

Lesson 1

The Scriptures

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This book is the all-time best seller. It has been translated into virtually every language on earth. It can be found in many homes, and even in most hotel dressers. Of course, we're talking about the Bible.

In this Bible study we are going to take a closer look at the Bible — the Scriptures — in order to see that the Bible is much, much more than just a book. To do that, we will need to answer the following questions.

- ◆ What is the Bible?
- ◆ What is the main message of the Bible?

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

Some people believe that the Bible is just a collection of moral ideas that wise men wrote down. They feel that the prophets and apostles came up with the message of Scripture all on their own. But look at the following passages.

2 Peter 1:20,21 Above all, you must 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 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is *God-breathed*... (Note: the Greek word for "breath" is the same as the word for "Spirit.")

2 Samuel 23:2 "*The Spirit of the LORD* spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, *the word of God,* which is at work in you who believe.

- 1) According to the underlined portions of those passages, who is NOT responsible for the message of Scriptures?
- 2) According to the italicized portions of those passages, who IS the author of the Scriptures?
- 3) Why is it so crucial for us to understand who is responsible for the message of Scripture?

Sometimes we use the phrase “verbal inspiration” to describe the way God used the prophets and the apostles to convey the message of the Scriptures.

✓ **DEFINITION: verbal inspiration** — *The miracle by which God “breathed into” the prophets and the apostles what he wanted them to write in the Bible. It is called verbal inspiration to show that God guided them to use the exact words he wanted them to write.*

Now let’s take a closer look at God, the author of Scripture. Please read the following passages and then answer the corresponding questions.

Titus 1:2 ...a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time...

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Isaiah 65:16 Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth; he who takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of *truth*.

4) According to the underlined portions of those passages what does God never do?

5) What is one characteristic you would always associate with God then?

And if that is the case with God, wouldn’t the same be true about his Word? Please read the following passages and then answer the corresponding questions.

John 17:17 [Jesus prayed to his Father], “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

2 Corinthians 4:2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

Ephesians 1:3 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

6) According to the underlined portions of those passages what must we say about the Scripture?

7) Since that is the case, which of the following couldn’t the Bible contain?

LIES CONTRADICTIONS MISTAKES

There is one more thing we need to consider as we try to answer the question “WHAT IS THE BIBLE.” We’ve just seen how God’s Word is truth. But to whom does that truth apply? For example, is what Paul wrote in the book of Romans only true for the Christians who were living in Rome at that time? Take a look at the following passages.

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.”

1 Peter 1:24,25 “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.”

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active...

- 8) If “the word of our God stands forever,” then to whom would those words apply? Would they apply just to the people who were living at the time those words were originally written down.
- 9) What do you think it means when the Bible says, “the word of God is *living*”?

On the basis of what we have looked at so far in this lesson, how would you answer that question, “WHAT IS THE BIBLE?”

The second question we need to answer is...

WHAT IS THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE?

The main message of the Bible contains two parts. Let’s look at the first part. Please read the following passages and then answer the corresponding questions.

Matthew 19:17-19 [Jesus said], “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments... Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

James 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.

Galatians 3:10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone *who does not continue to do everything* written in the Book of the Law.”

Matthew 5:48 *Be perfect*, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- 10) According to the underlined portions of those passages, what does God want us to do?
- 11) According to the italicized portions of those passages, what is the standard that God sets for obedience?

Romans 3:20,22,23 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin... There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

Romans 6:23 For *the wages of sin is death*...

2 Peter 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but *sent them to hell*, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment...

12) According to the underlined portions of those passages, who is able to win heaven by keeping the commandments?

13) According to the italicized portions of those passages, what do people deserve when they disobey God?

14) On the basis of these passages, how would you summarize the first part of the main message of the Bible?

All people are _____ and deserve _____.

We sometimes call this message the “Law.”

DEFINITION: Law — 1) *The commandments which tell people what God wants them to do and not to do.*
2) *The message of the Bible that all are sinful and deserve eternal damnation.*

Fortunately, that isn’t where God’s message to us ends. Please read the following passages and then answer the corresponding questions.

Luke 2:10,11 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

1 John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

Colossians 2:13,14 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins having, canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, *the forgiveness of sins*, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have *eternal life.*”

15) According to the underlined portions of those verses, why do we need not fear being punished for breaking God’s Law?

16) According to the italicized portions of those verses, what did Jesus win for us?

17) On the basis of these passages, how would you summarize the second part of the main message of the Bible?

God sent Jesus to be the _____ of the world.

We often refer to this message as “the Gospel.” “Gospel” means “good news.”



DEFINITION: Gospel — The “good news” that God in love sent Jesus to take away the sins of all people

Therefore, in order to answer that question, “WHAT IS THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE,” you could read your answers to questions 14 and 17 together with a “but” in the middle. For that answer would convey both the message of God’s Law and his Gospel.

One mistake that people often make is assuming that the Scriptures contain TWO messages — one found in the Old Testament and one found in the New Testament. Indeed, there are differences between the two. The Old Testament is longer, containing 39 books to the New Testament’s 27 books. The Old Testament was written over a longer span of time, from approximately 1450BC to 450BC. The New Testament was written in approximately the last half of the first century. The Old Testament was written almost entirely in Hebrew, the New Testament entirely in Greek. (For examples of Hebrew and Greek texts, please see Appendix I.)

However, the Old and New Testament contain the same basic message. As way of reviewing the main message of the Bible, let’s look at an assortment of passages from both the Old and New Testaments.

➤ **Proverbs 20:9** Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin"?

➤ **1 John 1:8** If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

18) What do these two passages tell us about our ability to keep ourselves from sin?

➤ **Isaiah 66:24** Their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

➤ **Luke 16:23,24** In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

19) What do these two passages tell us about the eternal punishment for sin?

➤ **Ezekiel 33:11** “As surely as I live,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.”

➤ **1 Timothy 2:3,4** This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

20) What do these two passages tell us is God’s desire for all people?

➤ **Isaiah 53:5,6** But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

➤ **2 Corinthians 5:21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

21) Both of these passages describe an awesome trade that occurred between Jesus Christ and the world. What was that trade?

- **Micah 5:2** But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.
- **Matthew 2:1** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.

22) Both of these passages describe something about the Savior. What?

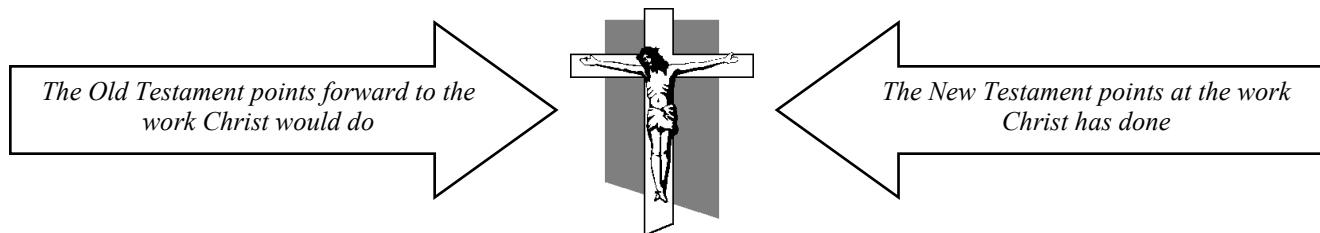
- **Psalms 34:20** (A Messianic Psalm, one that talks about the Messiah) — He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.
- **John 18:35** These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."

23) Both of these passages describe something about the Savior. What?

- **Job 19:25-27** I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes -- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!
- **1 Corinthians 15:42,43** So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

24) Both of these passages promise us something incredible. What?

Hopefully this illustrates that the Old and New Testament contain that same basic message. They both contain Law and Gospel. But they focus on the Savior from two different perspectives. You could diagram the difference like this.



TAKING IT DEEPER

- A) Agree or Disagree — The Bible contains the Word of God.
- B) Agree or Disagree — Every word of the Bible is true because the Bible is inspired by God.
- C) Agree or Disagree — When reading the Bible, we must be careful to understand that what was true for the Christians of the first century wouldn't necessarily be true for Christians today.
- D) Question — We said that God used verbal inspiration to convey the exact message he wanted through the prophets and apostles. We also said that the books of the Bible were originally written in either Hebrew or Greek. Therefore, what do we need to recognize as we read our English translations?
- E) Question — We said that the Bible contains both Law and Gospel, and we looked at what each of those tell us. What would happen if we only told someone about God's Law, and left out the Gospel? What about if we only told someone of the Gospel, but left out the Law?
- F) Question — Were Old Testament believers saved the same way New Testament believers are? (Take a look at Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:3 for help.)