

CAN WE DEPEND ON BIBLE PROMISES?

- Our reliance on the Good News in our modern world depends on whether we can trust the Biblical record. Many refer to the Bible as God's word. Is that true? The Apostle Paul, in writing to the disciple Timothy about the usefulness of scripture, he wrote:

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
– 2 Timothy 3:16-17*



- This answer has satisfied millions and led them to conclude that the Bible is reliable as the word of God Himself.
- However, an in-depth examination of the Bible reveals that the answer is far more complex and requires maturity of thought, a reflective attitude and an open and receptive mind.

The Bible is a collection of 66 little books.

39 books	27 books
Genesis to Malachi	Matthew to Revelation
Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures	New Testament or Christian Greek Scriptures
Jewish revelation of God	Christian revelation of God

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is a collection of writings of the history and activities of a people who came to be known as Israelites, or Hebrews or Jews.

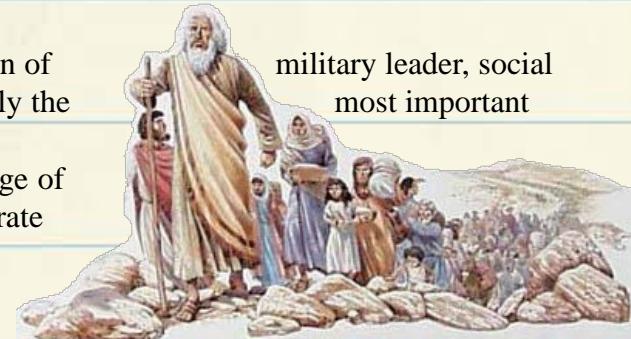
- They were the descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac, and through Isaac's son Jacob who was re-named Israel. (*Exodus 3:6*)
- The books of the Old Testament are of three major types:
 - (1) the five books of Moses;
 - (2) the major and minor prophets; and
 - (3) the general writings, including poems, songs and personal accounts.

These books contain the best of the higher thoughts and longings of the Jewish people and are the best collection of religious wisdom and spiritual truth to be found in the world at the time.

- The books of Moses provided the Jewish people with their law code and its associated rituals. At the time of Moses, the Jewish people were an oppressed, downcast, and uneducated Bedouin tribe. But they were the offspring of the patriarch, Abram, later named Abraham, who demonstrated faith in the one God taught by the high priest Melchizedek. (*Genesis 14:18-20*) As a result, Abraham received a special blessing:

*"The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
– Genesis 12:1-3*

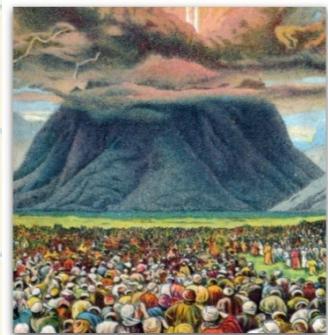
- During the passage of time between Abraham and Moses, the Jewish people had largely forgotten the one God and developed a form of worship similar to the surrounding nations where they worshiped many different Gods.
- But the time had come for the promise to Abraham to return to the forefront. Moses, being aware of this promise, accepted the heroic challenge of uplifting these dejected people and turning them back to the worship of the one God of Abraham.



- Moses himself was an extraordinary combination of organizer, and religious teacher. He was arguably the teacher on the world scene prior to Jesus.
- As such, he was no doubt aware that the challenge of educating and uplifting these ignorant and illiterate people would be a gradual process that would develop over time. Thus, he set in motion the beginning stages of their spiritual upliftment.

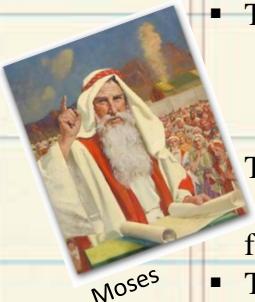
- After leading them out of Egypt, we read:

*"Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."
– Exodus 19:3-6*



- The elementary human mind responds more effectively to fear than to love.
- Think of how a parent teaches a young child. The child is given many rules of behavior with associated punishments and disciplines. The child responds not out of love for the parent, but out of fear of the punishment, for godly love based on faith is the possession of only a mature spiritual mind.
- Therefore, when Moses introduced the people to the one God, he presented God as great and fear-inspiring. And to keep them focused on the one God, Moses presented God as jealous and wrathful. (*Exodus 34:14*) The aspect of God that was most appreciated by these simple people was not God's love, but His justice.
- Moses' successors continued to teach a concept of God that was in accordance with the light of their day. The books of the prophets contain counsel and correction for the people when they strayed from the teachings of Moses, and foretold a time when life on earth would be truly peaceful. The remaining writings were words of wisdom and various experiences that we can learn much from.
- As time progressed, their concept of God matured, such that by the time of the latter prophets, God had become a loving Father of the nation. (*Isaiah 63:16; Jeremiah 31:9*) God had not changed; man had changed.
- Man progressed in his ability to comprehend more fully the true nature of God. And that explains why the God of the Old Testament appears different from the God of the New Testament, as taught by Jesus.

The distinction of "Old" and "New" helps us to more clearly identify the author, assess its credibility, understand its content, and discern its meaning.



- Even the prophet Jeremiah told the Jews to expect a change in their understanding of God:



High Priest

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” – *Jeremiah 31:31-34*

- The Old Testament served as a teacher or tutor that was preparing the Jewish mind for a better and greater revelation of God, accompanied by a better and greater relationship with God as contained in the New Testament. As Paul wrote:

“Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” – *Galatians 3:23-25*

- So if we ask, Who is the author of the Bible? we can confidently say that the Old Testament was inspired by God, because the men who penned the 39 books were writing according to best of their understanding of God, according to what had thus far been revealed to them. Yet at the same time, we must say that the Old Testament does not contain the final, infallible, absolute word of God, for if it did, why would Jesus say:

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” – *Matthew 11:27*

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” – *Matthew 5:17*

- And why would the Apostle Paul write:

“By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.” – *Hebrews 8:13*

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.” – *1 Corinthians 13:9-11*

“The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order.” – *Hebrews 9:8-10*

Who is the author of the Bible?

There was a greater understanding of God waiting to be revealed at ‘the appointed time.’ This further revelation is contained in the New Testament.

The New Testament



- Of all the ancient religious creeds, the Jewish creed with its ‘Ten Commandments,’ created the most successful and moral lifestyle, and continues to do so even down to this day. As a people of laws, the Jews had a distinct and cognizable social order.
- When coupled with their monotheistic religion and their metropolitan location, the Jews would have provided the most secure setting for a monotheistic God of order to make an appearance to mankind. In this setting, Jesus appeared with a greater and more universal message – the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He taught mankind that God was not just the God of the Jews, but the God of all people; and that God was not just the God of all people, but the Father of all people – ever single one of us! (*Matthew 23:8-9*)

- Jesus’ ministry was oral and demonstrative, meaning that he spoke and lived his teachings. It is noteworthy that Jesus did not leave any written records. The only account of Jesus ever writing anything was when he drew a cryptic message in sand. (*John 8:6*) Jesus’ reluctance to leave behind his own writings may explain why it took his followers so long after Jesus’ death to publish narratives about his life.



- The book of Matthew is said to have been completed in 41 C.E., Mark in 60-65 C.E., Luke in 56-58 C.E., and John in 98 C.E.

- However, it appears that immediately after Jesus’ resurrection, his followers began sending written correspondence to one another telling them about Jesus, about their personal experiences, and encouraging one another to hold onto their new found faith. History reveals that there were hundreds of such letters circulating in the first few centuries after Jesus’ death.

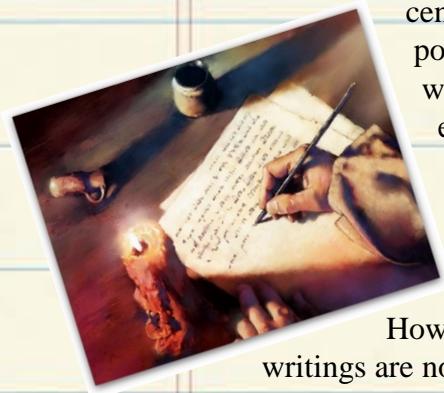


- Continuing up through the fourth century, the Christian community was very loosely organized. There were no centralized teachings or authorized dogma, other than having faith in Jesus and in the promise to be with him in heaven, and getting baptized to receive holy spirit. Each disciple taught about Jesus according to what they understood. The congregations were organized around their foremost teacher and in some instances, conflicts and dissension arose over what was the true good news, and whether the Gentile converts to Christianity would have to keep the law of Moses. (See *1 Corinthians; Galatians; Colossians; Hebrews*, as examples.)

- Some groups accepted certain writings as authentic, other groups chose different writings. There was a lot to choose from. And, as the Apostle John wrote:

“There are, in fact, many other things also which Jesus did, which, if ever they were written in full detail, I suppose, the world itself could not contain the scrolls written.” – *John 21:25*

- In time, the early Christians settled on 27 of those writings that they felt best represented the teachings of Jesus as they understood them. Those 27 books, consisting of 4 historical accounts of Jesus’ life, 1 historical account of the activities of the apostles, 1 book of prophesy, and 21 of the hundreds of letters that had been circulating, made up what came to be called the ‘New Testament.’ And shortly thereafter, these 27 books became the only authorized and acceptable teachings of Jesus.



- Unfortunately, this demarcation and codification of acceptable Christian teachings changed the free-flowing nature of original Christianity and gave rise to a centralized clergy/laity class that had far reaching, and not always positive, implications. Nevertheless, the canonization of the writings proved to be an important development toward preserving enough of the teachings of Jesus so as to effect powerful changes even down to our day.

So, as to its authorship, we know that the New Testament writers were men who wrote about Jesus and his teachings to the best of their ability and understanding, and were thus inspired by God.

However, except to the extent that they quote directly from Jesus, the writings are not the word of God. Instead, John wrote:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” – *John 1:1-3*

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” – *John 1:14*

- Yes, Jesus himself is the word of God. He demonstrated God’s message to mankind by the way he lived his life. Thus, learning about Jesus is how we learn about God, and what is true, and the way to the real life:

“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” – *John 14:6*

- Therefore, while we can learn much from the writings that were inspired by God, a true knowledge of the word of God can only come from a study of the life and ministry of Jesus. It is Jesus’ example that has the real power to effect change.

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” – *Hebrews 4:12*

The New Testament’s New Message

- So we learn that the Old Testament served as a tutor or teacher that prepared the Jewish mind for receiving the Good News (*Galatians 3:23-25*), but the New Testament actually contains the Good News. As Paul explained:

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”

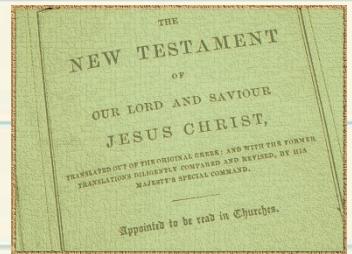
– *Hebrews 1:1-2*

- Accordingly, Jesus’ ministry was first to the people of his birth. And though he quoted from Jewish prophets and writings, he presented a new message that was not limited to the Jews. It was ‘new wine’ for ‘new wineskins.’ (*Mark 2:21-22*)

- So, when we today attempt to understand the Good News of the Kingdom, we need only look to the writings of the New Testament which contain the word of God as spoken through and lived by Christ Jesus.

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” – *Ephesians 3:14-19*

- That is not to dismiss the Old Testament, for it contains lessons of faith and courage that can be looked to today. It provided the foundation for the further revelation of God through Christ Jesus and it provided, and continues to provide, guidelines as to appropriate conduct and the effects of sin. But when we are looking for God’s message to our modern world, we must look beyond the Old, and into the New. And we should also be mindful that at any time the Father wishes, He or His Christ can provide an even further revelation of truth.

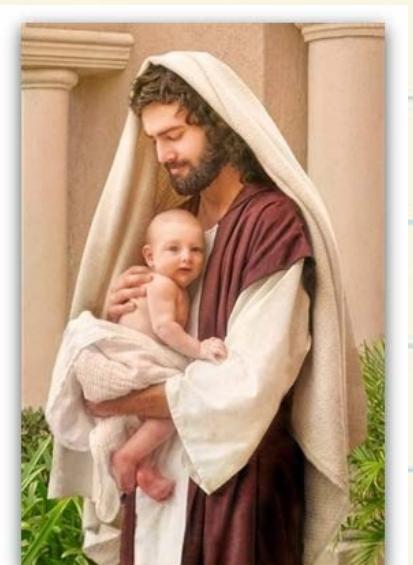


Understanding the Bible

- The best way for us today to understand the Bible is to open it and read it for ourselves. Meditate on it so that you can be receptive to the leadings of the Spirit of Truth, and let the Spirit of Truth do its work. Jesus said:

“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 the 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.” – *John 16:12-13*

- While it is true that Jesus occasionally referred to verses in the Old Testament and explained and expounded on their meaning, the bulk of his teaching consisted of illustrations – pulling life lessons from daily affairs – and by his own living example.
- Thus, we can best understand the Bible, and specifically the Good News, by examining Jesus’ life and the way he worshiped the Father.
- The Father “well knows the formation of us, Remembering that we are dust.” (*Psalms 103:14*) He knows how the human mind operates and He knows best how to reveal Himself. We bask in His great wisdom of first laying a foundation – the tutor of the Old Testament – and then introducing His true nature and eternal purpose through his Son, “in the likeness of men” (*Philippians 2:7*) as contained in the New Testament.



Having laid the foundation for the message of the Good News, the Jews were the first nation invited to share in it.