

*The heavens declare Thy glory, Lord,  
In every star Thy wisdom shines;  
But when our eyes behold Thy Word,  
We read Thy Name in fairer lines.*

The Bible actually consists of sixty-six books, written originally in the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek languages over a period of about 1,600 years. Its writers included kings (David and Solomon), fishermen (Peter and John), a herdsman (Amos), a tax-collector (Matthew) and many others. All in all, God used about forty different men to give us His Word. So if we wish to know about God, we must read and hear His Word, the Bible. This alone is God's Word. We can add nothing to it, neither can we take anything from it (*Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:5,6; Rev 22:18,19*). The Lord Jesus Himself condemned the Pharisees for daring to add to God's Word (*Mark 7:1-13*). This does not mean that the Bible reveals everything that could be known about God and His ways (*Deut 29:29; John 21:25*). For example, God has not told us the date of Jesus' second coming (*Acts 1:7*). But it does mean that the Bible is sufficient and completely true, and reading it, as we must, with reverence and understanding, we can know that God is speaking through it to us.

### **MEN SPOKE FROM GOD**

The Bible is God's book but God caused it to be written by men. Peter said that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (*2 Peter 1:21*). Each book of the Bible has two authors – the Holy Spirit, who is the divine author, and the prophet or the apostle, who is the human author. We should not be afraid to recognize that the Bible is human as well as divine. There are many places in the New Testament where the human author of an Old Testament passage is named (e.g. *Matt 2:17; 3:3; 4:14-16; Mark 7:10; 12:19,36; Acts 1:16*).

The human side of the Bible can be seen in many other ways. The authors have different styles of writing. Isaiah's style is majestic, whereas that of Amos is harsh. In the New Testament, Luke and Acts are written in very good Greek, while Mark and 2 Peter are rather rough. The Holy Spirit did not inspire men in a mechanical way, but worked through their different gifts and abilities.

If we read carefully, we shall find traces of the human hand in Scripture. In the original Greek, Romans 8:12,13 is an unfinished sentence, although it is clear that Paul meant to go on to say that Christians are debtors to the Spirit. Another untidy passage can be found in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16. Here, Paul recalls the names of the people he had baptized, but in verse 16

he suddenly remembers that he had also baptized Stephanas' household. He even adds, "I know not whether I baptized any other." Daniel confesses that he did not understand all that he had written (*Dan 12:8,9*), while Peter confesses that some of Paul's writings were hard to understand (*2 Peter 3:16*).

The Bible is fully human, yet without error, as Christ Jesus is fully human, yet without sin. The Bible, however, records the sins and errors of man. Noah's drunkenness in Genesis 9:20,21 is there to warn us to stand firm against sin. Similarly, not all that Job's three friends taught is to be received as God's truth, for in Job 42:7 God says that they were not completely correct in all that they had said.

So we should recognize that the Bible is a human book. God could have spoken through the human authors so that nothing human would have been left in their writings – after all, He spoke through Balaam's donkey (*Num 22*) – but He did not choose to work in this way. It has been said that we can hear the recorded voice of the singer and also the scratches on the record. This is true, but the scratches on the record do not mean that the singer misses any notes.

### **THE OLD TESTAMENT AS GOD'S WORD**

Many people today, and some who call themselves Christians, say that they believe in the New Testament, or parts of it, but not in the Old Testament. They often say that the God of the Old Testament is an angry God who punishes people, but the God of the New Testament is loving and merciful. Perhaps these people have never read Hosea 11:8,9 or Luke 16:19-31. Whoever rejects the Old Testament must also reject the New Testament, for the two Testaments fit perfectly together. As Augustine said, "The New Testament is concealed in the Old; the Old Testament is revealed in the New." Jesus says that if we do not believe Moses, we will not believe Him (*John 5:46,47*).

Some scholars have taught that God inspired the prophets and the apostles, but not their words. The truth is that God inspired both the men (*2 Peter 1:21*) and their words (*2 Tim 3:16*). But in the Bible the emphasis is always on the Word as God's Word rather than upon the men as God's men. God told Joshua, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein" (*Joshua 1:8*). God took great care to see that His Word was written down accurately so that it could be handed down from one generation to the next (*see Exod 24:4; Deut 17:18; 31:9,24-29; Joshua 24:26; 1 Sam 10:25; Isaiah 8:16; 30:8; Jer 36:4;*

*45:1; Dan 9:2; Hab 2:2; Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; Rev 1:3*). Because of this, people did not have to guess what God might have said; they could read God's Word for themselves or have it read to them (*see Exod 24:7; Deut 31:11; Joshua 8:34,35; 2 Kings 22:8-16; Neh 8:8; 9:3; 13:1*).

God's Word in the Old Testament is perfect and true (*Psalms 19:7; 119:89,142,160*). But we must come to a right understanding of it, for some of its laws were only for the Old Testament period. Examples of these laws include circumcision (*Gen 17:10-14; see 1 Cor 7:19 & Gal 5:2-6*), the food laws (*Lev 11; see Mark 7:18,19; Acts 10:9-15; 1 Tim 4:1-5*) and the sacrifices (e.g. *Lev 16; see Heb 10:1-18*). God gave these laws, but only for a time, until the Messiah came and a new age began.

When the prophets spoke in the Old Testament, they spoke God's Word; they did not just give their own religious views. The phrase, "Thus saith the LORD," occurs about 2,000 times in the Old Testament. The prophets used this phrase to tell the people that their word was also the Word of God (*see Jer 36:8,10*)\*.

When God called Jeremiah to be His prophet, He put His words in Jeremiah's mouth (*Jer 1:9*). We find this same thought in many places in the Old Testament (e.g. *Isaiah 51:16; 59:21; Ezek 3:1-4*). In Amos 3:7,8 we read, "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (*see also Num 12:6-8*). The Old Testament is God's Word, and this is truth (*2 Sam 7:28*). Therefore, the worst thing that happened to Israel occurred when God withdrew His Word from His people (*Amos 8:11,12*).

False prophets, then as today, spoke from their own imaginations (*Jer 14:14; 23:16; Ezek 13:3*), but the true prophet waited for God to speak first (*Deut 18:20; Jer 9:12; 23:21,22*). Only then did the prophet cry, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD" (*Jer 22:29*).

### **CHRIST'S VIEW OF THE BIBLE**

In recent years many theologians have spoken strongly against the teaching that the Bible is wholly true and contains no errors. Emil Brunner thought that such an idea made the Bible into an idol; Paul Tillich felt that it was demonic; while Archbishop William Temple claimed that those who believe in a Bible without error lack spirituality. If we wish to be Christians, however, we should hear first what the Lord Jesus teaches about the Bible. In John 10:35 our Lord says, "The Scripture cannot be broken," and in John

\* Occasionally, a false prophet used the phrase (e.g. *Jer 28:1,2,15*).

17:17, He says in His prayer to the Father, "Thy Word is truth." These two statements show that Jesus' view of the Bible is very different from that of many churchmen today.

When Jesus was tempted by the devil, He wielded the sword of the Spirit which is God's Word. Three times Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy, saying, "It is written" (*Matt 4:4,7,10*). To Jesus, "It is written" means "It is therefore true." When the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the body, our Lord accused them of not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God (*Matt 22:29*). Similarly, in His debate with the Pharisees over whether men's traditions should be obeyed, Jesus stated that what Moses said (*Mark 7:10*) was also what God said (*Matt 15:4*). Even the smallest letter or stroke ("jot or tittle") in God's Word is important (*Matt 5:17-19*).

Because the Scripture comes from God, Jesus was certain that its prophecies had to be fulfilled (*see Matt 26:24; Mark 9:12; 12:10,11; 14:27; Luke 22:37; John 13:18*). In fact, Jesus declared, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle [stroke of a letter] of the law to fail" (*Luke 16:17*). Even when Jesus appeared to speak contrary to Moses' law on divorce, He did so by appealing to the original meaning of the law as given in Genesis (*see Matt 19:1-9*).

Our Lord testified to the truth of many parts of the Old Testament that are often regarded as myths. He referred to Adam and Eve (*Matt 19:4,5*), Sodom (*Luke 17:28-30*), Noah (*Matt 24:37-39*), Jonah being swallowed by a fish (*Matt 12:39-41*), and Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt (*Luke 17:31,32*).

Jesus also looked forward to the time when the Holy Spirit would come to the apostles and inspire them as they wrote the New Testament (*John 14:26; 16:12,13*). Jesus obviously intended that the record of His work and teaching would be preserved for all time (*Matt 24:35; 26:13; John 17:20*).

In the nineteenth century, an Anglican bishop, Charles Gore, admitted that Jesus taught that the Old Testament was completely true, but added that Jesus was wrong in teaching this. We live in strange times. People want to be Christians without following Christ, which is rather like expecting crops to grow without planting anything in the first place. How different is the Bible's teaching! God tells us, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my Word" (*Isaiah 66:2*). A Christian will follow Christ in all things, including His view of the Bible.



## HOW CAN WE KNOW ABOUT GOD?

**T**he 1510 a young German monk named Martin Luther visited Rome. Here he was told that if he climbed what were supposed to be Pilate's stairs on his hands and knees, repeating the Lord's Prayer at each step and kissing it for good measure, he would help deliver a soul from purgatory\* Luther climbed the stairs, all the time repeating the Lord's Prayer and kissing each step; but when he reached the top, he asked himself, "Who knows whether these things please God?" Luther's question is our question, too. How can we know about God?

Because God created all things (*Gen 1*), all things point, in some way, back to Him. The heavens declare His glory (*Psalms 19:1*), although they do it without words (*Psalms 19:3*). In God's creation, there is clear evidence that there is a Creator (*Rom 1:20*). William Paley said that the world is something like a watch, and this shows that there is a watchmaker. There are beautiful lakes and trees (*see Matt 6:28,29*), but because of man's sin the creation was cursed (*Gen 3:17-19; 5:29; Rom 8:22*), so there are also hurricanes and earthquakes.

But a broken watch still shows that there is a watchmaker. And the beauty and order of the earth should be enough to lead all people to praise their Creator and Preserver (*Gen 8:22; Psalm 104; Matt 5:45; Acts 14:17*).

There is another way that we can know something about God. We are all created in God's image (*Gen 1:26*), so we all have some idea of God within us. God has set eternity in our hearts (*Ecc 3:11*). We all have a conscience, some idea of right and wrong. This is true even of heathen people (*Rom 2:14-16*).

Yet if we only had the testimony of creation and conscience, we could not know much about God at all. We could only know "parts of His ways" (*Job 26:14; Ecc 8:17*). We could know that God is our Creator, but we could not know of His love and grace. We would be like a traveler passing through a field on a dark night. Suddenly, lightning flashes and the traveler can see far and wide, but just as suddenly the traveler is back in darkness again, and cannot find his way.

However, God has not left us in such darkness. He has given us a book, the Bible, which is His Word. As Isaac Watts put it,

\* Purgatory is a Roman Catholic myth.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT AS GOD'S WORD

The teaching of the whole Bible concerning its own authority is summed up in 2 Timothy 3:16. Here, Paul says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." The wording in the Greek is even stronger. It should be, "All Scripture is God-breathed," as the New International Version has it. God did not just breathe into the Scripture, but Scripture was, in fact, breathed out by Him. It is "ex-pired" rather than in-spired.

We have seen that the Old Testament writers gave us God's Word. The New Testament writers support this claim (*see Acts 24:14*). In many places, the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, saying that the author was God Himself. Examples of this are found in Acts 13:33-35 (*citing Isaiah 55:3 & Psalm 16:10*) and Hebrews 5:5,6 (*Psalm 2:7; 110:4*). Old Testament passages are also attributed to Christ (*Heb 2:10-12 citing Psalm 22:22; Heb 10:5-7 citing Psalm 40:6-8*) and the Holy Spirit (*Heb 3:7-11 citing Psalm 95:7-11; see "the Spirit of Christ" in 1 Peter 1:10,11*). So the Old Testament comes from God, the Triune God.

The New Testament writers also taught that they, too, were recording the Word of God. The apostles were the Lord's men chosen for special purposes. They were: (1) witnesses of Christ, especially after His resurrection (*Acts 1:21,22; 1 Cor 9:1*) (2) directly commissioned by the Lord Jesus (*Gal 1:1*) (3) given special powers by God (*Rom 15:18,19; 2 Cor 12:12*).

Therefore God moved some of the apostles to write the New Testament, or, as in the case of Mark and Luke, men authorized by the apostles.

As a man thus commissioned by the Lord, Paul could say that his words came from the Holy Spirit (*1 Cor 2:13*) and so were to be obeyed as the Lord's commandment (*1 Cor 14:37*). He was certain that not even an angel from heaven could teach a different gospel (*Gal 1:6-9*). Paul did not issue commands on every subject (*see Rom 14:5,6; 1 Cor 7:8,9*), but when he was moved to give commands, he did so in the name of the Lord Jesus (*2 Thess 3:6,12*). Paul knew that his message was not the word of man but the Word of God (*1 Thess 2:13*). The apostle Peter also put Paul's letters with "the other Scriptures," which shows that he regarded them as part of God's Word (*2 Peter 3:15,16*).

The two Testaments form one unified book. Both testify that the Word of the Lord abides for ever (*1 Peter 1:24,25; Isaiah 40:6-8*). 1 Timothy 5:18 cites Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7, and treats them both as Scripture. The book of Revelation calls itself a book of prophecy, just like the Old Testament books (*Rev 1:3*).

Lastly, Paul could even write, "The Scripture saith

unto Pharaoh" when it would have been more natural to have written, "God saith unto Pharaoh" (*Rom 9:17; see also Gal 3:8*). The Bible claims to be God's very Word, complete and without error when it was first given. To try to explain away the Scripture's testimony to its own full authority is like trying to avoid an avalanche.

Many years ago, the great Augustine wrote fifteen books on the Trinity. He finished with this prayer: "O Lord, one God, the Triune God, whatsoever I have said in these books that comes of Thy prompting, may Thy people acknowledge it: for what I have said that comes only of myself, I ask of Thee and of Thy people pardon." This prayer is very humble and very Christian, for Augustine was not an apostle. The apostles, however, did not finish their books with prayers like this, for they knew they were writing God's Word. That also was very humble and very Christian.

## CONCLUSION

We began with Luther's question: "How can we know about God?" We can now answer that question. We can know about God through His Word, the Bible. This does not mean that if you have a Bible and read it, you will automatically go to heaven. We need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes before we can understand what God is saying to us (*1 Cor 2:14*). To know God, we need God's Word and God's Spirit. That is why Charles Wesley wrote:

*Come, Holy Ghost, for moved by Thee  
The prophets wrote and spoke;  
Unlock the truth, Thyself the key;  
Unseal the sacred book.*

Sometimes you might hear someone say that the Bible is true when it teaches doctrine and ethics, but on other questions it might well be wrong. We must be careful here. When David said, "Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD" (*1 Chron 16:33*), he was not teaching anything about science. Even when the Bible speaks of the sun rising and setting (*Ecc 1:5*), it is only speaking of the sun as it appears to us. We still speak in the same way today even though we know that the sun does not actually rise or set. However, when the Bible tells of the creation of the universe and of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-2, it is not speaking poetically. In this case, we cannot say that it is "spiritually true" but "scientifically false."

There are some things about the Bible that still puzzle us. Did Jesus cleanse the temple at the beginning of His ministry (*John 2:13-17*) or near the end (*Matt 21:12,13*)? This problem can be solved, for Christ must have cleansed the temple twice. Did Mark write Mark

16:9-20 or were these verses added later? This problem is not so easy to solve. Nevertheless, while problems like these should be studied, they must not keep us from the main reason for reading the Bible, which is to know God.

Here is some advice from Scripture which may help you in your Bible study:

(1) Read the Word. That is how the Ethiopian was led to salvation (*Acts 8:28*). If a man claimed to love his wife but ignored her letters when she was away, we would not think much of his professed love for her. The same is true in regard to God's letter to us.

(2) Work hard at understanding the Bible (*2 Tim 2:15*). Compare Scripture with Scripture and pray for light.

(3) Memorize passages (*Psalm 119:11; Prov 22:17,18*). When Jesus was tempted, He did not reply to Satan with some vague reference to Scripture, but with passages He knew by heart (*Matt 4:1-11*). A good translation will help you (*The Good News Bible is not a good translation*).

(4) Meditate on the Word (*Psalm 1:2; 119:97*). Arthur Pink used to write out a verse in the morning and consult it during the day. This helped him to draw out more truths from God's Word.

(5) Test all things according to the light of God's truth (*Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1*).

(6) Apply the Word. It is meant to teach, rebuke, correct and train us (*2 Tim 3:16*).

(7) Most importantly, seek Christ Jesus in all the Scriptures (*see Luke 24:25-27,44; John 5:39,46; Acts 8:35; 2 Tim 3:15*). As we seek Him, our daily Bible study will be a delight to our souls (*Jer 15:16*).

In 1747 David Brainerd, the devoted missionary to the North American Indians, lay dying. As he drew near to eternity, he spoke of the Bible: "O that dear book – that lovely book! I shall soon see it opened! The mysteries that are in it, and the mysteries of God's providence, will be all unfolded!" Only if we nourish our souls on God's Word can we expect to have faith like that of Brainerd.

*Lord, Thy Word abideth, and our footsteps guideth;  
Who its truth believeth, light and joy receiveth.  
O that we, discerning, its most holy learning,  
Lord, may love and fear Thee, evermore be near Thee!*

—by Peter Barnes  
Australia