

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

THE NEED FOR REVELATION FROM GOD

Once the existence of God has been established, it makes sense to think that such a Creator-God would want to communicate with His creation. Mankind shows evidence of high intelligence, kindness, goodness, justice, and many other unique characteristics. It is impossible for the Creator to be inferior to His creation in any way, since the effect never is greater than the cause. God, therefore, would exhibit—to a much greater degree than the beings He created—intelligence, kindness, goodness, justice, etc. Thus, some form of personal communication between the intelligent Creator and His intelligent creature should be expected. Without communication from God, how could mankind ever come to know, or appreciate, certain aspects of the Creator, or understand what the Creator might require of the humans He had made? Furthermore, some form of revelation from the Creator would be needed in order to instruct mankind in certain areas, such as the following.

The Character of God. While something of God’s power and wisdom can be seen in the vastness and marvelous intricacies of the creation itself, a more concrete communication is needed to explain the exact nature of His character.

The Origin of Evil. As mankind found itself adrift in a sea of evil, pain, and suffering, the question eventually would arise: Why? That is why man needed to be educated concerning the exact reason(s) for his predicament.

Mankind’s Origin. Without a revelation from God, men might come to the conclusion that they came from “accidental forces of nature” rather than from an all-powerful Creator. The confusion of modern-day evolutionary theories is evidence of this.

Mankind’s Purpose. Man—left to his own ideas—never could understand completely the purpose for his creation. With no real understanding of his role, and no immediate or future goals, he would wander aimlessly in a sea of uncertainty.

Mankind’s Destiny. If there were no divine revelation, man never would know with certainty anything about life beyond this one. He therefore might conclude incorrectly—as many have in every generation—that this life is all there is. If God never communicated to His creation about life after death, mankind would live in utter despair and constant fear of dying.

THE TWO TYPES OF REVELATION

A revelation from God might take almost any form. God could choose to communicate with His creation directly by word of mouth, through messengers (like angels), or through dreams and visions. Or, for that matter, He could choose any way that suited Him. Historically speaking there have been two different types of revelation. **General** (or natural) revelation designates the revelation that God has provided of Himself in nature (see Romans 1:20-21, Acts 14:17, and Psalm 19:1). **Special** (or supernatural) revelation is the name that designates the revelation God has provided within the Bible.

General Revelation

General revelation comes to man through nature. The first six verses of Psalm 19 declare that God has given a revelation of Himself in nature that constantly testifies of the Creator. In Romans 1:20, Paul stated that “the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived **through the things that are made**, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse.”

The Scriptures teach that general revelation is universal. At no time in history has God left Himself without a witness of Himself (Acts 14:17). General revelation is universal in both scope and territory. God’s glory can be seen whenever and wherever a heavenly body is observed. It can be seen in the glistening of a gorgeous afternoon rainbow or in the sweet waters of a gently flowing brook through a rainforest. Though men often refuse to recognize and accept God’s revelation of Himself in nature, it abides nevertheless.

Special Revelation

If God desired to ensure long-term results in regard to His communication with mankind, He could do that by providing a revelation that was both permanent and easily accessible. That is to say, it would withstand the test of time, and could be passed from generation to generation throughout human history. This might be accomplished by producing the revelation in a written form that could be copied and distributed as needed, thus benefiting all people throughout the ages.

Now we must ask the question: Is there any evidence that mankind has been given such a revelation? Yes, there is. The evidence clearly establishes that God has given mankind a permanent revelation in written form in the book known as the Bible. In the next lesson, we will study the evidence which proves that the Bible is the revelation of the Creator. For the rest of this lesson, however, we will look at what the Bible contains and how it is arranged.

The Unity of the Bible

The Bible shows a unity that—on purely human terms—is impossible to explain. In order to appreciate that unity, one first must come to terms with how the Book was put together. The Bible was written by more than forty different men from a wide variety of backgrounds. Nehemiah was a royal butler. Peter was a fisherman. Luke was a physician. Matthew was a tax collector. Solomon was a king. Moses was a shepherd. And Paul was a tentmaker. These men wrote from almost every human condition. Jeremiah wrote from deep sorrow as a result of God’s people refusing to remain faithful to Him. David wrote from heights of joy on the rolling, grassy hills of Judah. Paul wrote from the very pits of despair as he languished in a Roman prison. These 40+ men wrote in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), from at least two continents (Europe and Asia), over a period of time that spanned approximately 1,600 years (1500 B.C. to A.D. 100). And they covered a variety of topics that included psychology, geography, religion, history, medicine, and many others.

All this being true, one might expect that a group of men who were so different, writing on such unrelated subjects, over such a lengthy period of time, would have produced a book that was a tangled mishmash of inconsistencies, errors, and absurdities. Yet this is not the case. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The Bible shows such astounding harmony, such consistent flow, and such amazing unity that no naturalistic explanation can account for it. It is as if the Bible were a magnificent symphony orchestrated by a single Conductor. The “musicians” each may have played a different instrument, in a different place, at a different time, but when the talented Conductor combined the individual efforts, the end result was a striking masterpiece.

Consider this analogy. Suppose you assembled forty contemporary scholars with the highest academic training possible in a single field of study (for example, professors with Ph.D. degrees in world history). Suppose, further, that you placed them in a room and asked each of them to write a twenty-five page paper on a single topic—the causes of World War I. What kind of agreement do you think would exist when all of their papers were finished? Likely, these forty scholars would not agree on numerous points; their papers would be recognized more for the **dis**agreements they contained than for the agreements. But when we examine the Bible’s writers, we see that they did not all live at the same time, did not all work together, and sometimes did not know one another. Most were not highly trained, and what training they did have certainly was not in the same field of study. Nor were they allowed to write on a single subject. Yet they produced a book that is unified from beginning to end. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles and 1 and 2 Kings agree with one another in numerous historical events. Joshua 1 confirms Deuteronomy 34. Judges 1:1 verifies Joshua 24:27-33. And so on. This fascinating unity, which

can be seen throughout the entire Bible, confirms the fact that there was a guiding Intelligence behind it. So many writers, over so many years, covering so many themes, simply could not have been in such astonishing agreement by mere coincidence.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BIBLE

The Old Testament

The Bible is divided into two major sections—the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word “testament” means a covenant or agreement. Therefore, the Old Testament was God’s old covenant with mankind, while the New Testament is God’s new agreement with humanity.

There are 39 books in the Old Testament. The original Old Testament documents were written mostly in the Hebrew language (with small parts in Aramaic). Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament (known collectively as the Pentateuch) in approximately 1500 B.C. Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, was written around 450 B.C.

The first book of the Old Testament is named Genesis. Appropriately, its name means “beginning,” since it records the beginning of the Universe and everything in it. Adam and Eve were the first people God created (on day six of His creative activity). They lived in the beautiful Garden of Eden, where they were free to do many things—except eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (read Genesis 2:16-17).

One day, Satan, who appeared in the form of a serpent, tricked Eve into eating the fruit. Eve took the fruit to Adam and, although he was not tricked (1 Timothy 2:14), he, too, ate the fruit. This is how sin first entered the world. In fact, about 1600 years after Adam and Eve were ejected from the Garden of Eden, people had become such terrible sinners that the Bible says: “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). Because of man’s wickedness, God sent a flood that covered the entire Earth. Only Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives were spared, along with seven of every kind of clean animal and two of every kind of unclean animal.

After the Flood, humans began to repopulate the Earth. Most of these people sinned by worshiping many different gods (a concept known as “polytheism”) instead of the one true God. Eventually, God chose a man by the name of Abraham to become the father of a new nation of people who worshiped only Him as the true and living God. Abraham believed God and did as he was instructed. Some time later, God blessed him and his wife Sarah with a son named Isaac. Isaac then had a son named Jacob, and Jacob (whose name later

was changed to Israel) had twelve sons who became the heads of what came to be known as the twelve tribes of Israel.

In time, Jacob and his sons migrated to the land of Egypt, where, unfortunately, they became slaves. Even so, God blessed them and allowed them to multiply greatly during their sojourn in the land of the pharaohs. Eventually, after the Israelites had spent hundreds of years of bondage in Egypt, God sent Moses and his brother Aaron to set the Israelites free. When they left the land of Egypt, God gave them a special law that separated them from all other nations around them. The Pentateuch explains how Abraham became the father of the Jewish nation, how the Jews became the chosen people of God, and how God gave the Old Law to Moses to present to the Jews. The Ten Commandments represented the major rules that the Jews were supposed to follow under the Old Law (although there were many others as well).

The rest of the Old Testament records the history of the Jews, including the fact that they begged God for a king so that they could be like the nations around them. Once they had kings, they were led in the wrong direction spiritually, and eventually returned to worshiping many different gods (1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles). God sent numerous prophets to the Jews to urge them to come back to their Creator, but they were a stubborn, rebellious people who refused to listen (Isaiah-Malachi).

Since the Jews misused and ignored the Old Law, and since many of the prophets' efforts had been in vain, God promised that He would send a new prophet. Moses said: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear" (Deuteronomy 18:15). This new Prophet would arrive with a new law: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31).

The Jews of Old Testament times waited anxiously for a Messiah Who was prophesied to bring salvation and institute that new covenant. But He was not supposed to be a strong military leader or powerful political activist. In fact, the prophet Isaiah said that He would be "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). Instead, He was to be a Savior who would be put to death for the sins of His people in order to satisfy God's demand for justice (53:5). The prophet Isaiah wrote of this Messiah: "I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). Thus, under the new law to be established through the Messiah (His Son, Jesus), God would allow people from any nation—not just the Jews—to be His chosen people.

The New Testament

There are 27 books in the New Testament. Matthew is the first, and Revelation is the last. These 27 books are divided into 4 major sections.

The Gospel Accounts. The word gospel means “good news.” The first four books of the New Testament are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are known as the gospel accounts, because they tell the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Since the story of Jesus is good news for sinful humanity, it is known as the gospel.

History. This section of the New Testament has only one book—Acts. Acts was written by Luke, and tells about the “acts” of the apostles, the beginning of the church, and its early history. After Jesus returned to heaven, His followers went all over the world preaching the good news of His life, death, and resurrection. Because of their preaching, God’s Word spread throughout the whole world and the church that Jesus had promised to build (Matthew 16:18) spread like wildfire.

The Epistles. “Epistle” is another word for a letter. When the apostles preached the gospel around the world, many churches were started in various cities. The apostles and other writers needed a way to explain to these churches how to worship and how to live. So they wrote them letters. For instance, the book of Romans is a letter written to the church at Rome. Sometimes these epistles were written to an individual (like 1 and 2 Timothy, which are letters written by the apostle Paul to his helper, Timothy). These epistles were written to people who already were Christians, yet who needed some encouragement, answers to questions, spiritual instruction, and yes, even discipline.

The apostle Paul wrote many of the epistles in the New Testament. In fact, of the 27 books in the New Testament, He wrote 13 epistles (just under half of the entire New Testament).

Prophecy. This section has only one book—Revelation. The reason it is called a prophetic book is because it told the people in the first century things that were going to happen to them in the future. Most of the things discussed in Revelation already have occurred. Unfortunately, many people today misuse this book to make inaccurate and untrue predictions regarding the end of time. When reading Revelation, it is important to remember two things: (1) it uses a lot of symbolic language (much of which comes from the Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezekiel because the Jews would understand it while their enemies would not); and (2) nothing in it contradicts the rest of the Bible.

The New Testament was completed about 550 years after Malachi (the last book of the Old Testament). However, the New Testament picks up right

where the Old Testament left off. All of the prophets had been telling about the coming a Messiah Who would save the world from its sin and establish a spiritual kingdom. The entire Jewish nation was waiting for this Messiah. The four gospel accounts tell the story of Jesus, and prove by His miracles and teachings that He indeed was the prophesied Savior.

The rest of the New Testament outlines the new covenant that Jesus established. No longer would people offer animal sacrifices such as bulls and goats (as they did in the Old Testament) in order to receive forgiveness of their sins. Under Jesus' new covenant, His own death on the cross would be the only sacrifice that could forgive sins. It is very important to understand that the new covenant (New Testament) took the place of the old covenant (Old Testament). That is why the writer of the book of Hebrews said: "In that He says, 'a new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (8:13). The Old Testament is a wonderful set of books that can teach people today many amazing things about God. In fact, the Old Testament prepared the world for Jesus, the coming Messiah. But after Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected, God created a new system and established a new covenant with mankind. The details of that new covenant are found in the New Testament—the only place mankind can go to find salvation.

CONCLUSION

Since 1947, the United Bible Society has distributed over 9 billion Bibles in whole or in part. Portions of the Bible are available in 2,900 different languages, and the entire New Testament can be read in over 1,100 languages. The Bible has been distributed in over 200 different countries. In the United States, it has been the best seller for more years than any book every produced. Each book of the Bible complements the others in a single, unified plan. From Genesis to Revelation, there is a marvelous unfolding of the general theme of man's fall from his holy estate, God's plan for his redemption (as carefully worked out across the centuries), the sinless life and atoning death of Jesus Christ, and the ultimate victory of the Christian system. In essence, then, the Bible is the story of one problem—sin—with one solution, Jesus Christ.



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Questions—Lesson 7

TRUE OR FALSE

Write TRUE or FALSE in the blanks before the following statements.

- _____ 1. It makes sense that a Creator would want to communicate with His creation.
- _____ 2. A revelation from God might take any form.
- _____ 3. A written revelation could benefit mankind throughout the ages.
- _____ 4. None of the books of the Bible shows any unity.
- _____ 5. The Bible was written by four men.
- _____ 6. The Bible was written over a period of about 1,600 years.
- _____ 7. Adam was the very first man.
- _____ 8. Pain and sin entered the world because God put them there from the beginning.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the correct answer(s).

- 1. About how many men wrote the books of Bible?
 - (a) 4000
 - (b) 400
 - (c) 40
 - (d) 4
- 2. Which of the following is the last book in the Old Testament?
 - (a) Genesis
 - (b) Malachi
 - (c) Exodus
 - (d) Psalms
- 3. Most of the Old Testament tells the history of which nation?
 - (a) Jews
 - (b) Greeks
 - (c) Egyptians
 - (d) Assyrians
- 4. How many books are in the New Testament?
 - (a) 36
 - (b) 87
 - (c) 29
 - (d) 27

5. Which of the following words means “letter”?
- (a) Scribe (b) Hebrew
(c) Epistle (d) Scroll

FILL IN THE BLANKS

- There are _____ books in the Old Testament.
- The entire _____ nation was waiting for the _____.
- Each book of the _____ complements the others in a _____ unified _____.
- Yes, evidence does exist to _____ that God has given _____ His revelation in the written form known as the Bible.
- The word “testament” means a _____ or _____.

MATCHING

Write the letter and phrase under its proper heading. A sample has been provided for you.

Whole Bible	New Testament	Old Testament
_____	A. 27 Books	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A. 27 Books | I. Written by about 40 men |
| B. 39 Books | J. Last book is Malachi |
| C. 66 Books | K. Has two major sections |
| D. History of the Jews | L. Tells the story of Noah |
| E. God’s New Covenant | M. Contains four Gospel Accounts |
| F. Matthew is first book | N. Shows absolute unity |
| G. God’s Old Covenant | O. Tells of Jesus’ miracles |
| H. Written over 1,600 years | |

NOTES/COMMENTS

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