bringing hidden matters to light; causing especially *called* individuals to see, hear, perceive, know and understand the things of God; the unveiling of biblical mysteries (Romans 16:25).

Scribe: A copyist of official manuscripts (notably the Hebrew Bible); an archivist or keeper of records; a member of a professional class of secretaries who transcribed legal documents and who were experts in the study of the law (or Torah). Ezra was a skilled scribe (Ezra 7:6). Jesus commended the profession itself (Matthew 13:52) but often took exception to the way the scribes used their office and influence, frequently misinterpreting the Scriptures.

Torah: A Hebrew expression that refers specifically to “the law,” meaning the five books of Moses. In a much broader sense it means spiritual instruction or teaching.

Understanding: The quality of having insight or good judgment in general matters; an insightful power of abstract thought; the ability to logically follow through or trace a line of thought.

Wisdom: Having experience, knowledge and understanding together with the power of applying all three with prudence, practicality, discretion and common sense; the heart and center of proper moral and intellectual judgment; an attribute that God imparts to His people (Matthew 12:42) as they study His Word; personified in the book of Proverbs.

shamefully neglecting the OT. It is this practice that will leave . . . imbalances in her teaching ministry. She must return to the profitable, didactic usage of the OT” (p. 29).

THE TRANSITION FROM THE PROPHETS TO THE GOSPELS

These two parts of God’s Word join seamlessly to provide God’s complete revelation to mankind. Even though the period between the testaments was more than 400 years, the writings of the Hebrew prophets precede the apostolic writings in a manner that emphasizes their basic unity.

Consider how the closing words of the Old Testament prophets flow smoothly into those that open the New Testament. Malachi, generally considered to be the last of the Hebrew prophets, foretells an “Elijah who is to come”—John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13-14; Malachi 4:5-6).

Mark, considered by many to have been the first of the Gospel writers, begins right where Malachi left off—citing prophecies from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 of a messenger who would precede the Messiah. Then John the Baptist (the Elijah to come prophesied by Malachi) is introduced as the appointed forerunner of Jesus Christ, establishing the way for His first coming. (It is interesting to note that the context of the final chapter of Malachi also implies the appearance of still another prophet “in the spirit and power of Elijah” who will precede Christ’s *second* coming.)

Matthew similarly begins his Gospel as a continuation of the Old Testament, giving a genealogy of the Hebrew patriarchal and kingly lines leading to the birth of Jesus Christ. The specific purpose in Matthew 1 is summed up in verse 18: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows . . .”

Yet 17 vital verses precede this statement. Why? These boldly declare Jesus Christ’s Israelite ancestry back to King David and, even earlier, to Abraham. These words of Matthew validate the importance of the earlier books of the Hebrew Bible and demonstrate how he was building on their foundation.

Why does the New Testament begin with a genealogy?

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers . . . David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah . . . Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they [the peoples of Judah] were carried away to Babylon . . .”

“So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations” (Matthew 1:1-2, 6, 11, 17).

These 17 verses may be viewed as a brief summary

of the sacred history of Israel and Judah. They send a powerful message at the beginning of the New Testament that we must give the Old Testament due consideration.

Matthew’s historical introduction is designed to show Christ’s legal genealogy—that He is the fulfillment of promises made to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; etc.) and to King David (compare 2 Samuel 7:16; Acts 13:22-23; Luke 1:32). Matthew’s Gospel is built upon the foundation of the Hebrew Scriptures and contains many quotations from them. Thus both Matthew and Mark link the two testaments as a complete and whole revelation.



Matthew

THE FASCINATING NATURE OF GOD’S REVELATION

Men and women were created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). Within these words is an indication of the astonishing plan, purpose and relationship He desires with all humanity. Imagine all the abilities and potentialities that being created in God’s image confers on us—all the duties and responsibilities, all the magnificence and varied gifts to be used in His service.

What we can know is that God has employed “various ways” at “various times” (Hebrews 1:1), not only to preserve His Word but to convey it to mankind. The Bible includes a wealth of literary forms and expressions: law, poetry, proverbs, prophecies, histories, the four Gospels, a history of the Church, personal and general letters, an apocalyptic message and more. We human beings have an appetite for variety, and God has seen to it that the wonders of His Word did not come down to us in the form of a dull outline or a list of dos and don’ts.

The Bible is the story of people and events spanning several thousand years. Jesus and the apostles testified to the accuracy and divine inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures. They supported its laws and promises and based their teaching on its foundational principles. They continued to uphold its pattern of living.

Did Jesus Christ acknowledge that the message of the Hebrew Bible is conveyed in more than one basic form of general literary expression?

“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He [Jesus Christ] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27, 44).

Jesus recognized a threefold division in the Old Testament: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The Psalms constitute the leading book of that section of the Bible called the Writings. The Law constitutes the first five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—all written by Moses.

Did Christ refer to the time frame of the Hebrew Bible?

“. . . From the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah . . .” (Matthew 23:35; compare Luke 11:51).

Time in the Bible is sometimes measured in terms of the lives of its dominant personalities. For instance, the apostle Paul wrote of the period “from Adam to Moses” (Romans 5:14). Abel was the first righteous man to be martyred. Zechariah’s murder was the last one mentioned in the historical Jewish arrangement of the books of the Hebrew Bible.

Did Christ believe in and support the Genesis account of the creation of the earth?

“For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be” (Mark 13:19).

Did Christ confirm other historical accounts described in the book of Genesis?

“And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They [lived] . . . until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:26-27).

Clearly, Christ accepted the creation and flood accounts at face value as historical events. He believed in and publicly confirmed the statements found in the book of Genesis.

What did Christ say about the principal figures in Hebrew history?

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (John 5:46-47).

“. . . [You will] see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God . . .” (Luke 13:28).

“But He [Jesus] said to them, ‘Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry . . . ?’” (Mark 2:25).

Christ acknowledged and validated the historicity of the leading characters and events of the Old Testament (compare Matthew 11:22-24; 12:41-42; etc.). He authenticated the Hebrew

Bible by accepting biblical history and citing it in His teaching.

The apostles did the same. Read Hebrews 11, which is known as the “faith chapter” of the Bible. It is a brief compendium of the early Church’s belief in the leading people and the main events of the Old Testament.

THE WRITERS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

In writing His Word for humanity, God used people from all social levels and walks of life: kings, prophets, priests, scribes, tax collectors, herdsman, fishermen. Though God inspired them all, He used their own natural human personalities to help convey His message. Their background stories make for fascinating reading. It is surprising how much the Bible itself reveals about how it came to be put together through God using human instruments.

Let’s begin our story with David, the king of Israel who lived about 1,000 B.C. Three millennia later we still speak and write and sing the words of David. They are quoted extensively in what we call the New Testament. He created a large amount of literature that God preserved for future generations.

Who was the principal composer of the words and music of the Psalms?

“Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1).

“On that day David first delivered this psalm into the hand of Asaph and his brethren, to thank the LORD” (1 Chronicles 16:7).

“[Woe to you] who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David” (Amos 6:5).

“Now David himself said in the book of Psalms . . .” (Luke 20:42).

“For David himself said by the Holy Spirit . . .” (Mark 12:36).

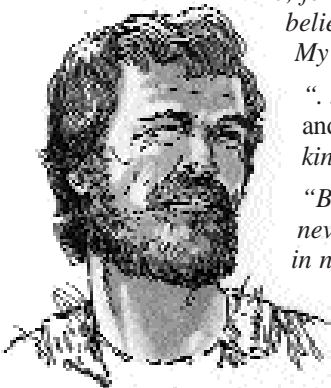
The Bible has much to say about David’s musical and literary accomplishments. No fewer than 73 psalms bear David’s name. It seems likely that many of the unattributed psalms were also authored by this king. His skillful playing on the harp calmed the disturbed mind of King Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23). David also composed a moving lamentation after Saul and Jonathan lost their lives in battle (2 Samuel 1:17-27; compare 3:33-34).

How many times have people unfamiliar with the Bible repeated the phrase, “How are the mighty fallen,” without realizing that they are quoting David’s sorrow over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan? David and his music were so renowned that the prophet Amos mentions them some 300 years after David’s reign (Amos 6:5).

What was the source of David’s inspiration?

“The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2).

These are “the last words of David” (verse 1)—serious matters he wished his audience to remember. This great king was one of many Peter had in mind a millennium



David

later when the apostle wrote, "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 1:21).

Did David himself have the Holy Spirit?

"Then Samuel [the prophet] took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13).

This anointing occurred when David was yet a young man caring for his father's sheep. God gave His Spirit to David at a young age, and these passages indicate that many of his compositions were inspired through that Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a vital link between God and man. God reveals His precious truth to us by and through His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10). As Peter later wrote, God's prophets had this Spirit, "the Spirit of Christ," working within them (1 Peter 1:11).

KING DAVID AND HIS SCRIBES

David was a remarkable leader and skilled organizer. In particular, 1 Chronicles details how he administered his government. Under his rule professional recorders and scribes were engaged and educated in the royal court. These men were greatly respected, and their successors in later reigns recorded court histories of the kings of Israel and Judah. One such record, for instance, was "the account of the chronicles of King David" (1 Chronicles 27:24). Shemaiah was one scribe in David's royal court whose name is recorded (1 Chronicles 24:6).

An earlier passage in 2 Samuel sums up David's regal administration. "So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people. Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were the priests; Seraiah was the scribe" (2 Samuel 8:15-17). The chronicler later mentions that "Jehonathan, David's uncle, was a counselor, a wise man, and a scribe" (1 Chronicles 27:32). This highly educated relative was apparently a trusted royal adviser.

The Bible indicates that King David created a climate in which recording and writing about royal affairs were important governmental functions, ranked with priestly and military duties. Solomon, his son and successor, grew up in an atmosphere that nourished his own considerable writing talents, which were strengthened by his father and others of the royal court. Among the king's final words to his young son Solomon were these: "All this . . . the LORD made me understand *in writing*, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans [for the first temple]" (1 Chronicles 28:19).

KING SOLOMON'S WRITINGS

The books written by King Solomon are part of the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible.

Does the Bible describe King Solomon's royal administration?

"So King Solomon was king over all Israel. And these were his officials: Azariah the son of Zadok, the priest; Elihoreph and Ahijah . . . scribes; Jehoshaphat . . . the recorder" (1 Kings 4:1-3).

Again, the offices of scribe and recorder were ranked high in the king's administration. Like his father, David, King Solomon prized these men and their skills.

Did some of the books of the Bible eventually emerge from this great emphasis on writing?

"He [Solomon] spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five" (verse 32).

Only a few hundred of Solomon's proverbs are recorded in the book of Proverbs. Only one of his songs (appropriately known as the Song of Songs) is preserved for us in the Bible. So a great deal of evaluation of written material had to have taken place. Solomon's contributions to the Bible are accurately termed Wisdom Books.



Solomon

Who is the real source of Solomon's wisdom?

"And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore . . . For he was wiser than all men" (verses 29, 31).

"And all the kings of earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart" (2 Chronicles 9:23).

This is an important biblical fact and one we should never forget: God is the ultimate source of the books of the Bible, no matter the human beings He used to write them. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," wrote the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:16). The wisdom of Solomon came from the Creator God.

Which well-known book of the Bible did King Solomon write?

"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel" (Proverbs 1:1).

"The proverbs of Solomon . . ." (Proverbs 10:1).

"These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied" (Proverbs 25:1).

The book of Proverbs commences with a brief introduction (Proverbs 1:1-7) followed by a long section extolling the merits of wisdom. Then chapter 10 begins the main body of Solomon's proverbs, some of which were later copied by King Hezekiah's scribes (Proverbs 25:1). The final two chapters are attributed to two other people, but Solomon is the principal author of the book.

These biblical proverbs are instructive sayings that often contrast right and wrong in one brief passage. These practical points of wisdom not only enrich our lives, but help us avoid trouble. In short, here we have a brief guidebook for successful living.

What book of biblical philosophy did Solomon write?

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Ecclesiastes 1:1).

Here, in the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon reflects on his life and experiences. He concludes that fearing God and keeping His commandments constitute “man’s all” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). He observes that without God life has no real meaning—and that all too many people waste their lives pursuing things that will never truly satisfy them. He reminds us that God will eventually bring every human work into judgment (Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:14).

ANOTHER IMPORTANT AUTHOR

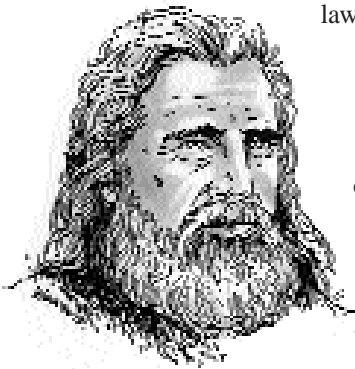
Which skilled author did God use to complete the Old Testament Scriptures?

“This Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses . . .” (Ezra 7:6).

“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (verse 10).

Jewish tradition says that Ezra compiled and inscribed both 1 and 2 Chronicles—the concluding books in the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament scriptures. Most conservative scholars agree that the internal biblical evidence supports this conclusion. Note the marked similarity between the end of 2 Chronicles (36:22-23) and the beginning of Ezra (1:1-3). Shimshai and Zadok were also scribes at that critical point in Hebrew history (Ezra 4:8; Nehemiah 13:13) and may have assisted Ezra.

By compiling an essential history drawn from national records, Ezra most probably produced an inspired contemporary analysis of the fortunes of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel right up to the time of Cyrus’s edict authorizing the Jews to rebuild and restore God’s temple in Jerusalem. Recall that Ezra was a man with a right attitude toward the law of God.



Moses

THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

Ezra was “a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). The New Testament tells us that Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and many scriptures show us that Moses was responsible for the first five books of the Bible. These books are usually called the Torah, a Hebrew term, and sometimes referred to as the

Pentateuch, a Greek expression. According to Jewish tradition, another hand, possibly that of Joshua or Ezra, added the account of Moses’ death to the end of Deuteronomy—and made other adjustments to complete the text we read today.

Early Jewish tradition is unanimous in accepting Moses’ authorship of the Torah. The last of these

books tells us that this prophet wrote the law in a book and gave it to the priests so they could read it to the people (Deuteronomy 31:9-13). It was also placed at the side of the ark of the covenant (verse 26). Although it is presented in five parts, the Torah is one integral book.

In all four Gospels Jesus Christ repeatedly referred to Moses as the giver of the law (Matthew 8:4; 19:8; Mark 1:44; 7:10; 10:4-5; 12:26; Luke 5:14; 20:37; John 1:17; 5:46; 7:19).

What did God tell Moses to do? Did he obey the Lord’s instructions?

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this for a memorial in the book’ . . .” (Exodus 17:14).

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words . . .’” (Exodus 34:27).

“And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD” (Exodus 24:4).

Although these are limited commands to write specific portions of God’s Word, the principle is clear. Moses is the prophetic scribe through whom God worked. Remember that he “was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22).

Does Numbers, the fourth book attributed to Moses, say anything about his literary activity?

“Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD” (Numbers 33:2).

Although some scholars question Moses’ authorship of Numbers, this passage near the end of the book cannot be dismissed (compare Numbers 36:13). The Bible attributes this whole section to Moses. Many other sections of Numbers begin with the words “the LORD said to Moses . . .” The book of Leviticus does not specifically mention its author, but the contents from first to last record God speaking directly to Moses (Leviticus 1:1; 27:34).

At the time of Moses the art of writing had been developed in Egypt and the Mesopotamian region. Permanent museum records inscribed on obelisks and cuneiform tablets provide clear evidence that writing was well established before and during the time of Moses.

What is different about Genesis?

The historical activities recorded in the book of Genesis occur before Moses was born. Clearly, he had access to written records or accurate oral traditions, or God dictated the contents to him.

Genesis is a Greek word meaning “beginning.” What is the significance of the name of this biblical book?

Is there an obvious genealogical structure to the book of Genesis?

“This is the history [‘These are the generations,’ KJV] of the heavens and the earth when they were

created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens” (Genesis 2:4).

“This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God” (Genesis 5:1).

“This is the genealogy of Noah” (Genesis 6:9; compare 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2).

Here we have the literary structure of Genesis in briefest outline. It is made up of 11 “books” or “genealogies.” Genesis tells of the beginning of all things, how the population of the earth grew and how God began to work through one man’s family, that of the patriarch Abraham. The Genesis story is told through the framework of family histories.

Genesis is the *beginning of the knowledge of God*. It has been preserved down through the ages for our benefit. It begins the precious knowledge of God’s great purpose that we can learn from no other source. Genesis doesn’t contain *all knowledge*, but it represents the *essential spiritual foundation* that is fundamental to the understanding of the rest of the Bible.

It reveals, for example, that we are created in the very image of God and that Adam and Eve chose a path that would take them and their descendants—every one of us—away from a relationship with God. The prophets had much to say about this latter point.

THE LATTER, OR MAJOR, PROPHETS

Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are known as the major prophets and wrote the books that bear their names (along with occasional assistance from personal scribes).

But the story for us to consider does not stop there. Each man told of his own fascinating contribution to the Bible.

Yet in the final analysis it is Jesus Christ Himself who joins the two sections of the Bible, the Old and New Testaments, together. He welds the Hebrew Prophets to the New Testament. So it is primarily to Christ that we must first look for guidance in evaluating the Latter, or Major, Prophets.

Did Jesus directly ascribe any portions of the Bible to the prophet Isaiah?

“Well did Isaiah prophesy about you . . .” (Matthew 15:7).

In verses 8-9 Christ quotes from Isaiah 29:13 in the Hebrew Bible.

Did all four Gospel writers attribute portions of the Hebrew Scriptures to Isaiah?

“For this is he [John the Baptist] who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah . . .” (Matthew 3:3;

King Jehoiakim: A Lesson From Biblical History

History shows that through the centuries various people have tried to destroy the Word of God. Early in the sixth century B.C., one who literally “destroyed” the Word of God and paid dearly for his arrogance was Jehoiakim, king of Judah.

Jehoiakim’s 11-year reign was disastrous. Although he had opportunity to follow his father Josiah’s righteous example (Jeremiah 22:15-16), Jehoiakim turned to evil. Jeremiah described him as a presumptuous ruler who abused his own people (verses 13-14) and persecuted and murdered God’s servants (Jeremiah 26:20-23).

God instructed Jeremiah to prophesy that, unless they repented, King Jehoiakim and Jerusalem would fall (Jeremiah 36). Jeremiah had God’s words recorded by his scribe, Baruch, and instructed him to read those prophecies to the people of Judah. God hoped they would repent and avoid their prophesied downfall (Jeremiah 36:4-7).

When the princes heard Jeremiah’s prophetic words, they quickly conveyed them to Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:19). Then the king heard the princes’ account of Jeremiah’s predictions and sent an officer to bring the scroll to him (verse 21).

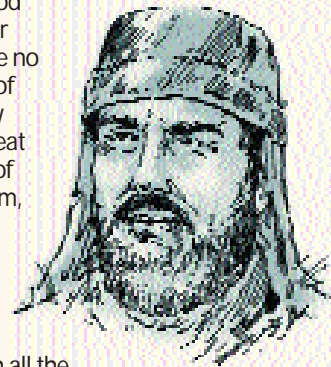
Jehoiakim commanded the officer to read aloud from the scroll. After the man read several columns, the king would cut away that part of the scroll, then contemptuously toss it into the fire burning in the hearth before him. The king continued “until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth” (verse 23).

Jehoiakim apparently thought he was accountable to no one. But God would have the last word.

He instructed Jeremiah to prepare another scroll like the first (verses 27-32). God reserved strong words for Jehoiakim: “He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. I will punish him, his family, and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring on them, on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah all the doom that I have pronounced against them; but they did not heed” (verses 30-31).

Sadly, Jehoiakim persisted in his defiance and suffered the consequences. Defeated by the Babylonians and dragged away in chains, he apparently died on his way to or in captivity in Babylon.

The lesson of King Jehoiakim applies to all leaders and all peoples: He who would attempt to destroy God’s Word puts himself in great danger. Man cannot arrogantly challenge God with impunity. God’s Word is the foundation of all knowledge, and, unlike mortal man, it will endure forever (1 Peter 1:24-25).



Jehoiakim

compare Mark 7:6; Luke 3:4; John 12:39-41).

Clearly, the prophet Isaiah spoke these words. Like Paul in composing some of his New Testament letters, he may well have dictated portions of his book to an assistant. Remember that the official system of recorders and scribes (established by King David) was still in operation in Judah during Isaiah's lifetime. His prophetic ministry continued during the reigns of several Judean kings (Isaiah 1:1).



Isaiah

Did the apostle Paul also quote from Isaiah?

“. . . They departed after Paul had said one word: 'The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers'" (Acts 28:25; compare Romans 9:27).

What was unusual about Jeremiah's calling?

"Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:4-5).

This expression, "the word of the LORD came to me" (in slightly varied forms), is repeated often in the book of Jeremiah. The message of the prophet is directly from God; Jeremiah is merely His human instrument.

What was one of Jeremiah's prophetic gifts?

"So Jeremiah wrote in a book *all the evil that would come upon Babylon, all these words that are written against Babylon*" (Jeremiah 51:60).

But did Jeremiah do all the writing himself?

". . . This word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: 'Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day'" (Jeremiah 36:1-2).

"Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote on a scroll of a book, at the instruction of Jeremiah, all the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him" (verse 4).

Jeremiah had his own personal scribe, who apparently was also an accomplished reader (verse 10). Baruch read the words of Jeremiah in "the house of the LORD," the temple in Jerusalem.

When God's message through Jeremiah (but written down by Baruch the scribe) reached King Jehoiakim, what did he immediately do?

"And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire . . . until all the scroll

was consumed in the fire . . ." (verse 23).

Many attempts have been made throughout history to destroy parts or all of God's Word. This particular instance is recorded in the Bible itself. Sometimes biblical writers and translators have been imprisoned or killed. Men literally gave their lives to bring you this Book. In this scriptural example, however, the attempt to "seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet" failed because "the LORD hid them" (verse 26).

What was God's reaction to the king's destruction of Jeremiah's scroll in the fire?

"Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words which Baruch had written at the instruction of Jeremiah, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah saying: 'Take yet another scroll, and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned'" (verses 27-28).

"Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe . . . , who wrote on it at the instruction of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And besides, there were added to them many similar words" (verse 32).

Not even kings have any authority or permission to alter or destroy God's Word. He has preserved the Bible throughout the ages in spite of determined attempts to extinguish all traces of it. Faithful men and women have risked their lives to preserve, spread and publish the Scriptures.

What were Ezekiel's prophetic credentials?

"The word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there" (Ezekiel 1:3).

Ezekiel is mentioned only twice in the Bible—both times in the book bearing his name. In addition to obvious allusions to the temple chapters of Ezekiel (40-48) in Revelation 21, the book itself is quoted several times in the New Testament. Also, Jesus' portrait of Himself as the Good Shepherd is an apparent allusion to passages from Ezekiel (compare 34:5, 8, 12, 23; 37:24). God addresses Ezekiel as "the son of man" 90 times, and Jesus Christ refers to Himself as "the Son of Man" about 80 times in the Gospel accounts.

Ezekiel's prophecies were born in the heat of captivity. Says *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (1997): "He [Ezekiel] was deported along with King Jehoiachin of Judah . . . in 597 BCE [before the Christian era] to Babylon by the invading forces of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:8-16; Ezekiel 1:1-3). The exiles were settled at Tela-bib on the river Chebar . . . Ezekiel's call to prophesy came in July 593, and all of his preaching took place among the deported Jerusalemites . . ." (pp. 246-247).

DANIEL THE PROPHET

What prophet is mentioned directly by Jesus Christ in His Olivet Prophecy?

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place’ (whoever reads, let him understand) . . .” (Matthew 24:15; compare Mark 13:14).

Jesus Christ clearly refers to Daniel as a legitimate Hebrew prophet, although the book of Daniel is not technically classified as a part of the Prophets, but of the Writings—the third major section of the Old Testament.

What major prophet places Daniel in some select company?

“‘Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in [a sinful land], they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,’ says the Lord God” (Ezekiel 14:14; compare verse 20).

Clearly, Daniel’s spiritual credentials are of the highest caliber. He was considered an example of righteousness alongside Noah (a preacher of righteousness, 2 Peter 2:5) and the patriarch Job (one of the most righteous men who ever lived, Job 1:1, 8).

What other gifts and qualities made Daniel so unusual?

“As for these four young men [including Daniel], God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:17).

“Then he [the angel] said to me, ‘Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words’” (Daniel 10:12).

Humility before the great God is a vital key to spiritual success. Few have ever understood this principle better than the prophet Daniel. Further, it is an important key to unlocking the door to knowledge of God. Daniel himself said in praising the God of heaven: “He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding” (Daniel 2:21).

Daniel also had special understanding in “literature and wisdom” (Daniel 1:17)—essential qualifications for writing his book. That Daniel wrote the book bearing his name is certain (Daniel 9:2; 10:2). Says *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*: “The book of Daniel was a product of the exile and was written by Daniel himself” (p. 688). In his book he often speaks in the first person.

But, as Daniel 1:17 explains, God is the ultimate source of all this spiritual knowledge, understanding and wisdom—not human beings. Prophets like Daniel have distinguished themselves by becoming willing and humble instruments in His hands.

Are any of the “minor” prophets quoted by the apostles?

“As He says also in Hosea . . .” (Romans 9:25).

In another example, Acts 2:16-21, Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 because the events on that Day of Pentecost were a direct and dramatic fulfillment of a portion of Joel’s prophecy. After Christ’s crucifixion, God’s Spirit, on this particular day, was spectacularly poured out just as Joel had prophesied. Peter proclaimed that these events were a dramatic fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy.

What great sign given by Christ is based on what happened to one of these 12 prophets?

“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:39-40).

One third of the New Testament is composed of quotations from and allusions to the Old. These two parts of Scripture are closely linked and intertwined with each other. The apostles constantly used the Hebrew Bible in their writings.

THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS

Comprehending the true role of the first-century apostles is fundamental to a correct understanding of the New Testament. It is through these men chosen for a unique role (and capable associates such as Mark and Luke) that God brought about the creation of the 27 books comprising what we call the New Testament. After praying all night to the Father, Jesus initially chose 12 men to help Him lead and build His Church in its early years. Later some of these men, along with Paul (also called to be an apostle), began to write extensively as the Church grew and expanded. These accounts were preserved for later generations in what we call the New Testament. Fundamentally they were apostolic writings.



John

What is an apostle?

“And when it was day, He [Jesus] called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” (Luke 6:13).

In simple terms an apostle means “one sent,” clearly implying “with a message.” Even Jesus Christ is referred to as “the Apostle” in one biblical passage (Hebrews 3:1). Says *The New Bible Dictionary*: “There are over eighty occurrences of the Greek word *apostolos* in the New Testament, seven-eighths of them in Luke and Paul. It derives from a very common verb *apostello*, to send . . .” (p. 48).

What was a major activity of the apostles?

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me [or ‘for Me’] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The 12 apostles gave a powerful firsthand confirmation of Christ’s resurrection and Messiahship in the early years of the Church. Luke included portions of this remarkable witness in the book of Acts. These early eyewitnesses fulfilled a special role. Their written testimony comprises the lion’s share of the 27 inspired documents that constitute the New Testament.

Remember that Jesus Christ had said: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, [which] the Father will send in My name, [it] will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). He added that this “Spirit of truth . . . will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). This happened as Christ predicted it would. These inspired truths are preserved for us today in the New Testament.



Peter

“Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease. For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:15-16).

Peter wanted future followers of Christ to have a permanent reminder of the true gospel. This was accomplished by creating a written record of Christ’s life and teachings plus the work of the apostles.

What was one of the chief reasons for John writing his Gospel account?

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31).

“This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24).

The book of John (and by extension the entire New Testament) was preserved to give later generations an accurate account of Christ’s Messiahship, His words and deeds, the vital knowledge He wanted passed on to all who would follow Him.

What does Luke say about the origins of true Christianity?

“To Theophilus: Many writers have undertaken to draw up an account of the events that have taken

place among us, following the traditions handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and servants of the gospel. So I in my turn, as one who has investigated the whole course of these events in detail, have decided to write an orderly narrative for you, your excellency, so as to give you the authentic knowledge about the matters of which you have been informed” (Luke 1:1-4, Revised English Bible; compare Acts 1:1-2).

Luke was an exceptional writer and knowledgeable historian. The events of the Bible took place in the real world, and Luke in particular records important details of the apostles’ time that can be verified from secular history.

What does Peter tell us about Paul’s writings?

“. . . As also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him [from God], has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15-16).

The apostle Peter considered some of the letters of the apostle Paul to be Scripture. Clearly, he understood them to have been inspired by God, just as the Old Testament scriptures were also inspired by our Creator.

How are we told to regard the Word of God?

“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).

God takes His Word seriously, and so should we. It is the very foundation of knowledge and not to be trifled with. In principle, these warnings extend to the rest of the books of the Bible. We should not add to, nor take away from, the words that God inspired to be preserved for all mankind.

On the other hand, do we gain God’s favor if we highly esteem His Word?

“But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isaiah 66:2).

God wants us all to respect the Bible—to learn to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4).

THE FOUNDATION OF TRUE VALUES

God’s Word is the foundation of knowledge. It provides essential information we could not discover from other sources. It provides the proper framework with

which we may apply other knowledge. God in His Word instructs mankind how to live. He commands us to live in harmony with His revealed way of life. God's laws define the true values, and He expects us to make them our own—rejecting any other alternative.

From beginning to end the Bible is a book of *spiritual instruction*. Its main focus is on God's spiritual law, which is embodied and summarized in the Ten Commandments. They are a reflection of God's mind and character. All biblical laws are expansions, case studies and detailed examples of how we are to love God and our fellowman.

How did Jesus Christ view the law of God?

“Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him. ‘“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets’” (Matthew 22:35-40; compare Mark 12:28-31).

God's law is spiritual (Romans 7:14) and based on love. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments,” wrote the apostle John. “And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). God's law defines love and shows us how to love God and our neighbor. This great spiritual law may be likened to a riverbed. Providing a basic framework for daily living, it is a channel through which the love of God flows.

Both of the commandments Christ cited come from the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. The “first and great commandment” is found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and the second in Leviticus 19:18. These are two of the five books of Moses. As Jesus Christ said, the teachings of the law and the prophets hang on these two great principles. They summarize the intent and purpose of Scripture.

What is the ultimate goal of this law of love?

“So the scribe said to Him [Jesus], ‘Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.’ Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God’” (Mark 12:32-34).

The purpose of God's law is to teach us how to live His way of life. When God knows we are committed to living that way, He will eventually grant us eternal life in the Kingdom of God—our ultimate goal.

Did Jesus Christ see this great law of love as a means to a majestic end?

“And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him [Jesus], saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’ So he answered and said, ““You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”’ And He [Jesus] said unto him, ‘You have answered rightly; do this and you will live’” (Luke 10:25-28).

Everlasting life in God's Kingdom is the end result of fulfilling these two expressions of love by those who are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

How does all this relate to the Ten Commandments?

“Now behold, one came and said to Him [Jesus], ‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ So He said to him, ‘. . . If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ He said to Him, ‘Which ones?’ Jesus said, ““You shall not murder,” “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “Honor your father and your mother,” and, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself””” (Matthew 19:16-19).

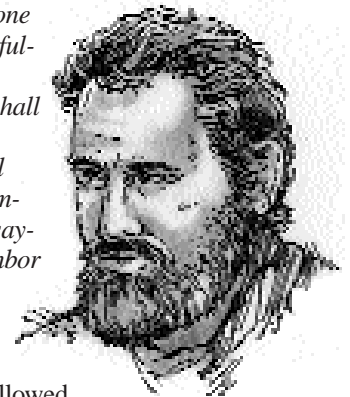
In answer to this young man's question, Jesus quoted five of the last six Commandments and then summed them all up by quoting the command to love our neighbor as well. The obvious conclusion is that loving our neighbor is a summary of the last six of the Ten Commandments. Accordingly, the first four of the Commandments tell us how to love God. This law is the perfect expression of God's eternal spiritual values.

Did the apostle Paul follow Christ's example in his teaching?

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8-10).

Paul told others to follow him as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1, KJV). So he quoted five of the last six Commandments and finished up with the summary command to love our neighbor as ourselves. Love, wrote Paul, is the fulfilling of God's spiritual law.

This love expresses itself in worship and proper fear of God—and an outgoing concern for the welfare of our neighbors. This is the “royal law” of “liberty” (a liberation from sin and death) spoken of by the apostle James (James 2:8, 12). Again, this law is the basis for right



Paul

values and godly relationships. It defines the courtesy and conduct we owe one another as human beings.

But where do we obtain this kind of love?

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit] which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5, KJV).

Only God’s Spirit can impart His love to and through us. Other scriptures show that we must first repent of breaking God’s law, then we are forgiven through the blood of Christ and we receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-39). For the whole fascinating story, be sure to request our free booklet *The Road to Eternal Life*.

SUMMARY REMARKS

Jesus Christ said that God’s Word is truth (John 17:17). This precious spiritual knowledge is revealed in the words of Holy Scripture. Remember that we are told to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4). Recall also that it was King David who said, “Your law is truth” (Psalm 119:142) and “the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:7).

In summary, the Bible is the *foundation* or *basis* of knowledge. It shows the root cause of every problem that has plagued the human family since creation. God’s Word reveals the *true values* by which we must live if we are to solve our massive relationship problems and the other seemingly insoluble dilemmas that threaten to overwhelm us.

Lesson 3 will explore the fascinating topic of *Why Man?* What is man and how is he related to God? Why was he made in God’s image? Do we have an immortal soul? Is there a spirit in man? Will men and women either go to heaven or burn in hell? What is the reward of the saved? All these questions and many more will be answered in the next lesson.

Points to Ponder

These questions are intended as a study aid, to spur further thought on the concepts discussed in this lesson and to help you apply them on a personal level. We suggest you take the time to write your answers to these questions and compare them to the scriptures given. Please feel free to write us with any comments or suggestions, including questions about the course or this lesson.

- Many people glory in their own accomplishments. What should we glory in? (Jeremiah 9:23-24).
- Who is really responsible for the darkness and deception that encircles the world? (2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9).
- The world is filled with many false values. To whom do we look for the foundation of right knowledge? (Proverbs 2:6).
- King David, a prolific writer of Old Testament scriptures, looked to what as the source of his inspiration? (2 Samuel 23:2; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Samuel 16:13).
- Which king ordered a copy of the Word of the Lord to be cut into pieces and burned? Was he successful in destroying God’s Word? (Jeremiah 36:1-32).
- Jesus Christ and New Testament writers often gave credence to earlier writers. Which Hebrew prophet included in the Writings section of the Old Testament is specifically referred to by Jesus in His Olivet Prophecy? (Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14).
- In what is now called the New Testament, many followers of Jesus Christ left a permanent record of His life and teachings and the work of the apostles. These were eyewitness accounts. Why were these records left for us? (John 20:30-31).
- What are the two great commandments? (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-40).
- Biblical knowledge is foundational in our relationships with God and each other. How long will it endure? (1 Peter 1:24-25).

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