

Lesson

4

THE BIBLE - GOD'S WRITTEN WORD

The Inspired Word of God

No other book in the history of mankind has affected the lives of men and women so deeply as the Bible. It contains significant divine wisdom and relevance to us as the living and abiding Word of God, expressed within the pages of the Canon of Scripture. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It is the only book about which this claim can truly be made. It forms the basis of our understanding of the Christian faith.

The Bible is just as relevant today as it always has been. Even though it was completed more than eighteen centuries ago, when the greater part of the world was uncivilised, there have been no discoveries or inventions that add to, or subtract from, the moral and spiritual truths contained within its pages. Today, we know no more about the origin of man, the nature of the soul, the problem of suffering, or the future destiny of man, than did those early Christians who were able to study God's Word 1800 years ago. The teachings of the Bible are infinitely superior to the ideas of men. God declares in Isaiah:

*"My thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are my ways your ways" (Is 55:8-11)*

Logos and Rhema

Christianity, to be effective, must be based on **faith**; and faith, to be of any realistic value, must be based on **truth** and an understanding of the **nature** and **character** of **God**. The Bible, as God's Word to mankind, is our source of knowledge about God and all things spiritual. As Christians, we have an obligation, to study it regularly and systematically.

There are two words used in the Greek to describe God's Word:

LOGOS *simply means God's written, revealed word*
RHEMA *simply means the spoken word of God*

When we say God speaks to us, or that God is showing us something in our lives, we are referring to the '**RHEMA**' Word of God. When we want to know what the written, legal instruction about a matter is, we need the Bible, which is the '**LOGOS**' Word of God.

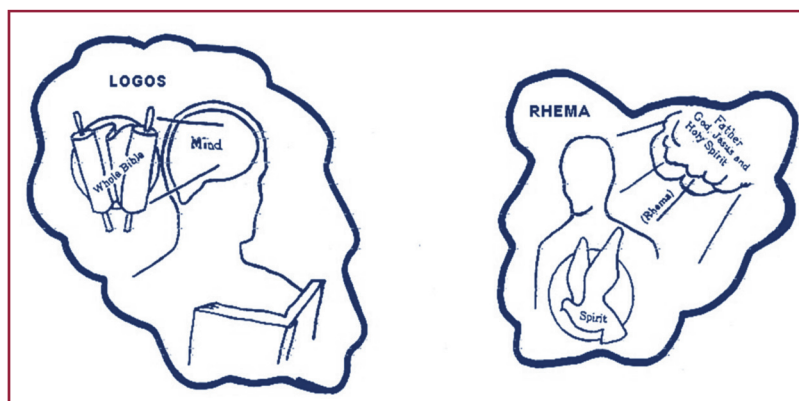
Whilst hearing a **rhema** from God is of vital importance, it must be subjected to the **logos** of God's written law. If you **feel** God is speaking to you about something, it must not contradict the **logos** of Scripture. Many an unwary and uneducated young Christian has been snared by the devil, and 'led' into stormy waters and much confusion because of the deception inherent in believing something that is essentially a lie.

If we are to be successful as individuals under God, we must align every 'leading' with God's written Word, and we must know our Bibles in order to be able to do this. To become familiar with the Bible's basic content takes time - lots of time, and much study. It is, however, a worthwhile endeavour, with great rewards for those who persevere and display a deep desire for ultimate truth.

The diagram below shows the difference between the **logos** word, which speaks to our mind (reason), and the **rhema** word, which speaks to our heart (spirit). Both are necessary, but the emphasis of this study is the '**logos**' word, God's written law and instruction manual, which is the Bible. However some explanation of these two words is in order.

The word **rhema** occurs often in the New Testament. It is used in both a general and a technical sense. In general, **rhema** means any kind of spoken utterance and was in very common use in the Greek world. In its more technical sense, **rhema** means a particular command, direction, promise or prophecy, especially where the idea of a mandate (a judicial or legal command from a superior) is concerned.

The other word frequently interchanged with **rhema** in its general use in the New Testament is **logos**. Like **rhema**, **logos** in general was often used to describe a conversation or utterance, but in its technical sense its use is distinctly different from **rhema**. Whereas **rhema** conveys the idea of a vivid, immediate, specific and (usually) brief utterance, **logos** conveys the idea of a more abstract and formal style of speech, an extended discourse, a story, narrative or report.



LOGOS without RHEMA is dead letter legalism
RHEMA without LOGOS is spiritual anarchy

Uses of Logos and Rhema

- ◆ **Logos** would be used for a whole language, but **rhema** for one saying, taken out of that language.
- ◆ **Logos** would be used to describe the Bible as a whole, but **rhema** for a particular verse of Scripture.
- ◆ The wisdom of God, in its totality, is the **logos** of God; whereas each promise of salvation, deliverance, or supply is a **rhema** of God.

For faith to function effectively in our life, it must be based upon a **rhema** from God. In other words, God's specific word to us, personally.

When we allow ourselves to be led by a **logos** that has not become a **rhema**, we operate in the realm of our understanding, or reason. When we allow ourselves to be led, by a **rhema** from God, then we function in the realm of the Spirit.

The need for Revelation

Man is unable to use his own ability - whether it be logic, intelligence, or any other form of analysis, to understand God.

Being finite, it is impossible for man to understand the infinite - the omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), and omnipresent (all present), God.

The only way we can understand our infinite God, is by His showing, or revealing, Himself to us in ways our finite minds can understand.

Our reference for truth must, therefore, be outside ourselves - not made by us, nor originating in us.

If we could actually understand God with our own mental capabilities, then He would become restricted to the size of our mind, our wisdom, or our understanding.

Christianity is not man's groping blindly in the dark trying to find God; but rather, God revealing Himself and making Himself available to man, through Jesus' sacrifice. This places its emphasis, not on our ability to rationalise or reason things through, but on divine revelation.

Two facts about the Bible

1. The Bible is the Inspired Word of God

God obviously did not write the Bible with His own hand; but men, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recorded the revelations of God down through the centuries. These men had diverse backgrounds and levels of education and experience, from kings and prophets, to fishermen and tax collectors.

The harmony of purpose and direction in the Bible's contents is such a literary feat that it would have been impossible for its writers to compose it without divine inspiration. The men responsible for compiling the Scriptures, many centuries ago, were also inspired in what they chose to include or exclude. The Bible is God's written Word to man, giving him instruction and counsel in every conceivable area of life. It is the ultimate book of absolute truth.

2. The Bible is the Infallible Word of God

Infallible means that it lacks error. It is a book of absolute truth - the only such book available to man on the earth today. God used the faculties of about 40 different writers over a period of over 1,600 years to compile the Bible, which is actually a library of 66 books (39 Old Testament; 27 New Testament). It contains a wealth of infallible revelation, brought to us through fallible men, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The Purpose of the Bible

God gave us the Bible so that we are able to understand His will and purpose for all things, whether spiritual or natural; and especially, so that we can know His direction for our lives and the world in which we live.

We should read the Bible diligently, study it, believe what we read is true, and act upon it accordingly. It is the ultimate authority for our lives, and a foundation pillar of our faith.

The Make-up of the Bible

The Bible is not simply one book, but a library of 66 different books, all bound together in one volume. The Bible has two main divisions:

- ♦ **The Old Testament** is the covenant God made with his people, Israel, before Jesus.
- ♦ **The New Testament** is the new covenant made possible, to the whole of mankind, through Jesus.

The content of the New Testament consists of the revelation of God's new covenant with man, through the recorded words of Jesus Christ and his followers. It is comprised of 27 distinct pieces of writing, by 9 authors (8 if Paul wrote Hebrews). These documents were written over a span of about 50 years, from AD45, at the earliest, to around AD100.

The four Gospels themselves are a unique account of the life of Christ, written to specific audiences of the time. Each author had a different vantage point from which to write, and a different set of people to write to.

The Four Gospels

Matthew: written to the Jews, who were eagerly looking for the Messiah; presents Jesus as Messiah/King.

Mark: written to the Romans, a people who recognised power as supreme; presents Jesus as the Conqueror.

Luke: written to the Greeks, whose ideal is of the perfect man; presents Jesus as the expression of that perfection.

John: written to the Church; presents the truth of Jesus' deity.

Understanding the Bible

Three things are essential to understanding the Bible:

1. You must be a child of God, born-again by the Spirit of God.
2. You must read and study it carefully and regularly, with a willing heart to hear what God may be saying to you personally.
3. You must receive teaching and instruction in the ways of God by becoming part of the local family of God (a church), and learning from inspired, mature and balanced ministry.

Using the Bible

Most sects, cults and 'alternative religions' use some part of the Bible to justify their often strange and misleading doctrines. The problem is that they use Scriptures out of context with the true meaning of the original, and often even re-word the Bible to suit their own peculiar beliefs (for example, the Jehovah's Witnesses use the *Watchtower Bible*, which you will find has been modified, and is quite different from the one we know as the Holy Scriptures); or add other books to 'complete' what is lacking in the Word of God (such as the Mormon *Book of Moroni*).

When formulating doctrine it is important to ascertain what the whole Bible says about a matter. This means researching all that the Scriptures say, and thoroughly checking and cross-checking the facts. Taking one verse and making major decisions for your life, without first identifying whether that verse has been correctly interpreted or not can be dangerous, and can potentially lead you into error.

As you read the Bible, keep a notebook and pen beside you, and make notes on all the things you don't understand. Then ask someone in the church who has some maturity in the Lord to answer your questions and explain any confusing Scriptures to you.

The Bible teaches that it is our own individual responsibility to seek out truth:

“Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Prov 23:23)

“Now these (Bareans) were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11)

Paul's exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:15 should also be applied in our lives:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15)

In 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, we see how important it is to have a love for the truth. We are to walk in truth and reject all falsehood. There is no greater truth than to know, and understand, God's Word - the Bible - and to be one who spends time studying, meditating, praying and seeking after the truth that it contains. All we need to know about life, love, fulfilment, destiny and hope are found in the pages of this marvellous, infallible, divinely inspired book.

The Canon of Scripture

The term **“canon”** means:

“The collection of sacred books that constitutes the authoritative rule and practice of the Christian church”

The word **“canon”** comes from a similar Greek word (*kanon*), which probably came from the Hebrew word *“kane”*, meaning a reed or a rod. From this the word came to mean “rule” or “standard”, and later still was applied to any list of writings that made up a rule of faith or practice.

To Christians, it signifies the divinely inspired Scriptures that are the authoritative rule for our faith. The term occurs in Gal 6:16; 2 Cor 10:13-16; Phil 3:16. It was first used in its present meaning about 350 AD.

The idea of a “canon” of Scripture involves three things:

1. That God has actually inspired and controlled the writings of each individual part of the canon.
2. That God has providentially supervised the preservation and collection of the canon, so that no uninspired work has been included, nor any inspired work omitted.
3. That God has divinely guided first the Jews, and then the Church fathers, in recognising the canon.

The information in the preceding section under the heading “THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE is courtesy of Ken Chant, Vision Christian College, “The Bible”, introduction to Lesson Two

THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE LAW	HISTORY	POETRY	MAJOR PROPHETS	MINOR PROPHETS
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel	Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE GOSPELS	HISTORY	PAULINE EPISTLES	GENERAL EPISTLES	PROPHECY
Matthew Mark Luke John	Acts	Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon Hebrews	James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude	Revelation

MAIN CHARACTERS AND EVENTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

BOOKS	PEOPLE AND EVENTS	DATE
GENESIS	CREATION ADAM NOAH TOWER OF BABEL ABRAHAM ISAAC JACOB TWELVE SONS TWELVE TRIBES CAPTIVITY IN EGYPT	c. 4,000 BC
	MOSES RELEASED FROM EGYPT 40 YEARS IN WILDERNESS LAW GIVEN	c. 1,500 BC
	JOSHUA JUDGES RUTH	
	SAMUEL DAVID SOLOMON	
	KINGS ISRAEL JUDAH	c. 1,000 BC
	CAPTIVITY (ASSYRIA) BABYLON CAPTIVITY	c. 720 BC c. 600 BC
	RETURN TO JERUSALEM	c. 530 BC

USEFUL READING TOPICS

OLD TESTAMENT

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|-----|--------------------------|---------------|
| 1. | THE FALL OF MAN | Genesis 3 |
| 2. | NOAH & THE FLOOD | Genesis 6-8 |
| 3. | ABRAHAM & ISAAC | Genesis 21-22 |
| 4. | JACOB CHANGES | Genesis 32 |
| 5. | THE LIFE OF JOSEPH | Genesis 37-49 |
| 6. | ISRAEL'S 12 SPIES | Numbers 13-14 |
| 7. | JOSHUA IN BATTLE | Joshua 10 |
| 8. | THE CALL OF SAMUEL | 1 Samuel 3 |
| 9. | THE CALL OF DAVID | 1 Samuel 16 |
| 10. | DAVID & GOLIATH | 1 Samuel 17 |
| 11. | ELIJAH AT Mt CARMEL | 1 Kings 18 |
| 12. | ELIJAH & ELISHA | 2 Kings 2 |
| 13. | THE FIERY FURNACE | Daniel 3 |
| 14. | THE CROSS FORETOLD | Isaiah 53 |
| 15. | THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH | Isaiah 60-61 |

NEW TESTAMENT

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| 1. | JESUS' BIRTH | Luke 2 |
| 2. | JESUS DEATH & RESURRECTION | Matthew 26-28 |
| 3. | YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN | John 3 |
| 4. | JOHN THE BAPTIST | Luke 3 |
| 5. | THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT | Matthew 5-7 |
| 6. | PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM | Matthew 13 |
| 7. | FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND | John 6 |
| 8. | JESUS IN ACTION | Luke 8 |
| 9. | THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH | Acts 2 |
| 10. | PHILIP THE EVANGELIST | Acts 8 |
| 11. | PAUL'S CONVERSION | Acts 9 |
| 12. | PAUL IN PRISON | Acts 16 |
| 13. | FAITH | Hebrews 11 |
| 14. | PROPHECIES FOR THE CHURCH | Revelation 2-3 |
| 15. | JESUS' SECOND COMING | I Thess 4-5 |