

# A SHORT STUDY OF THE HISTORY AND MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE

## *The Revelation of Truth*

What is this world? Who are we and what are we doing in it? Is there a purpose to it? Can we make sense of our lives? Is there an explanation for things and people? If there is, where is this explanation to be found? What foundation are we to build our life on? What truth?

Some people believe that there is no purpose in life and that there are no answers to their basic questions. They think that each person is left to oneself to make sense of life as best as one can. Whatever they believe is truth to them. And all of us need to respect their understanding of things. Truth is relative.

Others believe that there exists a source of truth apart from the human mind and above it. Their reasoning goes like this: *“I know I did not create myself. As a matter of fact, no human being could have created himself or herself. Only a Higher Power could have brought about human life on this planet.”* And, going one step further: *“Just as I did not create myself, I cannot create the explanation for my own life. But the Higher Being who has created us can provide the explanation for our lives.”*

This explanation for life is what Christians call “truth”. God Himself makes truth available to us. This is why Christians believe that the Creator is also the Revealer, the God of truth. He makes available to His creatures the truth they desperately need to understand the meaning of their lives. Since they cannot find truth on their own, God gives it to them. This truth that comes from God is called “revelation”.

God reveals Himself to us in nature, history, and in the creation of mankind. This is called “general revelation”. God, through “special revelation” speaks to us through His Son, Jesus Christ and in the Bible, which is the original book about Jesus Christ. The Bible is a collection of 66 sub-books. Of these, the first 39 comprise the Old Testament and 27 comprise the New Testament.

## *The Uniqueness of the Bible in its Authorship, Continuity, and Prophecy*

### *Authorship*

In order to explain the unique character of Scripture as God’s truth in human words, Christians have adopted the doctrine of divine inspiration, often called verbal or plenary inspiration. Some simple definitions are in order: (a) “inspiration” refers to the divine influence on the human authors during their writing of the text of Scripture; “all scripture is *breathed out* by God” (2 Timothy 3:16); (b) “verbal” (from the Latin *verbum*, which means “word”) indicates that the very wording of the text is affected by inspiration, not just the ideas contained in the Bible; (c) “plenary” indicates that inspiration concerns the “full” extent of the Bible, not just certain parts of it.

A formal definition of this doctrine might go like this: Verbal or plenary inspiration refers to the divine activity that surrounded the writing of the books of the Bible, without infringing on the autonomy of their authors, so that the resulting autographs (that is, their original documents) inerrantly expressed the thoughts of God in their very wording.

In plainer language, this means that the writing of Scripture resulted from a cooperative activity between God and human authors, whereby God exerted enough influence in them without controlling them completely, so as to guarantee that the original manuscripts that came directly from their hands (the “autographs”, not later copies or translations) rendered the thoughts of God without errors or contradictions.

The concept of “inerrancy” cited in the formal definition above refers to Scripture’s quality of being free from error. Obviously, misleading statements cannot be upheld as a standard for knowing truth. If the Bible is to be regarded as revelation, it must be free from error in what it affirms or teaches. This much is recognized in those passages of the Bible that refer to its own inspiration in relation to its intended usefulness (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12,13; 2 Peter 1:21). The implication of such texts is that a faulty revelation would be of no value in correcting human thought and behavior.

## ***Continuity***

The Bible is one book....

1. written over a 1,500 year span;
2. written over 40 generations
3. written by more than 40 authors, from every walk of life - including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, etc.: Moses (a political leader, trained in the universities of Egypt); Peter (a fisherman); Amos (a herdsman); Joshua (a military general); Nehemiah (a cupbearer); Daniel (a prime minister); Luke (a doctor); Solomon (a king); Matthew (a tax collector); Paul (a rabbi);
4. written in different places: Moses in the wilderness; Jeremiah in the dungeon; Daniel on a hillside and in a palace; Paul in side prison walls; Luke while traveling; John on the isle of Patmos; others in the rigors of military campaign;
5. written at different times: David in times of war; Solomon in times of peace;
6. written during different moods: some writing from the heights of joy and others from the depths of sorrow and despair;
7. written on three continents: Asia; Africa; Europe;
8. written in three languages: Hebrew - the language of the Old Testament (2 Kings 18:26-28 called “the language of Judah” in Isaiah 19:18 called “the language of Canaan”); Aramaic - the “common language” of the Near East until the time of Alexander the Great (6th century B.C. - 4th century B.C.); Greek - the New Testament language (the international language at the time of Christ).
9. Finally, its subject matter includes hundreds of controversial topics and includes a great variety of literary types. They include history, law (civil, criminal, ethical, ritual, sanitary), religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic, etc.. For all that, the Bible is not simply an anthology; there is a unity which binds the whole together. An anthology is compiled by an anthologist, but no anthologist compiled the Bible. The biblical authors spoke with harmony and continuity from Genesis to Revelation. There is one unfolding story: “God’s redemption of man”.

## ***Prophecy***

In Isaiah 41:23 the prophet hurled out the challenge to heathen gods: “Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods.” God has accepted this challenge. He has predicted

multitudes of events to happen in the future. They have come true exactly as predicted, even though in some cases thousands of years were involved in for the fulfillment. God has proven that He is our supernatural God with all wisdom and, with His prophesies enscribed in scripture, has proven His divine authorship of the Bible. Three significant prophesies are cited below:

**Cyrus:** The prophet Isaiah, writing about 700 B.C., names Cyrus as the king who will say to Jerusalem that it shall be built and that the Temple foundation shall be laid (Isaiah 44:28; 54:1). At the time of Isaiah's writing, the city of Jerusalem was fully built and the entire Temple was standing. Not until more than 100 years later, in 586 B.C., would the city and Temple be destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar. After Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians, it was conquered by the Persians in about 539 B.C. Shortly after that, a Persian king named Cyrus gave the decree to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. This was around 160 years after the prophecy of Isaiah.

**Daniel's Seventy Weeks:** In Daniel 9:24-27, a prophecy concerning the Messiah is given. Specifically, that at the end of 69 weeks, the Messiah will come to Jerusalem. According to the text the 69 weeks are understood as 69 seven year periods or 483 years. The starting point of the 69 weeks is the decree to restore and build Jerusalem. In 444 B.C. (Nehemiah 2:1-8) King Artaxerxes issues a decree to Nehemiah to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. This is the only recorded decree to rebuild Jerusalem. If Daniel is correct, the time from the edict to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Nissan 1, 444 B.C.) to the coming Messiah to Jerusalem is 483 years, each year equaling the 360-day year (Hebrew year - 12 months of 30 days each).

Using the 360-day year, the calculations works as follows. Multiplying the 69 weeks by 7 years for each week by 360 days gives a total of 173,880 days. The difference between 444 B.C. and 33 A.D. then is 476 solar years. By multiplying 476 by 365.24219879, or by 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 45,975 seconds, one comes to 173,855 days. This leaves only 25 days to be accounted between 444 B.C. and 33 A.D. By adding the 25 days to March 5 (of 444 B.C.), one comes to March 30 (of 33 A.D.) which was Nisan 10 in 33 A.D. This is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

The terminal event of the 69 weeks is the presentation of Christ Himself to Israel as the Messiah as predicted in Zechariah 9:9. This materialized on Monday, Nisan 10 (March 30), 33 A.D. On the following Friday, April 3, 33 A.D., Christ was crucified or "cut off" (Daniel 9:26) This is also a part of Daniel's prophecy. After the termination of the 69 weeks and before the commencement of the 70th week, two events had to occur: 1) The "cutting off" of the Messiah; and 2) The destruction of the city and the Temple. The Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by Titus the Roman. Therefore, according to Daniel's prophecy, the Messiah had to come and be crucified between March 30, 33 A.D. and 70 A.D. Christ was crucified April 3, 33 A.D.

**Jesus Christ:** In the Old Testament there are 60 major messianic prophecies and approximately 270 ramifications that were fulfilled in one person, Jesus Christ. It is helpful to look at all these predictions fulfilled in Christ as His "address". You've probably never realized how important the details of your name and address are - and yet these details set you apart from the 5 billion other people who also inhabit this planet. With even greater detail, God wrote an address in the Bible to single out His Son, the Messiah, the Savior of mankind, from anyone who has ever lived in history - past, present, or future. The specifics of this address can be found in the Old Testament, a document written over a period of a thousand years, which contains more than 300 references to His coming. Using the science of probability, we find the chances of just 48 of these prophecies being fulfilled in one person to be right at one in  $10^{157}$  (a one followed by 157 zeros). All of these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The task of matching up God's address with one man is further complicated by the fact that all the prophecies of the Messiah were made at least 400 years before He was to appear. In addition, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament was completed around 150-200 B.C. There was a minimum 200 year gap between the prophecies being recorded and their fulfillment in Christ. Imagine one of your ancestors, 400 years ago, trying to predict your name and address.

Applying the science of probability to just 8 of these prophecies produces this vivid illustration. The chance that any one man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in  $10^{17}$ . That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. Suppose we take  $10^{17}$  silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote them in their own wisdom. These prophecies were given by inspiration of God as their fulfillment proves that God alone inspired them.

## ***The Uniqueness of the Bible in its Survival - Canon and Transmission***

### ***Canon***

The 39 books of the Old Testament had already been gathered before Jesus' time by a process of accumulation, although they were not set in the Hebrew Scriptures in the same order as in our Bibles. These were the Scriptures that Jesus and His apostles used and quoted in their teachings and writings. The Christian Church simply adopted them as the "Old Testament" Scripture. The story of the formation of the New Testament *canon* (a Greek word for the collected books of the Bible as "standard" or "measure of truth") is immensely complicated. A rough oversimplification goes as follows:

**First century A.D.** The books of the New Testament are written to meet a variety of needs in the early churches.

**Second century.** The books travel from church to church in an improvised exchange program and are used to define Christian beliefs.

**Third century.** The books are gathered into groupings (called "lists") of Gospels and Epistles - not necessarily the same from place to place. These mini-Bibles were needed to provide authoritative guidance for faith and practice.

**Fourth century.** Worldwide representatives of churches come together (in "Councils") and recognize the 27 books of the New Testament as divine revelation, thus confirming and bringing to a close the biblical canon.

The church leaders of the fourth century did not select the books of the canon so much as recognize them under God's guidance as inspired writings on the following bases: 1) They were written by apostles of Jesus or by their immediate associates. As a result, the authors of those writings were covered by the authority that Jesus had given them to teach in His name. 2) The content of each book was in accord with the teachings of all the other books taken together; thus there was consistency of teaching around them. 3) They had been used by the churches since the time of their writing and had proven their value as God's word in the life and worship of the churches throughout the Roman Empire.

## *Transmission*

Being written on material that perishes and having to be copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press did not diminish the style, correctness, or existence of the Bible. Jews preserved it as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. They kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word and paragraph. They had special classes of men within their culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity.

An example from the Talmudists (A.D. 100-500): The Talmudists had an intricate system for transcribing synagogue scrolls. These minute regulations are as follows: 1) A Synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals. 2) prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew. 3) These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. 4) Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal through the entire codex. 5) The length of each column must not extend over less than 48 or more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. 6) The whole copy must be first lined; and if three words be written without a line, it is worthless. 7) The ink should be black, neither red, green, nor any other color, and be prepared according to the definite recipe. 8) An authentic copy must be the example, from which the transcriber cannot in the least deviate. 9) No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him... 10) Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; 11) between every new section, the breadth of nine consonants; 12) between every book, three lines. 13) The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so. 14) Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress; 15) wash his whole body, 16) not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, 17) and should a king address him while writing that name, he must take no notice of him.

The Old Testament Canonical books were generally recognized prior to the birth of Jesus. However, with the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. and the persecution and scattering of the Jews a council was held at Jamnia (Jabneh) in 90 A.D. in which the Old Testament Canon was ratified. This council concerned itself not so much with what should be included in the canon but whether certain books should be excluded. The Council of Jamnia confirmed what had been assumed for several hundred years.

A comparison of the Massoretic text of Isaiah (916 A.D.) and the recently discovered Dead Sea scroll (125 B.C.), 1,000 years earlier, shows the exactness of the transcribers. Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, there are only seventeen letters in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes. The remaining three letters comprise the word "light" which is added in verse 11. In one chapter of 166 words there is only one word (three letters) in question after 1,000 years of transmission.

First century Christians saw in the words of Jesus and the writings of the Apostles an authority of divine inspiration equaling that of the Old Testament Scriptures. As time passed, an increasing circulation of books recognized as either not in accordance with the apostle's teachings (i.e., heretical) or not written by them even though an apostle's name may have been attached to them (i.e., pseudonymous), motivated believers to become increasingly concerned about identifying the authentic works of the apostles or those entrusted with their teachings (namely Mark for Peter and Luke for Paul). Concerning the New Testament canon the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D. listed the 27 books of the New Testament. It did not confer upon them any authority which they did not already possess, but simply record their previously established canonicity. The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) formally recognized the same New Testament as Christians do today. Again, these men and councils did not formulate the canon, they merely recognized what God had already done.

Concerning the New Testament. There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament. There are more extant manuscripts of the Iliad (643) than any other book. Both it and the bible were considered sacred and both underwent textual changes and criticisms of their Greek manuscripts. The Iliad has about 15,600 lines. 764 lines of the Iliad are in question or 5% textual corruption. The New Testament has about 20,000 lines. 40 lines (or 400 words) of the New Testament are in doubt or .05%.

AUTHOR	WHEN WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPY	TIME SPAN	NUMBER OF COPIES
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,000 years	10
Plato ( <i>Tetralogies</i> )	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200 years	7
Herodotus ( <i>History</i> )	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 years	8
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1,400 years	193
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,400 years	49
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 years	643
New Testament	40-100 A.D.	125 A.D.	25 years	over 24,000

A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put. Voltaire, the noted French infidel who died in 1778, said that in one hundred years from his time Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history. But what happened? Voltaire has passed into history, while the circulation of the Bible continues to increase in almost all parts of the world, carrying blessing wherever it goes. Fifty years after Voltaire's death the Geneva Bible Society used his press and his house to produce stacks of Bibles.

No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? with such venom and skepticism? with such thoroughness and erudition? upon every chapter, line and tenet?

The Bible is unique in facing its critics. There is no other book in all literature like it. It is unique in its transmission and supernatural protection. These attest to its divine authorship.

### ***The Uniqueness of the Bible's Message - God's Plan of Redemption - Authority Over Our Lives***

The single thematic message of the Bible runs from Genesis to Revelation: **God's Plan of Redemption**. Man has sinned and separated himself from the righteousness of God (Genesis 1-3; Romans 3:23), God has purchased the redemption of mankind through the blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:6-11), and will one day bring the complete restoration of His relationship with man (Revelation 20:11-22:21). Within the main theme of the Bible are two important sub-themes: 1) How

God desires to know man: and 2) How man can come to know God.

Since the Bible is God's truth it should hold absolute supreme authority over our lives. It should shape our beliefs, our values, our moral choices, and our lifestyle decisions. Even the Church must place itself under the authority of the Bible. And, finally and of most importance. The Bible points us to salvation in Jesus Christ. The absolute truth of our sin, God's judgment, and His open door of salvation and life in Jesus Christ encourages us to trust Jesus as our Savior.

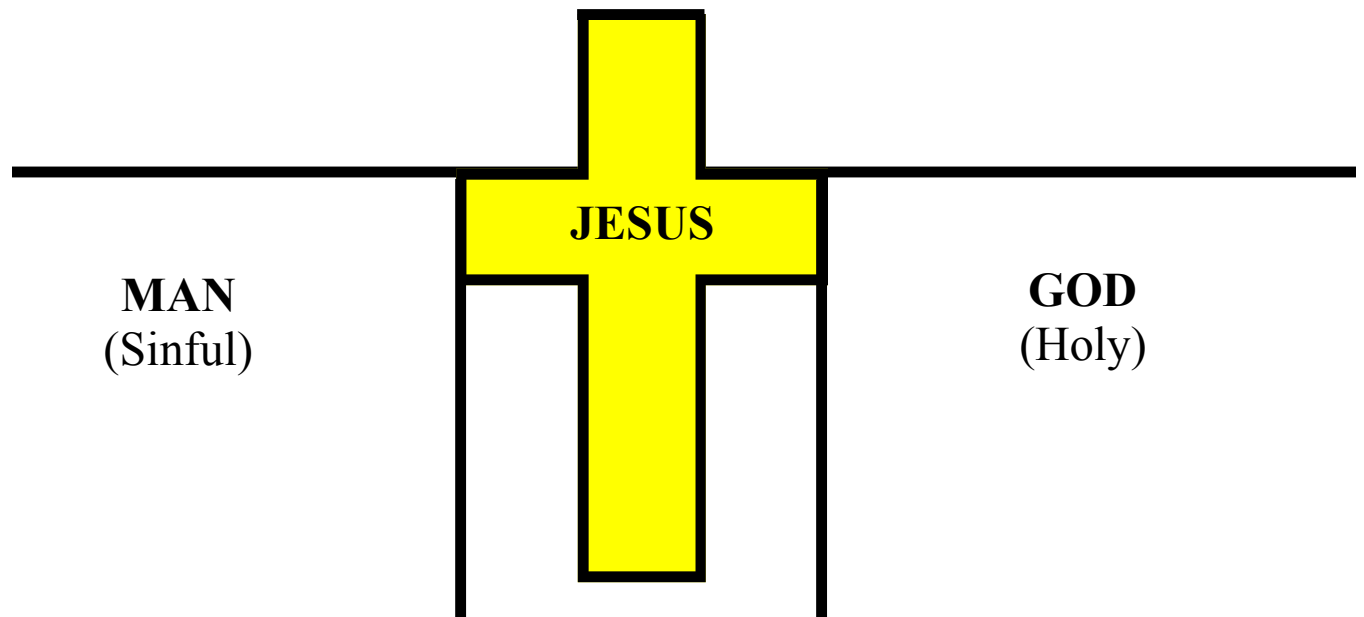
### ***God's Message Concerning our Sin and Salvation***

Man was created by God, for God (Genesis 1:26; 2:7; Colossians 1:16). The purpose of man is to glorify God (Isaiah 43:7). Man was created to have fellowship with God and to live according to God's will, His initial command being to exercise dominion over creation and to procreate (Genesis 1:28).

Sin was introduced into creation by Satan (Genesis 3:1-7). Through the work of Satan, Eve according to her own will was deceived, and Adam chose to follow in sin (2 Timothy 2:14). Man sinned by a willful act of disobedience to the revealed will of God (Genesis 3:1-7). Through Adam's sin the entirety of mankind, existing seminally in Adam, sinned (Romans 5:12-19). Mankind is dead in sin, separated from God, and unable to comprehend the things of God (Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3). All men are without excuse with regard to sin (Romans 1:16-23).

The result of sin is that man experiences separation from God (Romans 3:23), spiritual death (Romans 5:12; Ephesians 2:1-3), and physical death (Genesis 3:19). Those who die without Christ face eternal separation from God, including no second chance for salvation (Luke 16:19-31; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 9:27). Those who are judged at the Great White Throne, who do not have Christ as their Savior, will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire prepared of the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:11-15).

Because of his sinful state man is incapable of earning salvation or favor with God (Romans 3:9-20,23). Salvation is a work undertaken by God for man in accord with God's love and graciousness (John 3:15; Ephesians 2:8,9). Salvation is based upon the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross, as our sin offering (Hebrews 9:22; 1 John 2:1,2). Jesus Christ is the justifier of mankind before God (Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-11; Ephesians 2:8,9). Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation. He is our bridge between our sinfulness and God, who is holy (John 14:6).



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### **A Short Bibliography**

This study was prepared with extensive use of the following works.

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