

DAWN CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE — LESSON 1 — The Bible

The Bible makes great claims. It clearly states that its author is God - the Creator of the universe. It claims to reveal God and His purpose and it speaks with authority. If this claim cannot be upheld, then the Bible is the greatest and the most cruel hoax which has ever deluded mankind.

If the claims of the Bible can be supported, then we are in possession of the world's greatest treasure. The Bible as the true Word of God contains the key to peace and happiness. It answers the most perplexing questions concerning the meaning and purpose of our existence and the final outcome of the struggle between right and wrong. Let us look more closely at its claims.

Paul, writing of the Old Testament, says 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3 v 16). Every word of the original manuscripts was written under direct Divine guidance. The Apostle Peter stressed the same fact, 'For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1 v 21). These two apostles claim Divine authority for the writings of the Old Testament recorded centuries before their own days. This Divine authority is responsible for the complete harmony of teaching revealed in the Bible. The writers were separated by time, education, occupation, experience and social position, yet their writings all combine to form one united Book.

WHY THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN

The Bible tells us how the human race began and how God's plan of salvation will lead to the final victory of right over wrong and the extermination of every trace of sin and evil. The chief purpose of the Bible is to make known to the condemned human race this way of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Old and New Testaments combine to present Jesus as the only Saviour of mankind.

'These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name' (John 20 v 31).

In the pages of the Bible we find all the teaching necessary for man's enlightenment; The Divine definitions of right and wrong, and of man's duty to God and to his fellow-men (2 Timothy 3 v 15-17).

Finally, the Bible has been given to tell us, in broad outline, what the future holds, that we might be prepared for the coming of Christ (2 Peter 1 v 19).

THE CONTENTS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is a collection of books divided into two main sections. The books of the Old Testament were written before the time of Christ and the books of the New Testament after the time of Christ. There are 66 books altogether. You will find a list of them at the front of your Bible. They were written by about forty different writers over a period of 1,500 years. They were written in a number of different countries - such as Israel, Egypt, Italy and Babylon.

All the books combine in one consistent theme - the theme of the working out of God's purpose with man, from the very beginning recorded in Genesis to the time when 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever' (Revelation 11 v 15).

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The books of the Old Testament fall into four main sections:-

(a) THE BOOKS OF MOSES

The first book is called Genesis, which means the beginning. It tells us about God's dealings with the first men on the earth. Then follow Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They tell how God called Abraham, made a covenant with him and with his descendants, brought them out of Egypt and gave them the land now called Israel.

(b) THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

These, from the Book of Joshua to the Book of Esther, are a record of the history of the Israelites (or Jews) and of God's dealings with them.

(c) THE POETIC BOOKS

The books of Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs were written in Hebrew (the language of the Israelites) in poetic form. They contain much important teaching about the ways of God and the feelings and duties of man.

(d) THE BOOKS OF THE PROPHETS

The word prophet means seer - one who has insight or visions, not only of future events, but also of God's requirements of man. The long prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are followed by a number of shorter ones.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

(a) THE GOSPEL RECORDS

These are four separate accounts of the life of Christ, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; each is telling the gospel (the good news) in his own way.

(b) THE BOOK CALLED 'THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES'

This was written by Luke and tells what happened after Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. We are told how the first churches were formed as the apostles carried the good news throughout the Roman Empire.

(c) THE LETTERS

These were written by some of the apostles to help the early believers in the small, scattered young churches.

(d) THE BOOK OF REVELATION

This was the last message of Jesus, given in vision to the Apostle John.

JESUS CHRIST BELIEVED EVERY WORD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Bible plan and when he was born the New Testament did not exist. The Scriptures which he used and studied were the Old Testament. Jesus believed these Scriptures, he based his teaching on them and accepted them as indisputable authority.

Look at these passages: John 5 v 46-47, Luke 24 v 27, Luke 24 v 44-48 Matthew 22 v 29, Mark 7 v 6-13

Jesus speaks of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and Solomon, and of many other people about whom we read in the Old Testament and bases his teaching on the fact that these people were real and that all of the Old Testament is the Word of God.

THE BIBLE CANNOT BE PROVED FALSE

All the developments of modern thought and technology have combined to establish that the Bible records are true. Many enemies of the Bible, including some very clever men, have tried to prove it wrong but they have all failed. Since truth cannot contradict itself, we should naturally expect the Word of God to be in harmony with observable scientific knowledge.

A further evidence of the authority of the Bible is the way in which it has been preserved over the centuries. The Bible has triumphantly withstood every effort of man to overthrow it. It has been suppressed and withheld from the common people; whole editions of it have been burned and many books have been written in attempts to disprove it. No other book has been subjected to such continuous and determined opposition: the Bible still stands, immovable and unconquerable.

The great antiquity of the Bible, its preservation and influence upon the human race are factors which cannot be ignored. The evidences of archaeological discoveries by such people as Rawlinson, Layard, Smith, Woolley and Kenyon in Egypt, Nineveh, Assyria, Babylon, Ur and Israel are all striking confirmations of the truth of Bible history. Exhibits in museums all over the world clearly demonstrate this. The inscriptions of Nations which fought against Israel confirm the Bible accounts both of events and of ancient customs and local habits. Present-day archaeology continues to add material supporting our reasons for believing the truth of the whole Bible.

Even the criticisms relating to the care taken by the Jewish copyists of the original writings are discounted with the discovery of ancient manuscripts. The remarkable discovery in 1947 of the Dead Sea Scrolls has provided yet more valuable evidence of the accuracy of the Bible. These manuscripts are some of the earliest available, dating back to the second century B.C. Despite their age, the slight variations that do occur are only in respect of spelling and do not affect the doctrine, prophecy or historical facts. So the work of the archaeologist confirms in a remarkable way the truth and reliability of the Bible and thus, indirectly, that it is the production of Divine inspiration.

PROPHECY PROVES THE BIBLE TRUE

God himself has chosen prophecy as a great proof of His infinite superiority over all other beings (Isaiah 46 v 9-10; Isaiah 42 v 9). The Bible speaks from time to time of events that would come to pass hundreds of years later. In Matthew 2 it is recorded that the wise men came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?' When Herod asked the chief priests this question, they at once replied, 'In Bethlehem of Judea' because hundreds of years before it had been prophesied in one of the books of the Old Testament (Micah 5 v 2).

In addition to prophecies about Jesus Christ, there are many relating to ancient nations and, in particular, to the Jews. Many of the ancient nations have disappeared from world affairs but the Bible said that the Jews would survive. The Jewish people still survive today in spite of many efforts to destroy them (Jeremiah 30 v 10-11). If the Bible had been of mere human production, at any time in history such a declaration could have been found false. The Jews are still with us today with their own state, Israel, and its capital city Jerusalem now in their complete control.

The Bible gives us the reasons for these facts. This is a powerful proof that the Bible is Divinely inspired and therefore infallible.

SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE REASONS FOR BELIEVING THE BIBLE TO BE INSPIRED

1. The unity of its message in spite of the number of writers who worked over a great period of time.
2. Its miraculous preservation.
3. The evidence of the discoveries of the archaeologist
4. The fulfilment of Bible prophecies - (further examples will be given in later lessons).

CONDITIONS TO BE MET

If we are to understand the Bible, Jesus said we must become teachable as little children Matthew 11 v 25. We must want to find out for ourselves the truth and wisdom of God's Word (Proverbs 2 v 3-6).

We must believe that God will reward us in our search (Hebrews 11 v 6).

We must be willing to bring our lives into harmony with God's commandments.

Jesus said, 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them' (John 13 v 17).

and 'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 7 v 21).

The Apostle Paul wrote,

'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2 v 12).

HOW SHALL WE STUDY THE BIBLE

As with any course of study, regular, planned reading is the most helpful. To begin, follow the suggestions for study enclosed with this lesson.

The Bible itself is its own best interpreter. Always consider passages in their context and compare scripture with scripture.

As you go through this course, you will see that every basic belief is supported by clear and positive scripture. With this foundation all apparently 'difficult' or 'contradictory' verses can be explained or harmonised.

A concordance, marginal references or Bible commentaries can sometimes be helpful, but it must be remembered that the compilers of these were not guided by Divine inspiration. If their conclusions contradict the teaching of scripture, they are in error (Isaiah 8 v 20).

The purpose of this course of lessons is to help you to understand the Bible for yourself, so that you may accept it as it is, the Word of God, offering the hope of everlasting life to all who will hear and obey it.

PASSAGES FOR BIBLE READING

11 Timothy 3 11 Peter 1 Luke 24 Isaiah 8 v 20 Acts 28 v 23-31 Ephesians 4 v 21-32

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