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# What Is the Bible?

**M**any books have been written throughout the history of mankind, and I can assure you that until the end comes, there will be many more.

Claiming that one book is the best of all time would start as much debate as asking a hip-hop head what's the best album of all time or who's the greatest emcee to grab the microphone! The answer to those questions are based on personal preference. However, the good news for Christians is that when we say the Bible is the greatest book of all time our claim is more than an opinion; it's a fact. It's in a class all by itself. Peep it, all other books have been written by people, but the Author of the Bible is God Himself.

To better understand why the Bible is one of a kind, let's unpack Bibliology, the study of the Bible. We will uncover:

- the meaning of the word *Bible*
- how God reveals Himself to humans
- how God used people to record His Word without error
- how the books of the Bible were chosen (canonization)
- how to study the Bible

*The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. Psalm 19:7-9*

## THE MEANING OF THE WORD *BIBLE*

*Bible* comes from the Greek word for paper scroll or book, *biblion*.<sup>1</sup> It contains 66 separate books (39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament). The Old Testament was written mainly in Hebrew, with some parts in a language called Aramaic.<sup>2</sup> The New Testament was written in Koine Greek.<sup>3</sup> *Koine* is used to describe the everyday language of the common person who lived in the area of the world dominated by Greece during the lifetime of Alexander the Great.

As Alexander conquered more and more territory, the language and culture of Greece spread. By God's sovereign plan, this took place in order to set up a worldwide platform for the preaching of the gospel (Galatians 4:4-5). In our day, we must embrace the worldwide platform available to us and advance the gospel as the first-century believers did and without compromising it.

A modern parallel to Koine is the language of ebonics, which was birthed in the mid-1970s and comes from the merging of two words: ebony and phonics.<sup>4</sup> Ebonics has spread throughout the world thanks to technological advancements and hip-hop culture. Rap music, the most recognized and vocal element of hip-hop culture, has broken down cultural, socioeconomic, and racial walls worldwide.

As God used the spread of Greek civilization to later advance the gospel, so is He using ebonics and rap to spread the Good News today.

## HOW GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

### General Revelation

Revelation happens when God gives us snapshots of His character and His will. There are two types of revelation seen in the Bible: general (or generic) revelation and specific (or special) revelation.

*Creation:* God reveals truths about Himself using general revelation through both creation and our conscience. In His creation or nature, we can think of it as an artist putting his work on display in a gallery. God is so bangin' that His handiwork is all of creation, and the world we live in is the gallery He has placed us in to admire His work in order to seek Him out to give Him props for what He's done.

Two passages that have to do with general revelation are Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:18-20, so let's take a few moments to break these passages down.

Psalm 19:1-2 tells us general revelation expresses glory to God every moment of every day. In what ways does creation express glory to God?

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Psalm 19:3 presents a bangin’ truth. Read this verse and explain in your own words why creation does not need language or words to glorify God.

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Psalm 19:4–6 tells us the praise of creation is everywhere on the planet earth, leaving every person without any excuse to know that God exists.

If the general revelation of creation can “speak to” every person who has ever lived, why do you think people ignore creation’s witness?

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*Conscience:* Romans 1:18–20 says people “suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

This passage explains why nonbelievers refuse to acknowledge God’s existence even while creation is declaring praise to Him nonstop every day. The word *ungodliness* describes the behavior of those who do not fear and respect God, and the greatest demonstration of ungodliness is living life as if God is not alive and real.

Before you came to know Christ as your Savior, what were some ways you lived your life that demonstrated you had no fear and respect for God?

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### Specific Revelation

Sometimes we have to go back and remember the mindset we were in before Christ saved us to understand where nonbelievers are. It's easy to talk down to those who reject God when we forget that we too were once the same way. Real talk, never forget that the real reason the ungodly reject the testimony of creation is because they suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

The word *suppress* means to restrain or hold down,<sup>5</sup> and it was used to describe someone who took the steering wheel of a ship and turned the ship in the opposite direction that the wind was blowing. Paul used this word to describe how the ungodly turn away from the testimony of general revelation, and to show that when they stand before God they will have no excuse for continuing to live like He did not exist.

The questions we have to ask now are, can the ungodly be saved by looking at creation alone? or does God provide humans with more information on how they can be saved? What do you think?

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The answer is that the ungodly need more than creation in order to be saved. God revealed specific truths about His character and His will so we might come to know Him. Everything God revealed in this way we call *specific* or *special revelation*.

*Theophany*: There are many examples of specific revelation in Scripture. The first examples we'll peep are some of the visible manifestations of God in the Old Testament called theophanies.

Read Genesis 3:8. What does it say about God chillin' with Adam and Eve?

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Peep Exodus 34:5–8 and in the space provided, write down the description this passage gives about God's appearance to Moses.

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*Pre-incarnate:* We read in the Old Testament of Christ appearing and interacting with humanity before He clothed Himself in flesh and lived among His very own creation. (We use the term *incarnation* to describe God the Son coming to earth as a human.) Read Genesis 16:7–13. Notice how God the Son, here called the angel of the Lord, speaks in first person telling Hagar He has heard her cry. He then gives her instructions regarding her son, Ishmael, and receives her worship in verse 13.

Read Judges 13:2–7 and reflect back on what we read in Genesis 16. What similarities do you see between these two passages?

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*Dreams and Visions:* Another example of specific revelation is God speaking to people through dreams and visions. Read Genesis 28:12. Notice how this passage records the details of Jacob's dream that included a description of angels going up and down a flight of stairs as they carried out the will of God.

Read 1 Kings 3:5–14. What did God communicate through this dream?

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Now peep Genesis 15. Notice that God spoke specifically to Abram by declaring him to be righteous, promising him a seed (child) and land (a piece of property) for his children and their children to live in. In this same passage notice how God ratified or confirmed His covenant with Abram.

*The Bible:* Another example of specific revelation is the Bible. Jeremiah 1:2 declares that it is the actual Word of God that is being spoken through His prophets and recorded by humans.

*Jesus Christ:* The final example of specific revelation is the God-man Jesus Christ.

Read John 1:1–14. Write down your thoughts on who you think the Word is that John is speaking about.

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This passage put us up on the fact that Jesus Christ is the Word John is choppin' about. The Word has always been and will always be eternally God, equal with God, and essentially God. John 1:14 tells us the Word dipped from heaven to set up shop on earth to

live among us so He could live a perfect life sinners could never live in order to save them. As we've said, we call Jesus' dippin' out of heaven in order to clothe Himself in human flesh the *incarnation*. What we must not conclude is that Jesus was 50 percent God and 50 percent man; rather, in the incarnation God the Son remained fully God while clothing Himself in full humanity by rockin' human flesh like we do 501s, T-shirts, and snapbacks. We must be clear in understanding Jesus never stopped being God at any point of His incarnation. At His incarnation He was both fully God and fully man. We call this truth the *hypostatic union*.

Read Hebrews 1:1–3. Explain in your own words how this passage describes Jesus as the best example of specific revelation.

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Jesus accomplished His mission of putting humans up on the fact we were born in sin, have lived in sin all our days, and are totally unable to have a right relationship with God unless we embrace Him as the only qualified Savior (John 14:6).

## **HOW GOD USED PEOPLE TO RECORD HIS WORD WITHOUT ERROR**

If God spoke, and humans were used to write down His message, how can we trust that they didn't mess up what God said? The answer to this is summed up in two words that describe the process God used to write the Bible: inspiration and inerrancy.

### **Inspiration**

When we say the Bible is inspired we are saying that every time God breathed out new revealed information to humans who recorded it, God the Holy Spirit kept them from writing anything false. In order for revelation to be new it must be revealed by God alone since He alone is the one who kept it concealed previously.

Read 2 Peter 1:19–21. In verse 20 Peter says that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. The word for *interpretation* in Greek means to unloose or untie something,<sup>6</sup> like the laces on a shoe. What Peter is saying is that no human that God used to write Scripture untied and unloosed what God revealed to them. The writers God used didn't discover on their own what God was revealing; it was God who put them up on

what He wanted to communicate. We know this is what Peter meant, because in the next verse he says that “no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” So we learn that the source of Scripture did not come from man but originated from God alone.

As men recorded what God said, God the Holy Spirit moved them or carried them along to make sure what they wrote was true to what God spoke. They were still free to use their personalities, native languages, and life experiences to relate it to the people God was telling them to write to. Think of it like a sailboat that raises its sails. As the wind blows and moves the boat along the water, the Holy Spirit moved the men along in their recording of what God spoke to them.

*Verbal Plenary:* When speaking of inspiration, the words *verbal plenary* are used to bring even more clarity to this teaching. To say the inspiration of Scripture is verbal is to say it was verbally spoken by God Himself.

Read 2 Samuel 23:2; Isaiah 30:8; and Jeremiah 26:2. Write down how each of these passages identifies God as the one who is verbally speaking.

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When we say Scripture’s inspiration is plenary we are saying that every word of Scripture is true and full of inspiration. Real talk, there’s no expiration or time limit on the inspiration of Scripture. Scripture is not like milk that spoils after a certain date. With this being said, we must remember that the Bible is as relevant today as it was when God verbally spoke it to His human writers.

Read Romans 15:4. Write down what Paul said to remind his readers about this fact.

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Read 2 Peter 3:1–2. What does Peter say about the writings of Paul?

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Read 2 Peter 3:15–16 and in the space provided below, write down your thoughts on how Peter put the writings of Paul on the same level with all the Old Testament Scriptures.

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Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What do you think Paul is saying about the words of the apostles?

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Just to recap, verbal plenary means God verbally spoke every word of Scripture, which is full of timeless truth.

### **Inerrancy**

In addition to being inspired, the Bible is also inerrant. *Inerrancy* is the teaching that says every Scripture in the Bible is true and should not be cliqued up with anything that's false.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17. How does this passage support the teaching of inerrancy?

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The word *inspired* in 2 Timothy 3:16 means God-breathed,<sup>7</sup> so Paul is saying God is the one who put the writers up on game what to write as He breathed out new revelation. We must understand that since Scripture is God-breathed it's a reflection of His character.

Read Numbers 23:19 and Hebrews 6:18. What do we learn here about God's character?

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Since God is the one who breathed out all of Scripture, and since God cannot lie, we can be easy with the fact of every word in Scripture being absolutely true.

## **HOW THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE WERE CHOSEN (CANONIZATION)**

The word *canon* means a standard or measuring rod that was used to measure something.<sup>8</sup> We can think of it being like a ruler we used in school. When we speak of the canon regarding the Bible, we are talking about the list of books that make up the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. It is called the canon because the Bible is to be our rule or standard for both what we believe and how we live. God's Word is to have complete authority in the life of every believer, even over our experiences in life and what others say about both God and His Word. We must become excellent students of God's Word to keep

ourselves from falling into the trap of false teaching.

Since we already said Jesus is the best example of specific revelation, we must also understand that He alone possesses all authority (Matthew 28:18). This is important in dealing with the canon of Scripture because Jesus addresses both the Old and New Testaments during His time on earth. It would be wise of us to look at what He authoritatively says about the Scriptures.

Read Matthew 4:1–11. Write how Jesus responded to each temptation Satan threw at Him.

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Now read Matthew 23:35. The two people Jesus mentioned in this passage are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

It's important to understand that these two men were the first and last martyrs of the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup> The word *martyr* means witness, but over time as those who were unashamed about their witness for God began to suffer death, the word was used to describe those who were killed for the unashamed witness for Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

Read Luke 24:44 and in the space provided, write down the names of the three sections of Scripture that speak of Him:

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These three descriptions of the Old Testament are the sections of what is called the *Tanak*, which is the complete Jewish-accepted canon, which we call the Old Testament.<sup>11</sup> In this passage Jesus fully endorses all of the books that we have today that make up the Old Testament because they are the same books that are present in those same three sections He speaks of.

Since God wanted the New Testament written after Jesus' ascension back to heaven to be with God the Father, it's bangin' how Jesus prophesied its writing while He was still on earth.

Read John 14:26. What will the Helper (God the Holy Spirit) do?

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Jesus is saying God the Holy Spirit would teach new things to the disciples and bring back to their memory all the things Jesus taught them while He was with them. Some of the disciples would be used by God to write the new things the Helper, God the Holy Spirit, was teaching them as well as what He was bringing back to their remembrance. What these disciples would write would become what we know to be the New Testament.

Another way we can express it is that the Holy Spirit worked together with the minds and hearts of Jesus' followers to produce trustworthy understanding and recollections. What they wrote became the New Testament.<sup>12</sup>

Read John 16:1–14. Explain how this passage supports God the Holy Spirit's role and the disciples' role in the writing of the New Testament.

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Many books have been written over the time period the Scriptures were written. Some claim that prophets and apostles wrote them; therefore, the church fathers had to be certain which books were truly God-breathed and distinguish them from the ones that were not. Since God is the one who breathed out His Word, He alone is the one to lead His children through the process of discovering these books. Think of varsity tryouts for basketball. Everyone is invited to try out. Everyone who shows up is put through a series of drills and tests, and the coaching staff selects the best from all who tried out; those they select are on the team.

Before the incarnation of Christ, Old Testament Jewish scholars collected books that were to be examined to see which ones were truly inspired by God. For a book to be deemed to have been written by a true prophet of God, it must have been written for all generations (meaning it should be timeless), and it must be written in one accord or in harmony with all previous revelation.<sup>13</sup> The books that passed these tests are the books we have today that make up the Old Testament.

Before moving on to the choppin' about the New Testament, it would be good to mention here the Septuagint. The Septuagint is a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew and Aramaic into Greek that took place about 300–200 BC. Its name and abbreviation (LXX) come from the team of seventy scholars who did the translation work.<sup>14</sup> Often when studying the Scriptures, both scholars and students of the Word will use the Septuagint when performing a word study, an in-depth look at a specific word and how it is used in Scripture in order to help discover its usage in a specific context of a passage.

Regarding the New Testament, church councils brought a similar process of examination to books that were being considered for the New Testament. They discussed: Was this book written or endorsed by an apostle? Is the content of this book truly new and unique revelation from God that complements all previous revelation? Was this book accepted by the church while it was in circulation?<sup>15</sup> The books that passed through these tests make up the New Testament.

In response to the Protestant Reformation, at the Council of Trent in 1546, the Roman Catholic Church added a new list of books to the Bible called the Apocrypha. *Apocrypha* means something that is hidden.<sup>16</sup> The books contained in the Apocrypha were written after the last Old Testament prophet (Malachi, ca. 430 BC) and mainly between 200 BC and AD 100. They contain valuable historical and religious information but have been rejected by Protestants because we historically have maintained that these books lack earmarks of divine authorship that distinguished the recognized Old and New Testament books.<sup>17</sup> It should be mentioned that during His life and ministry Jesus never acknowledged, endorsed or even quoted from any of the Apocryphal books like He did of the Tanak. Since this list of books did not fit the rules for both the Old and New Testament canon and were not endorsed by Christ, it is right to reject this list of books from the canon.

## HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

When we study the Bible we must practice good hermeneutics in order to gain an understanding of what God's Word truly says so that we can apply His Word in our lives. *Hermeneutics* is the science of interpreting the Bible.<sup>18</sup> Three rules for practicing good hermeneutics are observation, interpretation, and application.

### Observation

We practice observation when we look at a specific passage and ask: Who is this passage talking about (names or people groups that are listed)? What issue is the passage addressing (struggles, situations)? Where was the author when this passage was written (what geographic landmarks and places are mentioned)? Think of these questions while reading and interpreting a passage.

### Interpretation

We practice good interpretation when we work hard to discover the context of the passage. As stated before, the context is the main thought and purpose of what is being communicated in the entire passage, not just a few sentences.

False teachers thrive in our cities today because they regularly take Scriptures out of context and preach a new meaning into them that was not the meaning of the author of that passage. Adding one's own interpretation into the Scriptures that expresses one's own ideas rather than what the Scripture is saying is called *eisegesis*.<sup>19</sup>

Think of this scene from a movie: A stepmother brought her daughter a bowl of soup, but before she served it to her, she turned away from the girl and added Pine-Sol to the bowl. She repeated this behavior for several weeks. One small dose of Pine-Sol did not poison the child immediately, but it kept her sick for a long time. Over time all those small doses added up until she finally died.

As scandalous as this action was, false preachers who practice *eisegesis* on a regular basis are keeping people sick spiritually because they are not practicing *exegesis*. In contrast, *exegesis* is taking what is already in Scripture, keeping it in context, and clearly communicating what Scripture says to the hearer.

One time I was sharing my testimony about how God delivered me from the addiction of smoking weed. I opened by telling the people that it was God alone who broke my addiction. Then I began to express to them my mindset in needing to get high. I did this by telling them what I would say when I got to school, and how I would ask my boys who wanted to go in with me in buying weed. I ended my testimony by telling the people that by God's grace, I had not smoked weed since January 21, 1997.

Now imagine if some people came in the middle of my testimony and all they heard was me repeating the phrases I used to say to my boys about buying weed. What if then they walked out and told their friends I was on stage trying to get people to buy weed? That would be messed up because they didn't hear what I said before or after that point; they could tell others things that were not true and make me out to be a weedhead all because they did not find out the context of what I was saying. In a similar way, when readers of Scripture do not work to discover the context of the passage of Scripture they are reading, they can easily misrepresent what God was communicating to His people in that passage. Never underestimate the seriousness of finding the context of the passage you are studying.

### **Application**

Finally, after we have practiced good observation and worked hard to discover the context of the passage by finding its context, we can now practice living out what the Scripture says. Living out what the Scripture says is called *application*. The goal of every Bible study we do should not be only to gain head knowledge or to learn Greek and

Hebrew. The goal of every Bible study should be to live out the context of the passage in our life to the best of our ability as believers in Christ. As we study God's Word with a heart to be doers of His Word and not just hearers or readers (James 1:22–25), God will transform our lives through our obedience to His Word and mature us spiritually while we live in community with the believers in our local body (Ephesians 4:14–16).

### **CONCLUSION**

God has chosen to reveal Himself to human beings. He reveals His creativity and beauty through nature, and He speaks to us through our conscience so we know right from wrong.

God also has revealed truth we need about Him and about how to live through the written Word, the Bible. He ensured that it was written without error, so we can trust its words. We can study the Bible for knowledge as well as for practical application.

Now that we have discussed the Bible, God's Word to us, let's begin to learn more about God Himself.