

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSETutor's Name: Date: Student's Name: Ref No.: **LESSON 3 • THE BIBLE OUR GUIDE**

Reading: Psalm 119:1-40

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?

Millions of people go through life never concerning themselves with its meaning or its end. God, the great Maker of all things, has told us all we need to know in His guide-book, the Bible.

When we consider the wonders of the world around us, and the marvellous way in which our bodies are made, we feel sure that a great Creator must have been at work. But how can we know more about Him, and find out what He wants us to do? If we want to please Him, we must take the Bible and read it and study it, and think about it day by day.

THE BIBLE'S CLAIMS

The Bible makes great claims. It speaks with authority, claiming to be the Word of God. Many times the prophets of the Old Testament begin their message with the words: "Thus saith the Lord". The apostle Paul tells us that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). The word "inspiration" means that God was totally in control of everything in the Bible. He told men what to write. It is literally His Word. If these claims were not true, and the Bible were not the Word of God, we could forget about it. However beautiful its teachings might be, they need have no effect on us.

But the Bible is true. We dare not ignore it - unless we want to ignore God, and cut ourselves off from the offer of life which He has given us.

Are there other written revelations from God?

The answer to this question, is, "No". There are many religions in the world, and most have their 'holy book'. The Muslims, for example, have the Koran, which they regard as God's Word. The Mormons have the 'Book of Mormon', which they say was sent to them by God. Some of these books take part of their teaching from the Bible; some give wise and sensible advice, but in many places these books do not agree with the Bible message.

Now it is quite clear that God would not say one thing in one book, and something different in another. Only one can be the inspired Word of God. The Bible claims to be this Word.

How do we know the Bible is true?

We have the word of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was brought back to life by God after he had been dead for three days. This is a staggering miracle. Never in the history of the world has anyone brought a dead body back to new and perfect life which will last for ever.

Jesus was in the grave, dead and lifeless, for three days. After this, he came out of that grave, alive for evermore! This is certain proof that he is God's son, and we can believe every word he has spoken.

In the days when Jesus lived, only the Old Testament had been written, and he believed every word of it. Whenever he was challenged over anything that he had said or done, he would support his words and deeds by referring to the Old Testament.

When the Sadducees came to him, arguing that there was no such thing as the resurrection from the dead, he said to them: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29).

Then he went on to prove to them, from the Old Testament, that the hope of the resurrection from the dead was part of the revelation of God.

Jesus believed

- in Adam and Eve (see Matthew 19:4,5)
- in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see Matthew 8:11)
- in David and Solomon (see Matthew 12:3,42)
- in Jonah and the great fish (see Matthew 12.40)

No-one has ever proved the Bible false

Many enemies of the Bible, including some very clever men, have tried to do this, but they have all failed. If we stop to think about this, we have to admit that it is remarkable.

The Bible foretells the future

Men cannot speak with any certainty about the future. We cannot even be sure what will happen tomorrow - or next week or next year. And as for the next hundred years it is quite impossible for anyone to say what will happen. But the Bible speaks, from time to time, of events that are to come to pass hundreds of years later.

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Here are some examples:

1. The birth of Jesus

In Matthew 2 we read that the wise men came to Herod and asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Now Herod asked the chief priests this question, and they answered at once, "In Bethlehem of Judea". How did they know? Because, hundreds of years before, it had been prophesied in one of the books of the Old Testament - Micah 5:2.

2. The death of Jesus

Turn to Psalm 22 and read it carefully. In this Psalm there is a description of the crucifixion of Jesus. Notice the end of verse 16 - "they pierced my hands and my feet". Look again at verse 18 - "they part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

Now if you read John 19:23-24, you will see that is exactly what the soldiers did after they had crucified Jesus. How could the writer foretell the death of Jesus so long before it took place, unless he was inspired by God?

This is specially remarkable, because in the days of the Psalmist the Jews knew nothing of crucifixion - they put their criminals to death by stoning.

3. Great events foretold

Read Isaiah 13:19-20. At the time when the prophet Isaiah wrote these words about Babylon, it was the greatest nation in the world; glorious and powerful. Now, where Babylon once stood, there are only ruins in a semi-desert area. Many hundreds of years after it was given, the prophecy of Isaiah came to pass just as he had foretold. Only God could have foreseen that such a tremendous change would take place.

There are many examples like these. Only God Himself can see into the future. The prophets were right when they wrote: "Thus saith the Lord..."

Their remarkable prophecies are another proof that the Bible is indeed God's Word

THE CONTENTS OF THE BIBLE

What a remarkable book the Bible is. It took over 2000 years to write, and it was written by shepherds and kings, fishermen, a doctor, a tent-maker and others. It is not really one book, but a collection of books. There are 66 books in all, 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament.

All the writers combine to give us one complete story - the story of God's purpose with men, from its very beginnings recorded in Genesis, right up to the time when "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

The Old Testament -Books

The first five books of the Old Testament were written by Moses. The first book is called Genesis, which means 'beginnings'. It tells us about God's dealings with the first men to live on this earth.

Then follow Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These four books tell us how God took the Jews, whom He had chosen to be His people, out of Egypt, and gave them the land of Canaan (Israel). The books that follow tell the story of the Jews, and God's dealings with them.

When we come to the book of Psalms, we find some of the finest poetry that has ever been written. Perhaps you think that poetry is not for you? The poetry of the Bible is different. It speaks of feelings we all have at times, yet cannot put into words. For instance, take these verses from Psalm 8:3-4:

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

Have you never felt like that when you looked up at the stars at night?

After Psalms come three more books of poetry: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. Then there are the books of the prophets - the long prophetic works of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, followed by many shorter prophetic books.

The prophets spoke to the men of their own day. When the Jews neglected God's law and went their own way, the prophets tried to bring the people back to God. We have already seen how they spoke of the coming of the Lord Jesus. They spoke, too, about many important events which were to happen in the history of the world. Some of these happenings are still future.

In later lessons you will hear of prophecies about God's purpose being worked out in history, and about the setting up of God's Kingdom.

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The New Testament

This begins with four separate accounts of the life of Christ, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - each one telling the story in his own way. Then follows the story of what happened after Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Here we read about the first churches, or ecclesias, that were formed, in a book called "The Acts of the Apostles".

They are a pattern for all churches today, and we should take them as an example. Every member of the church in those days was baptized when he became a Christian. (This baptism was by total immersion.) It should be the same today.

After the book of Acts, there are a number of letters written by various apostles to help these young churches and, finally, there is the book of Revelation. If you want a complete list of the books of the Bible, you will find it in the front pages of your Bible.

THE BIBLE AND THE JEWS

God has chosen to work out His purpose with this earth through one nation - Israel. It is through them that the Bible comes to us: the writers of the Bible were nearly all Jews.

God chose the Jews to be His special people, and to be His witnesses to all nations (Isaiah 43:10). Often they failed, and disobeyed His wise laws. They were severely punished for this. But God has said: "Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished" (Jeremiah 30:11).

The greatest man of all time was a Jew - the Lord Jesus Christ. When God sent His son, the Jews killed him. They were scattered among all nations as a punishment. Now, in our day, God is gathering them again; soon He will send Jesus back to be their King. Then they will be the head of all nations. All these things were foretold in the Old Testament. The history of the Jewish nation, foretold so long ago, witnesses to the truth of God's Word.

FINALLY -

It's a tremendous thought that God in heaven has given us a book so that we may come to know Him, and live as He wants us to. He has actually told men and women in this book why He made the world, and what its history will be, right up to the time when the Gospel will be fulfilled, and God will be all in all.

The Bible is the guide God has given us, showing us the way to everlasting life in His Kingdom. There is no other book like it. It is no dead text book - it is a living word. If we read it every day, carefully and prayerfully, it will transform our lives, and make them pleasing to God.

Summary

1. The Bible is unique. It claims to be God's Word to men and women.
2. It offers to men and women a hope of life.
3. Jesus believed the Bible.
4. There are many proofs that it is true: its history is proved by modern discoveries; it contains many prophecies that have been fulfilled.
5. It tells the story of God's dealings with men, from the creation of the first man to the time when the earth will be filled with the glory of God.
6. It is God's gift to us, showing us the way of life. We should read it every day.

Verses to read: Psalm 1; Psalm 22; 2 Timothy 3.

Learn by heart: 2 Timothy 3:16-17.