

What is the Bible?

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12, ESV

This goal of this Bible Study is to provide factual evidence to believers that support their trust in the Bible as the Word of God. The evidence here is only the tip of an iceberg.

Five hundred years ago Martin Luther was put on trial for his writings. He placed the authority of the Bible above the authority of the pope, among many other things. He was told to recant what he wrote. Here are his words from his trial in 1521. Many Protestants point to these words as an important moment at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.¹

From this statement, and others from Luther, Protestants have held to the idea that the Bible alone is the final authority for truth about God. The intention of the Protestants has been to return to the beliefs which were held by the first Christians. Catholics consider the Bible to be God's word also. However, they place the final authority to interpret the Bible more on the pope and the church. This continues to be a point of difference between Protestants and Catholics.

Why should we trust the Bible?

As believers we experience God's revelation of His plan of salvation through the Bible. Accounts of Jesus Christ's life and teach, and the teaching of His followers, are found in the Bible. That is how we came to faith in Jesus Christ. "Historically, the church ... affirmed that God reveals Himself, and that He does so in two distinct ways: through general revelation and special revelation."² General revelation is available to everyone, both believers and non-believers. God reveals Himself through nature and the human conscience (Psalm 19:1; Romans 2:15).

Special revelation is found only in the Bible. It is the original source where people can learn about God's plan of redemption from sin through Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prepared people for the coming of the Savior. The New Testament explained how God revealed His Salvation through Jesus:

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:1-3, ESV)

Why trust God's word?

At the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 1:3, we read that "God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." God spoke the words and it happened. He "spoke" the creation into existence. If you or I say, "Let there be light,"



¹ Sproul, R. C. (2017). [Can I Trust the Bible?](#) (Vol. 2, p. 14). Reformation Trust: A Division of Ligonier Ministries.

² Sproul, R. C. (2017). [Can I Trust the Bible?](#) (Vol. 2, p. 14). Reformation Trust: A Division of Ligonier Ministries.

and we don't flip a light switch at the same time, there will be no light. The power of the words in Genesis 1:3 comes from God.

In John 1:1 John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." John wants us to make a connection with Genesis 1:1. God began a new act of creation through Jesus, the Word. (John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ..."). A mysterious relationship exists between the Son of God and God the Father. What is clear is that Jesus is God and always was God. We also learn that Jesus is the "Word." Again, a great deal is mysterious. What is clear is that through the Word, Jesus, human beings came into direct contact with God Himself.

Throughout the Old Testament the phrase "the Word of the Lord came" is used repeatedly. In fact, it appears 109 times in the Old Testament in the English Standard Version. This phrase introduces a time when God communicated directly with at least one of His people.

In the Old Testament God spoke to prophets. When they wrote scripture, they recorded words God had spoken to them. In the New Testament people who had direct communication with Jesus wrote down their accounts. In both the Old and New Testament God did not write things down but had his people write down His words. This process always involved a "middle man." We might wish that God would speak directly to each of us. However, if you take a close look at the experiences of the prophets and the apostles, it was traumatic when they encountered God's holiness. God uses a gentler approach for the rest of us. As is often the case, God doesn't explain why.

Why trust the words written in our Bibles?

That's a start. We'll be looking next at how God's words were written down and come to us in the Bible. We will look first at the New Testament, then at the formation of the Canon, and then at the Old Testament. After that we will look at how all of these different books of the Bible form one cohesive story.

Our next lessons will be:

- Why trust the New Testament text?
- Why trust the Old Testament text?
- Why trust the selection of which writings are in the Bible?