

Bible Study Course
Introduction to the Bible

I. The Bible – Revelation, Inspiration and Authority

A. Revelation

- i. What do we mean by the word “Revelation”? The Oxford Dictionary gives its meaning as “the disclosing of knowledge to man by divine or supernatural agency”, whilst both the Hebrew and Greek words translated “to reveal,” mean “to uncover, or unveil.”
- ii. The Bible is therefore the Revelation of God Himself given by inspiration through men to man. It is the unveiling of God’s character, purpose and salvation, both authoritative and unique. What the human mind and intellect could never attain to naturally; what was beyond man’s ability to discover or understand, God has revealed.
- iii. This unveiling of Himself is a progressive revelation. It begins with Genesis and is gradually unfolded, more and more fully, until the Book of Revelation. Note carefully Hebrews 1:1-2. Mark “portions” and “manners” ASV, “fragmentary and Varied” NEB, “Many and various ways” RSV

It is the Revelation of God Himself given through:-

- a) Direct word – e.g. Exodus 25:1ff
 - b) Prophecy – e.g. Isaiah 53
 - c) History – (including miraculous events) national and personal.
E.g. Exodus 13-14 Psalms and Job.
 - d) Types and Figures – e.g. Noah; Pool of Marah; Dove; Serpent
 - e) Theophany – e.g. Exodus 19:16 ff; Gen 32:33 ff
 - f) The Lord Jesus Himself – He is the supreme and full Revelation of God. See John 1:14, 16-18
 - g) The Body of Christ, the Church – The Revelation was completed with the NT written by the Holy Spirit through the Early Church, principally the apostles and prophets e.g. Ephesians 2:20, 2 Peter 3:15, 20 N.B. v20, “the other Scriptures.”
- iv. This revelation is a unity. We need all the parts to fully understand the whole, and the whole to fully understand the parts. No one piece of Scripture can be isolated and “privately” interpreted. 2 Peter 1:20 (See particularly J.N. Darby’s version of this and his foreword.) It must be compared and understood in the whole. It is dangerous to build a doctrine on an isolated verse, story or parable. In the revelation not every part is as important, profound or final, but all is necessary to the full revelation. To neglect or ignore any part is harmful.
 - v. If then the Bible is an unveiling of God, beyond our natural ability to attain to or properly understand, it follows that we cannot approach it in an ordinary way, as we would Shakespeare, or Goethe or Tolstoy, etc. Revelation is a principle! It is not enough to have the Bible as the Revelation of God! We must have the eyes of our hearts enlightened. Ephesians 1:17-18; Matt 16:17; 2 Corinthian 2:6-16. Self-sufficient knowledge is a great danger and stumbling block, stemming as it does from the Fall. Upon that type of mentality and approach rests a Divine veto. We need the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit in our approach to the Word of God.

B. Inspiration

- i. What do we mean by “Inspiration”? The Oxford Dictionary gives its meaning as “to breathe in, inhale; infuse thought or feeling into. This is not the Scriptural idea at all. The word used in 2 Timothy 3:16, means literally “God breathed” and means “breathed out” more than “breathed in. It is in fact important that we should understand the difference. The

Bible is not the result of God infusing thoughts and feelings into certain men, playing on their artistic and “spiritual” abilities. The Bible resulted from God the Holy Spirit within them breathing out His Mind and Heart. See 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:10-11 “in them”; 2 Peter 1:19-21 “moved – borne along”; Hebrews 1:1 “God... in the prophets...” When we therefore speak of the Divine Inspiration of the Bible, we do not mean that it is inspiring or inspirable, nor that God is breathing through the Scripture nor that the Scriptures breathe out God, but that God has breathed out the Scripture. The Bible has been produced by God, by the Holy Spirit moving in certain men. It is therefore clear that the Bible is in a different class altogether to the inspired work of the human genius.

- ii. We must also note that this “inspiration” covers every part and phase in the “construction” of God’s Word – human temperament and background; prevailing conditions and knowledge; transmission from the oral to the written. Note 2 Timothy 3:16, the word “Scriptures” is the technical word for “Writings.”
- iii. The Scriptural idea of inspiration does not, however, mean a mechanical dictation, or the putting aside of human personality and will. In this it differs from the Gentile view then prevalent and still lingering today, that inspiration means, “possession with human will suspended.” It is interesting to note, in this connection, 1 Corinthians 14:32. Ecstasy there may be, and a complete lack of self-consciousness, but not the loss of self-control.
- iv. This revelation of God, in a way which is impressive, has been given by the Holy Spirit in and through different men at different times in the style, method and vocabulary of their day. It is however this mysterious connection between the Divine and human aspects of the Scripture which is both baffling and instructive. Note carefully 2 Peter 1:21 RSV. Here we are at the heart of the mystery “No Prophecy ever came by impulse of man but men moved by the Holy Spirit...” Note also NEB version of this, “men they were, but impelled by the Holy Spirit...” The word translated “moved” means “borne along, impelled.” Compare Acts 27:15, 17 “were driven”; also Acts 2:2, “rushing” – all the same word.
- v. This divine compulsion was neither physical, nor psychological. It certainly did not involve setting aside of the personality, character, or will of the human vessel. Indeed, it would seem that this divine direction and compulsion used the originality of the human author or speaker to the full, breathing through their particular personality and character quite naturally, and allowing them both spontaneity and freedom. Yet the outcome was “God-inspired Scripture.” Note again carefully Mark 12:36 – David’s words and yet they are given “In the Holy Spirit.” Compare Heb 1:13 – the same Psalm quoted but no mention of David, only Divine Authorship. The book of Acts 1:16 – Divine Authorship again. Acts 2:25, 34 – only human authorship. There are so many phrases – “Moses said; Moses wrote; Isaiah said; Isaiah cried; Isaiah did prophecy; Scripture said; God said” etc. It is not that there are various depths and differing measures of Divine Inspiration. Studied carefully, it will be seen that all is equated within “God said”
- vi. Again it is instructive to note that when God wishes to give us a full orb view of His Son, He takes four different men who say the same thing in different ways! Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If inspiration were a mechanical dictation, one writer could have sufficed and would have saved us a number of difficulties. It is virtually the same with the letters. God takes a Paul to speak to us about faith, and a James to speak to us about works! He takes a John to speak to us about Eternal Security

and a writer of the Hebrews about losing our Inheritance! Yet all is equally God inspired!

- vii. Then again note the difference in style between:-
Genesis, Daniel and Song of Songs; or Isaiah and Ezekiel; or John, Paul and James
Or the differences in method between:-
Acrostic Psalms e.g. 34, 37, 119; Composite (Mosaic) Psalms e.g. 144; between Psalms 22, 42, and Job, Proverbs and Zechariah; Song of Songs (allegory) and Exodus; Romans, Philemon, James; Revelation and Acts.
Or the differences in vocabulary between:-
Genesis 1 and Ephesians 1; Ezekiel and Isaiah; John's letters and Paul's letters.
Or the difference in personality between:-
Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Luke, Paul, James, Peter. The personality of the writer is not obliterated by Divine Inspiration at all! (Note for interest Rev 1:9, 2 Corinthians 10:1) At times it would seem that the very failings of the individual, or should we say their temperamental lacks, are used by God, e.g. Jeremiah, Paul and James. It seems therefore quite clear that inspiration does not mean sameness of style, or method, or vocabulary, or of temperament.
- viii. All these men had one thing in common. They were chosen, apprehended, prepared and anointed by the same Lord as vessels through which he would produce the Scriptures. Were they always conscious and aware of this "inspiration"? See 1 Peter 1:10-11, RSV; John 8:56; Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 11:13-16, etc.; Acts 2:30, 31 NEB. But what about Job; Jonah; Psalm 22; Psalm 51 – both David's; Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:8; Philemon?
- ix. **In all that we have said the supreme thing about the Bible is its Divine Authorship. We are not handling something which merely contains God's Word, or something which merely breathes God. We are handling the Word of the Lord given us by Divine Inspiration. An argument with Scripture invariably involves us, in the end, in an argument with God.**

C. Authority

- i. What do we mean by "Authority"? The Oxford Dictionary gives its meaning as "the power, right to enforce obedience." We therefore mean that the Word of God has the incontestable power and right to claim our absolute obedience, to settle all questions and matters in dispute, and to mould and fashion us in every part of our life.
- ii. The authority of the Bible lies wholly in the fact that it claims Divine Authorship. It claims to be "The Word of the Lord," a God given Revelation, with the inherent power to accomplish His will. It is not merely literary, not merely ethical, nor merely outlining the Truth. It is the powerful and creative Word of God Himself, living and active. Psalm 119:50; Isaiah 55:11; John 15:3; Acts 19:20; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 5:26; 6:17; Hebrews 1:3; 4:12; 11:3; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:21-25; 2 Peter 3:5, 7.
- iii. There are three ways in which we see this claim to authority:-
- a) The Old Testament is full of phrases such as "God spoke;" "God said"; "The Word of the Lord came;" "Thus said the Lord," etc. It has been estimated that there are 3800 such references. To these we must add all the acts of God with which its pages are filled

remembering that those acts are all with meaning. We must also add the appearances of God. The sum of it all adds up to a divinely initiated, inspired and authenticated revelation.

- b) Christ Himself witnessed to this authority. John 10:35 (cannot be broken); Luke 22:37 (must be fulfilled); Matt 5:17-19; Matt 22:43 (Mark 12:35, 36); Matt 19:3-6 (He who...said...); Matt 22:31 (Spoken by God); Luke 16:16-17; Luke 18:31; 24: 44-47. Note also that Christ believed in Isaiah's authorship; in David's authorship of Psalm 110; in God's creation of Adam and Eve; in the history of Cain and Abel; in that of Noah and the Flood and its results; in the story of Sodom, and of Lot's wife; in the miraculous provision of manna; in the story of the brazen serpent; in Naaman's healing; in the widow of Zarephath; in the story of Jonah etc. There is no doubt that Christ believed implicitly in the Authority and Inspiration of the OT. It has been rightly said that "the Christian who in his view of the Bible stands on any lower ground than that on which his Lord stood, does so at spiritual peril." It is also interesting to underline the claims Christ made for what He said. He never used the phrase "Thus saith the Lord" as such, but always the direct "I say" etc. Note John 14:26; 16:12-14; Matt 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44.
- c) The New Testament witnesses to the Authority of the Old, as well as to itself. Matt 1:22 2:15; Acts 1:16; 4:25; 28:25; Romans 3:2 (Oracles of God); 2 Tim 3:15-17; Heb 1:5-8, 13; 2:2-4 (through angels; the Lord; confirmed by them that heard etc.); Heb 3:7; 4:4; 12::25, 26; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:21; Note especially:- Romans 15:41; 1 Corinthians 10:11. Also 1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:16 Compare verse 2. (Note "as also the other Scriptures".) Rev 22:18-19

iv. There are also some other ways in which this claim is supported:-

- a) Whenever and wherever the Holy Spirit is Sovereign, he witnesses to the Authority and Inspiration of God's Word. This is a remarkable fact in both persons and movements in every phase of Church history.
- b) The matter of fulfilled prophecy. Messianic and otherwise. E.g. Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Micah 5:1-5; Zechariah 9:9; Daniel 2; Daniel 7 etc.
- c) The unity of the Bible – 66 books, with different human authors, backgrounds, times and even language, yet one theme running throughout. The whole thing is woven together without an editorial committee or any such thing! All 66 books come slowly to be recognized and find their place in the Canon of Scripture. E.g. Gen 1-3; Rev 20-22; the book of Revelation, etc.
- d) The amazing power inherent within Scripture in all its parts to speak; to change; to convict; to comfort; to create faith; the fact that it speaks to us in a completely contemporary way, etc. What other book has that power?
- e) The sobering fact that as soon as man begins to question its authority and full inspiration, belittle its power, or take a superior position to it, that one opens the floodgates of unbelief, loses his confidence, peace, joy and spiritual life, and gets into an intellectual, albeit religious side water. See 2 Peter 1:24-25
- f) The endurance of God's Word down through the centuries, until we have it in its final form. E.g. Egypt, Judges, the Assyrian and Babylonian Exile, the Roman Conquest and persecutions. We ought also to remember that we all have translations of the Bible,

and yet that fact doesn't seem to hinder its power at all. 1 Peter 1:24-25.

- v. We are therefore bound to say that as in all other essential matters, e.g. Salvation, The Church, His Purpose, God has not left the question as to what is and what is not His Word, what is inspired and what is not, what is operative today and what is not, to the tender mercies, or otherwise, or man's own judgement and discretion. He has defined His Word to be received through faith. There are things difficult to understand, things which are hard to reconcile with other things. There are some matters which may appear to us to be incompatible with God. But these difficulties we should expect when the finite starts to touch the Infinite; the imperfect, the Perfect; the ignorant, Wisdom Itself! The created will never fully grasp the Creator!
- vi. The amazing fact is that God in the compass of a small volume, in weak human language, had expressed a vast and endless universe of inexhaustible wisdom which century upon century has hardly tapped, and which once trusted and obeyed is powerful enough to change not only individuals, not only nations, but history itself!
- vii. And should anyone argue, or still doubt that God could have so spoken to man, then I must ask 'Is God, God?' If He is, then such is gloriously possible, and the basic requirement in us is reverent faith, honest enquiry and true humility. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."
- viii. Thus we see the supreme authority of the Word of God. It is like an act of parliament – "operative and authoritative to the last and farthest extremity of its letter."

Conclusion:

The Bible is the result of God breathing out His heart and mind by the Holy Spirit in certain men at different times. It is a God-given Revelation of Himself, of His Salvation and of His Purpose. Herein lays its unique and living Authority and Power. It is not to be ignored or played with, or argued with, but to be received by faith, in obedience and humility. Human systems will come and go; great men rise and fall; all flesh and all its glory will wither and fall like flowering grass, but the Word of the Lord will endure forever.

I. The Bible – Revelation, Inspiration, Authority

Questions

1. State in your own words, what we mean by “Revelation,” “Inspiration” and “Authority.”
2. Suppose someone said to you, “Why should I believe a book?” What would your answer be?
3. Give five ways in which the Bible claims to have authority. Give examples from Scripture where possible.
4. What verses in the Bible claim that the New Testament is inspired by God?
5. What is the greatest revelation that God has yet made?
6. If someone said to you, “I don’t believe the Bible, because it is simply a number of folk tales and stories which have been handed down from Father to son, over many generations,” what would your answer be?
7. State some of the dangers which we must avoid as we approach the Bible.
8. What part does the Holy Spirit play in enabling men to make a proper approach to the reading of the Bible?
9. Give reasons why we may accept that the Old Testament has Divine Authority. Give Scripture references as examples.
10. Give some examples of men, having different personalities, temperaments, etc., whom God has used to give us His Word.