

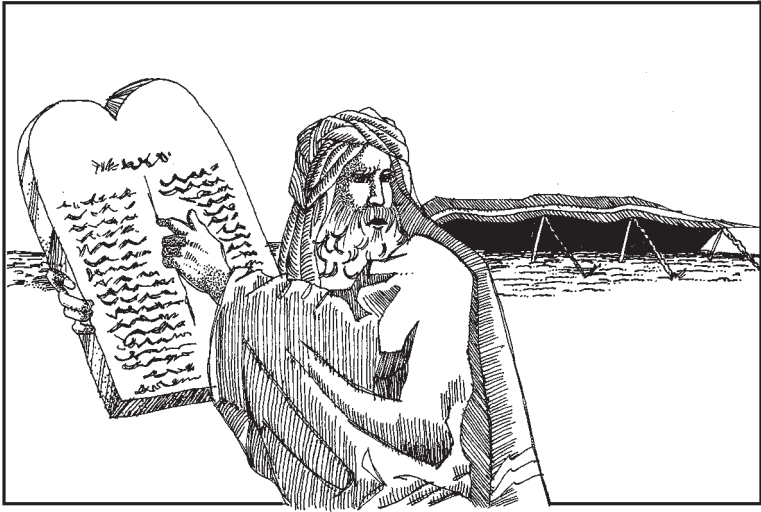
Lesson 8

The Scriptures: God's Written Revelation

In the preceding lessons we have learned many facts about the nature of God, the nature of man, the origin and nature of sin, angels and their activities, and God's plan for the redemption of fallen man. You have surely noticed that the major source for all of these doctrines has been the Bible, the Holy Scriptures. It is God's written revelation of Himself and of His creation.

It is reasonable to believe that a sovereign, loving, righteous, personal God would want to reveal Himself to His rational creatures through a written record. It is awesome to realize that He chose to use men who were in submission to His will as the human authors of the Scriptures. It is inspiring to study the facts about how the written records of more than 40 men over a period of some 1600 years were divinely preserved and are contained in our Bible.

As we begin our study of Unit 3, we shall first consider the revelation of God's redemptive purpose as recorded in the Scriptures. Second, we will review evidences which give us the assurance that the Bible is indeed God's holy Word. Then we shall examine the church, the structure God uses to call unsaved people to Himself, nurture them in the faith, and make them into effective witnesses. In the final lesson of this course, we shall study the goals of redemption as we consider the future.



lesson outline

The Need for a Written Revelation
The Inspiration of the Scriptures
The Exclusiveness of the Scriptures
The Interpreting of the Scriptures
The Authority of the Scriptures

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- Define terms related to the inspiration of the Scriptures.
- State why a written revelation from God is needed.
- Explain what is meant by the *exclusiveness* and *authority* of the Scriptures.
- Discuss the place of authority that the Scriptures should have in the life of believers and in the church.
- Understand the importance of correctly interpreting the Scriptures.

learning activities

1. Study the lesson according to the procedure given in Lesson 1. Be sure to read all Scripture references included in the lesson development as you come to them, and answer all study questions carefully.
2. Find in the glossary any key words that are new to you, and study the definitions.
3. Take the self-test and check your answers.

key words

apocalyptic	doctrine	inspiration
authoritative	elevating	oral traditions
autographs	epistles	preserved
canon	exclusiveness	reliable
disclosure	illuminates	revelation
distorted	inconsistency	validate

lesson development

THE NEED FOR A WRITTEN REVELATION

Objective 1. *Identify statements that explain why it was necessary for God to provide a written revelation of Himself.*

Most of us have poor memories. If God were to reveal Himself to me face-to-face at a specific point in my life, I would soon be uncertain about some of the details of His revelation. Before long my memory of the event would fade. Perhaps I would be able to recall some parts of His revelation vividly, but I'm sure that the details would be unclear and unreliable. If I were to repeat all the details to one of my children immediately following the revelation, it is very unlikely that he would remember everything I said. If he were to pass the information on to his children years later, the passage of time would dim his memory and distort the story. You can see that this method of sharing God's revelation would not be very reliable.

The *oral traditions* of man, those stories which are passed from one generation to the next, may change greatly as they are handed down. Thus, it is clear that this method of learning about God and His purposes would not be reliable.

Our great and wise God shows His love for us through His provisions for us. He has provided for our physical survival in many ways, such as through His wonderful design of the water cycle which replenishes and purifies the earth's water supply. No less marvelous is His method for replenishing oxygen in the atmosphere. As we breathe, we exhale carbon dioxide, while plants release oxygen into the air. We inhale the oxygen released by the plants and they take in the carbon dioxide, with which they manufacture their food.

If God provided so carefully for our *physical* nature, He certainly would not expect us to work out our *spiritual* problems without help. Without a revelation from God, natural man would not even be aware of his hopeless condition and his need of help. In order to understand why a revelation from God is necessary, we need to know what the word *revelation* means in relation to God. It means that God *reveals* or *discloses* to people what they could not otherwise know about Him and His purposes. Be sure to remember this definition, as well as other key words we shall highlight in this lesson.

1 Write the definition of the term "revelation" as it relates to God. Use your notebook for this response.

Since God is great and loving, and since man needs help so desperately in order to resolve his sin problem, we would expect God to communicate clearly to man who He is and what He wants man to do. Furthermore, it would be most logical to ensure that this revelation would be protected so that people could have this knowledge without it being distorted in any way. Thus, as we could expect, God provided for His revelation to be preserved in written form for very good reasons.

- 2** Circle the letter in front of each **TRUE** statement.
- a** It was necessary for God to provide a written revelation of Himself so that people could know what He expects of them.
 - b** Oral tradition is the most reliable way to pass God's revelation from one generation to another.
 - c** Oral tradition is preferred over written records because it can be kept up-to-date and changed to suit man's needs.
 - d** Written records give us a certain standard that preserves accurately what happened so that we don't lose or forget what took place.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Inspiration Defined

Objective 2. *Define and list evidences of the inspiration of the Scriptures.*

We believe that the Scriptures are God's infallible (without error) revelation of Himself and His purposes in the lives of men. They were written by human authors under the *inspiration* of the Holy Spirit. They are God's written communication of divine truth that can be discovered only as God reveals them to man.

By *the Scriptures* we are referring to the writings we know as the Old and New Testaments, the 66 books of the Bible. (Some include the apocryphal books in the scriptural canon and thus recognize a larger body of sacred writings.)

By *inspiration* we mean an operation of the Holy Spirit in which He guided or supervised the authors of the Scriptures in the selection of the materials to be included and the words they wrote. It was a special enablement for a special task. God placed in the minds and hearts of the writers of Scripture what He wanted them to express. They wrote under the management or direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit kept the writers from all error and all omission in recording what God wanted them to say. Yet it is remarkable that God used the personality of the human authors in recording His revelation. The style or vocabulary of each book contained in the Scriptures is unique to its author and his human character.

The human authors were not necessarily conscious of the fact that what they were writing was to be a part of the recorded divine revelation. Nevertheless, as inspiration came, they wrote obediently, and they were not in doubt about what words to use. God impressed upon Luke, for example, the need to research and investigate all the eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus so that he could write an orderly account (Luke 1:1-4). Paul often wrote to answer questions of the churches, to give teachings that were needed by the churches, and to send instructions to individuals (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 7:1; Galatians 1:6-7; 1 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 10). Yet everything He wrote was through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Two portions of Scripture in the New Testament give us valuable insight into the kind of inspiration the writers had. Paul says that "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). That is, it is inspired by God. Peter makes this statement:

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 Peter 1:20-21).

The authors themselves often speak of their own inspiration or the inspiration experienced by other writers of the Scriptures. They speak of this by saying that *God spoke to them*.

3 Find the Scriptures listed below and state what each says to indicate that God spoke through a human author:

- a** Exodus 17:14
- b** Exodus 24:4
- c** Isaiah 43:1
- d** Jeremiah 11:1
- e** Amos 1:3,6,9
- f** 1 Corinthians 14:37
- g** 2 Peter 3:15-16

Thus, we see that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit upon human authors in the writing of the Scriptures was a *special enablement for a specific task*.

4 Select the correct completions to this statement: *The inspiration of the Scriptures* refers to

- a) any kind of creative work based upon a biblical theme.
- b) a specific enablement of the Holy Spirit for a specific task.
- c) every idea and every act recorded in Scripture as being inspired of God.
- d) the guidance of the Holy Spirit upon selected men chosen to record God's revelation of Himself and His plan.
- e) the style and vocabulary of human authors of the Scriptures.
- f) all of the content of the Scriptures, including the materials chosen to be included and the words selected.

Evidences of Inspiration

Let's turn now to an examination of the evidences of inspiration. We will consider Jesus' approval of Old Testament Scriptures, fulfillment of Bible prophecy, and the unity of biblical themes.

1. *Jesus demonstrated respect for and approval of the Old Testament.* Jesus indicated His feelings about the Old Testament in three ways. First, He affirmed that they are to stand forever (see Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 10:26; 21:22; John 10:35). Second, He said that the Scriptures speak about Him (Matthew 26:24; Mark 9:12; Luke 18:31; 24:44; John 5:39). Third, Jesus showed that He accepted the authority of the Old Testament by quoting from it (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; 21:13; 26:31).

Have you noticed that Jesus never pointed out any phrases or teachings of the Old Testament as being false or unworthy? Surely He would have said something about any part of the Old Testament that was not inspired. Rather, He demonstrated a total acceptance of the sacred writings which the Jews themselves accepted as inspired of God. The reverence and approval of Jesus for the Old Testament Scriptures, and His own use of them, are strong evidence of their supernatural inspiration.

2. *Bible prophecy has been fulfilled.* The Bible is more than a book written by gifted authors. The fulfillment of many of its predictions with such complete accuracy points to the involvement of the Holy Spirit. In no way could these events have been foreseen by the intelligent reasoning of man. Yet

many of them have already had a striking fulfillment, and the balance will be fulfilled in due time.

The place of Jesus' birth. The little town in which the Messiah was to be born was singled out by the prophet Micah about 700 years before the event: "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" (Micah 5:2). Just imagine all that took place to get Joseph and Mary to that town. From a purely human point of view, one might say that they almost didn't make it! Very shortly after they arrived, Jesus was born. The Holy Spirit in His omniscience knew that the divine King would not be born in Jerusalem, but in the small town of Bethlehem.

The betrayal of Jesus. I am amazed that the fact of Jesus' betrayal was predicted by the Psalmist more than 1000 years before Jesus' birth. Who could possibly have foreseen that the Anointed One many generations longed to see, the One who would bring salvation to Israel, the One designated by God to rule forever, would be betrayed by a friend and associate. Yet, there it is for all to read: "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9).

The manner of His death. A third prediction that astonishes me suggests a form of execution for the Chosen One that was not in use in Israel when David wrote Psalm 22. The Jews in David's time stoned criminals who were condemned to die. Psalm 22 predicted a different method: ". . . they have pierced my hands and my feet" (v. 16). This would sound very strange to Jewish ears, but it fits perfectly the picture of a Roman crucifixion.

Prophecy also provides details of the crucifixion. You may remember that God gave special instructions to Moses about the preparations of His people for their departure out of Egypt. The Passover lamb had to be killed and its blood sprinkled over the door. Also, the meat was to be specially prepared; it had to be roasted whole. God probably had a number of reasons for this instruction, but one was made perfectly clear; *no bones were to*

be broken. If they boiled the meat, bones would have to be broken so that the pieces would fit into their pots. The Holy Spirit knew that Israel's Passover lamb was a type of the perfect Passover Lamb. Thus, the prophetic word stated 1000 years before His birth that He would be bruised, pierced and maligned, but *not one of his bones would be broken* (compare Isaiah 52:13-15 and 53:1-12 with Psalm 34:20).

5 Read John 19:31-37 and state in your notebook what we learn about the prophecies we have just discussed.

Other prophecies. Many other prophecies have come to pass in ways that cannot be explained away as mere coincidence. Look at the large number that are beginning to come to pass before our eyes in the rebirth of Israel as a nation-state (see Isaiah 35:1-2; Ezekiel 37; Zechariah 8:7-8; 10:9). So many predictions from the book of Daniel have come to pass that liberal critics have tried to claim that it is really a historical record, and not a prophecy. They have been unsuccessful. Modern scholars continue to discover new evidence that Daniel lived in the time of the Babylonian captivity, and that the revelation he received of the future was recorded during those years.

3. *The Bible has a miraculous unity of themes.* Although written by about 40 authors over a period of some 1600 years, the books of the Bible present one overriding theme: *God's redemption of man through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.* In the Scriptures there is but one doctrinal system, one moral standard, one plan of salvation, and one divine plan of the ages. The books, instead of conflicting with one another and confusing the theme, serve to fill out and complete each other in a harmonious way. A marvelous series of unfolding revelations move along a dramatic course that reaches its breathtaking climax in the final triumph over Satan. Books of the Bible as different as Leviticus and John produce but one story, one theme, one work. The four Gospels give us details about the life of Christ, and each of them sheds light on a different aspect of His character and ministry. Yet together they are a unified whole.

- 6** Without referring to the preceding section, answer these questions in your notebook.
- a** List three evidences of the inspiration of the Scriptures.
 - b** How did Jesus show that He accepted the authority of the Old Testament?
 - c** Give an example of a Bible prophecy that has been fulfilled.
 - d** What is the major theme of the Bible that is carried through from Genesis to Revelation?

THE EXCLUSIVENESS OF THE SCRIPTURES

Objective 3. *State the criteria for the exclusiveness of Old and New Testament canons, and identify statements concerning the canon of Scriptures.*

When we speak of the *exclusiveness* of the Scriptures, we mean that the Bible is God's *complete* written revelation of divine truth. We have seen that God used a number of human authors to record His revelation. We have also discussed the time involved in the completion of the divine disclosure. We come quite naturally, then, to two important issues: 1) When was the revelation completed? 2) What does the divine revelation include? Let's turn now to an examination of these matters.

The Completion of Divine Revelation

We have considered Jesus' attitude toward the Old Testament—He showed His approval by quoting it extensively. However, as He neared the end of His earthly ministry, He indicated that He had much more truth to reveal to His disciples:

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 16:12-15).

In this passage we see that additional truth would be revealed by the Holy Spirit. This truth would include *future events* (“what is yet to come”), *guidance and illumination* (“taking from what is mine and making it known to you”), and further *doctrine* (“into all truth”) essential for living in a way *pleasing to God* (“He will bring glory to me”).

Included in Jesus’ statement are two things of great importance:

1. He promised that the Holy Spirit would complete the revelation by guiding His followers into all truth (v.13). He would enable them to understand and apply the teachings of Jesus.

2. He referred to the New Testament revelation before it was disclosed to the human writers and recorded. You might say that He *validated* it in advance. To *validate* means to declare as approved and authoritative. In this way, the work of the writers of the Gospels, the book of Acts, the Epistles, and the book of Revelation was predicted, explained, and approved.

Writers such as Paul indicate that what they wrote was received by revelation. Speaking of his experience in Ephesians 3:1-12, the apostle says that he and the other apostles and prophets received divine revelation of previously unknown truth. Peter also recognized the value of what the Holy Spirit revealed and inspired to be recorded (2 Peter 1:20-21). In 2 Peter 3:15-16 he referred to recorded doctrinal teaching of the apostle Paul as *the Scriptures*.

By A.D. 64 or 65, most of the Gospel accounts and the Epistles had been written and were in circulation among the churches. Then, some 25 or 30 years later, the apostle John received the Revelation. The Holy Spirit, having enabled the apostle to receive this revelation, then seems to have completed the divine revelation. Now that the Scriptures are complete, we are not to add to or take away from them. God progressively revealed His will and purpose over a period of some 1600 years. We need no more. God has said all that He wants to say to us concerning Himself and His plan for us.

This means that the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit that brought into being the Word of God in written form is not available to us today. It was exclusively for the writers of the

Scriptures. We can be inspired by God to contribute to the advancement of His kingdom, but not to His written revelation. Having read, studied, and applied the teaching of the Scriptures, we can say with certainty that truly God has spoken *clearly* and *consistently* to us. He has revealed *completely* what He wanted to communicate. Nothing more is needed or intended.

It is important for us to recognize that God continues to speak to His church today. Through the gift of prophecy, the Spirit continues to declare to believers the mind of God. However, all such prophecy, if it is to be received, must harmonize with the Word, edifying, exhorting, and comforting believers (1 Corinthians 14:3). It is no substitute for, nor can it be in contradiction with, the revelation given in the Apostolic Age as general direction for the church.

7 We have seen that Jesus validated the Old Testament Scriptures by quoting them often in His ministry. Answer these questions regarding the New Testament Scriptures in your notebook.

- a** What Scripture text reveals to us that Jesus validated the New Testament Scriptures in advance?
- b** What did Jesus tell us the additional truth to be revealed would include?
- c** State two texts which reveal that the apostles themselves recognized that what they were writing was divine revelation.

8 Why is it important for us to know that God's written revelation the Bible, is the complete revelation of God? Use your notebook for this response.

The Canon of Scriptures

Nearly 2000 years have passed since the last scriptural revelation. It included God's redemptive program as it was first revealed in the Old Testament and His final invitation to man in the New Testament.

You may ask, "How were the many records of revealed truth brought together to form one book? When was the task undertaken? What agency, institution, or individuals are responsible for the formation of the Bible?" We will now consider these questions.

The Formation of the Old Testament

We call the 39 books of the Old Testament a *canon*. The word comes from the Greek word *kanon* which originally meant “a reed or rod.” It later came to mean a “measuring rod, a rule or standard.” As it applies to the Scriptures, *canon* refers to books which have been measured according to certain criteria and found to satisfy all the requirements for them to be approved as God’s inspired revelation.

To review briefly, the beginning of God’s revelation was recorded by Moses around 1450 B.C. The final Old Testament disclosure was recorded around the end of the fifth century B.C. Moses is credited with authorship of the first five books of the Old Testament, which are often referred to as the books of *the Law*. Next in the Hebrew Bible were *the Prophets*. These included the books that were disclosed to men who occupied the prophetic office. The third division of books, called *the Writings*, includes three groups: 1) books written for specific occasions such as feasts (for example, *Esther* was read at the feast of Purim); 2) poetical books (Psalms, Proverbs, and Job); and 3) non-prophetical historical books (Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, which were written by men who did not occupy the prophetic office, although Daniel did exercise the prophetic gift). The books which made up the Hebrew Bible are the same 39 which we recognize as the Old Testament.

Evidence from the Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 95) indicates that the books of the Old Testament were brought together under the direction of Ezra and the members of the Great Synagogue in the fifth century before Christ. The 39 books which were included in the three categories we have mentioned—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—were held by the people of God to be divinely inspired and their only rule for faith and conduct. Records of discussions at the teaching house in Jamnia, Palestine, between A.D. 70 and 100 recognize the existence of the canon of 39 books which we call the Old Testament.

The Formation of the New Testament

In the last two centuries before Christ, Israel suffered terrible oppression and persecution at the hands of foreign nations.

People were wondering, "Why does God not intervene? Is there no hope that justice will be done?"

As if in response to these anxious inquiries, a body of literature emerged which we call *apocalyptic* (relating to the forecasting of world-shattering, violent events). Various books appeared which, it was claimed, were written by ancient biblical characters. These so called prophecies claimed that God would soon break into history in violent judgment, punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous. While this literature had some historical value, it was never recognized as being on the same level as the Scriptures by either Jews or the early church. An example of this type of literature is a group of writings called the *Apocrypha*.

Against this background, Jesus came to minister, die, be resurrected, and ascend to the Father. He came to bring hope and light to sin-darkened people; however, He neither punished the wicked nor rewarded the righteous. Instead, He established the church and challenged the believers to preach the gospel everywhere. He stated in particular that His followers were to preach all the things He had said (Matthew 28:20). Obviously, some written record of what He had said was needed.

As the early church grew numerically and spread out geographically, believers matured through the ministry of preaching the gospel. This ministry was begun by those who had walked with the Lord during His time on earth. As believers grew spiritually, questions arose concerning the practical application of God's grace to everyday problems, to cultural differences, to the demands of society, and to heresy (opinions or doctrines contrary to the accepted beliefs). Apostolic leaders responded to this need, writing letters of instruction (called *epistles*) that were circulated among the churches. It was apparent that these writings were initiated by the Holy Spirit and were accepted as sacred Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Then, as the apostles and first generation leaders and believers began to age, the Spirit moved certain writers to record the life of Christ (2 Peter 1:12-15). These records are called the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

We must remember that at the same time as the church was maturing, there were false "brethren," false "apostles," and

“antichrists” offering themselves and their doctrines to the church. (Read 2 Corinthians 11:12-15; Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1; Colossians 2; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 2:18-19; and Jude, which speak of this.) As the Scriptures circulated, so, too, did the various other kinds of literature. In the process of time, therefore, the church developed a means of recognizing divinely inspired Scripture and giving it the proper place in the church. This move, of course, set Scripture apart from all other literature.

The rule (or canon) for New Testament Scripture was this:

1. It must be either written or backed by an apostle.
2. Its contents must be of such spiritual character that it is recognized as divinely inspired.
3. It must be accepted universally by the church as divinely inspired.

Very early in the church’s existence the 27 books of the New Testament were measured by these criteria and informally judged to be inspired by God. This was made official when, on a formal basis, the Council of Carthage (a group of church leaders) announced in A.D. 397 that the New Testament canon of the Scriptures is the 27 books now included in the New Testament. Thus, the church council only verified at this later time what had already been evident to Spirit-directed believers.

9 State the approximate date and group responsible for canonizing the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

- a) Old Testament:
- b) New Testament:

10 State in your own words the three criteria for choosing the early church writings that were included in the New Testament canon. (Write your answer in your notebook.)

The Reliability of the Manuscripts

The special inspiration of the Holy Spirit under which the authors labored as they recorded God’s revelation applies to their original writings or manuscripts. We don’t have any of the original

manuscripts today; however, we do have many excellent copies of those documents. Since there are slight differences among the copies, we can't say correctly that God inspired every copy.

However, even in the matter of copying and passing on the sacred Scriptures, we see much evidence of God's protection and care. In fact, the preservation of the accurate text over so many generations is itself a miracle of divine providence. You might well ask, "How accurate *is* the text, since slight differences do occur from one copy to another?" To this question we can respond quite frankly and with great assurance, "It is entirely trustworthy! Such differences do not affect any doctrinal belief or teaching and do not change any of our understanding of God's revelation."

The fact is that many experts have spent years comparing the oldest manuscripts with each other and with other trustworthy ones. They have carried on extensive research. Recent discoveries of ancient copies of the biblical text near the Dead Sea have contributed a great deal to this work.

The results of all this scholarly investigation assure us that we have completely trustworthy texts. They indicate that the texts we now have in Hebrew and Greek are practically the same as the originals (called *autographs*), and that all of the important doctrines of both the Old and New Testaments are intact. God, who inspired the writing of His revelation to man, has preserved it over many generations. We can have confidence that our Bible is God's Word!

While the Bible indicates that a special inspiration of the Holy Spirit was required for the receiving of the divine revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21), we cannot conclude from the Bible that the same inspiration is available to those who translate, transmit, and copy the Scriptures. I do not wish to say by this that translations are unreliable. On the contrary, we do know that most translations today and historically have been and are subjected to the scrutiny of rigid scholarship. Most of them have been of an unusually high quality. However, I do want to make it clear that we cannot make any one translation our final authority in faith and conduct. We are wise to compare one version with another and consider the merits of each in the light of good scholarship.

- 11** Which of these statements are **TRUE** concerning the canon of Scriptures as discussed in this lesson?
- a** Since we no longer have the original manuscripts, we cannot be certain that the canon is the inspired Word of God.
 - b** The term *canon of Scripture* indicates that all of the books in the Bible have met this standard: they are divinely inspired.
 - c** We may accept with confidence the teachings of the Bible because God not only inspired its writing, but He has also preserved it through the centuries.
 - d** Not only did God inspire the writers of Scripture in a special way, but He also inspires scholars who translate the text into other languages, so that all translations are completely reliable.
 - e** Some apocalyptic literature, such as the Apocrypha, has been admitted into the canon of the Old Testament.
 - f** Our Old Testament is the same as the Hebrew Bible.
 - g** The Old Testament canon has 39 books, while the New Testament has 27.

THE INTERPRETING OF THE SCRIPTURES

Objective 4. *State the proper method for analyzing and interpreting Scripture.*

Perhaps as you have read the Scriptures, you have noticed that some particular verses and portions of Scripture do not appear to teach clearly the acts and purposes of God. Neither do they reveal what He expects of man. You may even have failed to find any mention of God. I often wondered, for example, what value the book of Ecclesiastes could have, and why it was included in God's Word. Many of its statements are in direct opposition to the teaching of other parts of the Scriptures. As you read this book, you will find that the theme "Everything is meaningless" (1:2) is woven through it.

When we come across these particular verses or portions of Scripture, we must analyze them carefully in order to interpret them correctly. We need to read what precedes and what follows these verses. In the case of Ecclesiastes, we are not to separate these statements from the rest of the book or the entire Bible and use them as the basis for our lives. We must read the book of

Ecclesiastes in its entirety in order to understand what is “meaningless.” When we come to the final chapter of this book, the message of the entire book becomes apparent. The author has pointed out quite clearly that *apart from God*, life is definitely useless and meaningless. Experience has taught him a lesson which he seeks to pass on to us in the form of helpful advice:

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth ...Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (12:1, 13-14).

This example teaches us a valuable principle: *All individual Scriptures must be analyzed and interpreted in the light of the teaching of the whole Bible*. If we learn and apply this principle, we will build our Christian life on a sound foundation. We dare not base our life and actions on any one isolated verse or text. If we do not follow this principle, we can get into serious trouble.

God helps us to understand the teachings of His word. His Holy Spirit not only inspired the men who wrote the Scripture, but He *illuminates* the minds of those who read it. This means the Spirit *enlightens* the mind of the believer to understand what he reads. Without the Spirit's help, no one can understand the Scriptures properly, because sin has darkened the mind. When the Holy Spirit dwells within us, He makes clear to us the truths found in God's Word, and He helps us to interpret it correctly. (See Romans 1:21; Ephesians 1:18; 4:18; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; and 1 John 2:20, 27).

We see, then, that the Bible is God's revelation to man. While some statements recorded in it appear to be contradictory, when interpreted in the light of the whole book or Bible, their meaning becomes clear. Moreover, the Holy Spirit enlightens our mind so that we may correctly interpret God's Word and understand the lessons God wants us to learn.

12 Complete the statement: All individual Scriptures must be analyzed and interpreted in the light and teachings of the

.....

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

Objective 5. *State what place of authority God's Word should have in our lives.*

A very important question arises when we study the Bible. What importance will we assign to it as far as our lives and wills are concerned? The Scriptures from beginning to end reveal God's feelings in this matter. *We learn that they are to be the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Early in His communications with people, God revealed His will and purpose. He also let His people know that He expected them to know His commandments and to act accordingly, "See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32). He even said He would test them to see if they understood His word and would obey it (Deuteronomy 13:3).

What if a prophet or interpreter of dreams came to your area and performed a miracle or fulfilled a promise in a special way. Would that make him a true prophet? Not unless what he says is in accord with what God has already taught in His Word (see Deuteronomy 13:1-3).

This principle is repeated throughout the Scriptures. We are not to be led astray by wonders, signs, miracles, that which is mere entertainment, or anything that will draw us away from the truths of God's Word.

The way for us to continue our relationship with Jesus is to live by His Word: "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love" (John 15:10). We can demonstrate our love for Christ by our obedience to His revealed will: "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14).

The Word of God is truth (John 17:17). We therefore must make it the highest authority of our personal and corporate church life. In many of our church buildings, we place the pulpit in the center of the platform because that is where the Word of God is preached. This illustrates what the Psalmist David said, "For you have exalted above all things your name and your word" (Psalm 138:2).

God's Word is to be foremost in every part of our lives. We are to place its teachings above that of family or friends. We are to pay attention to its warnings and its guidance. It must rule over our emotions.

How very important it is, therefore, to have sound Bible teaching in our churches. We must foster a love in the heart of the believer for the systematic study of God's Word. People should come together in God's house not because of programs or personalities, but because they love the Word of God.

*The grass withers and the flowers fall,
But the word of our God stands forever.*

—Isaiah 40:8

13 Based on what we have taught in this section, explain in your notebook what place of authority God's Word should have in our lives.

self-test**MATCHING.**

1 Match each term (right) with its definition (left).

- | | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| a | The passing down of unwritten stories from one generation to the next | 1) Apocalyptic literature |
| b | What happens when the Holy Spirit helps us to understand Scripture | 2) Autographs
3) Oral Tradition |
| c | The original manuscripts of Scripture | 4) Canon |
| d | A special act of the Holy Spirit in guiding human authors who wrote the books of the Bible | 5) Inspiration
6) Illumination
7) Revelation |
| e | God's self-disclosure and His acts that could not otherwise be known | |
| f | Writings characterized by the forecast of world-shattering, violent events | |
| g | The system of measurement according to certain criteria to determine which books were divinely inspired | |

TRUE-FALSE. Place a **T** in front of statements that are true and **F** in front of statements that are false.

- **2** The church is the final authority in matters of faith and conduct.
- **3** To understand the truths of God's Word we must carefully analyze and interpret what has been written in the light of the teachings of the whole Bible.
- **4** The inspiration of the Scriptures includes autographs, copies of autographs, translations, and versions.
- **5** We have assurance that our Bible is reliable as the inspired Word of God because we see evidence that God has preserved the accurate text over many generations.

- **6** All books accepted into the canon of Scriptures are recognized as divinely inspired.
- **7** The *exclusiveness* of the Scriptures means that in the 66 books of the Bible we have God's complete written revelation.

answers to study questions

- 7 a** John 16:12-15.
b Prophetic guidance and illumination and further doctrine.
c Ephesians 3:4-5, 9-10; 2 Peter 3:15-16; 2 Peter 1:20-21.
- 1** Revelation, as it relates to God, means that God reveals to people what they could not otherwise know about Him and His purposes.
- 8** Because we will know that we must reject any later so-called revelations, as they are not consistent with what God has already revealed, and they do not glorify Him.
- 2 a** True.
b False.
c False.
d True.
- 9 a)** About 500 B.C. by Ezra and members of the Great Synagogue.
b) A.D. 397 by the Council of Carthage.
- 3** (Quoting from the NIV):
a “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll . . .’”
b “Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said.”
c “But now, this is what the Lord says” (Isaiah is the writer).
d “This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord.”
e “This is what the Lord says.”
f “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.”
g “Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.” (Note in v. 16 that Peter recognizes what Paul wrote was *Scripture*.)
- 10** They must be written or backed by an apostle. The content must have spiritual character that shows it is divinely inspired. It must be accepted by the entire church as being divinely inspired.

- 4 b) a specific enablement
 - d) the guidance of the Holy Spirit
 - f) all of the content
- 11 a False.
- b True.
 - c True.
 - d False.
 - e False.
 - f True.
 - g True.
- 5 Although it was the custom to break the bones of those crucified to hasten their death, it was not necessary to break the bones of Jesus, as the soldiers found that He was already dead. So instead, they pierced His side with a spear.
- 12 whole or entire Bible.
- 6 a Jesus showed respect and approval for the Scriptures as God's Word; many Bible prophecies have already been fulfilled; there is a unity of themes in the Bible.
- b He quoted often from it.
 - c One example is the place of Jesus' birth which was foretold by Micah; another is the manner of His death, foretold by Isaiah and David.
 - d The redemption of man.
- 13 Your answer should be similar to this: The Bible, God's Word, should be our final authority in all matters of our faith (beliefs) and our conduct. It should guide our actions, thoughts, and emotions. We must study it faithfully and apply its teachings to our total lives.

Your Notes

