



# “Understanding the Bible”

## Section 1: What is the Bible?

### Unit 1.2: Proclaiming its Purpose



#### I) Searching for a Starting Point

- When we ask the question, *What is the Bible?*, the first logical place to begin our investigation is to find out who the main author is so we can know this author’s main purpose in writing it. We stated earlier that the Bible was written by more than 40 different human authors who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, so the ultimate author of Scripture is **God**. But that immediately leads us to two important follow-up questions: *How do we know that God is the author of the Bible?*, and if so, *Why did He write it?*

#### II) Should the Bible Speak for Itself?

- Let us begin by addressing the first question: *How do we know that God is the author of the Bible?* To state it bluntly, we believe the Bible is the Word of God because the Bible says so itself. **2 Timothy 3:16** says, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God.*” But why should we just accept this reality that the Bible is God’s Word just because it says so? What if we wrote our own book and declared that they also were God’s words and not just ours?
- Biblical scholar Graeme Goldsworthy provides a helpful answer that sheds some much-needed light on this concept of the Bible’s self-authentication. According to Goldsworthy, “*To say that the Bible defines itself, including its inspiration and authority as the Word of God, is a circular argument. But it is not a vicious circle. It does not bind us to futility, but leads to freedom and eternal life. We cannot hope to prove the authority of the Bible on the basis of criteria from outside of the Bible, for that would be like shining a pocket flashlight on the sun to see if it is real. God’s word is the ultimate authority and only such a Word can authenticate itself.*”
- In simpler terms, if the Bible is not the final authority to declare its own nature, purpose, and substance as God’s Word, then what is the final authority? Fox News? CNN? The New York Times? The Smithsonian? As soon as you trust any of these sources to give you the definitive answer on the Bible coming from the mouth of God, you have elevated that source above God Himself. While there is certainly a wealth of historical, geological, and philosophical proof that the Bible is divine, if it actually is the Word of God, then **the Bible** must always remain the highest authority to declare its own divinity.

#### III) God’s Primary Purpose: Revelation

- So, that leads us to our second question: *Why did He write it?* Stop and think for a moment: Why did God go to so much trouble to write a book with more than 40 different co-authors from three different continents, in three different languages over the span of more than 1,500 years? The answer is found in a single word: **Revelation**.
- The word revelation means to **uncover**, unveil, or disclose something that was previously unknown or hidden. When it comes to the Bible, what is being revealed is personal truth *about* God and also proposition truth about a world that was created *by* God. Simply put, the Bible is God’s gracious effort to reveal who He is to us as His creation. As theologian David Dockery says, “*By God alone can God be known.*” We can celebrate God does want to be known by us, and that the Bible makes that possible.
- The reason it is so important that we start with the Bible’s purpose being the self-revelation of God is that Scripture is *His* story and not ours. As my professor Dr. John Hammett used to say, the Bible gives us “*stage directions for our participation in God’s great drama.*”

#### IV) What is Revelation, “Generally Speaking?”

- Before we talk about how the Bible reveals who God is, we need to pause and reflect on other ways that God has revealed Himself to the world. Everyone (including those who have never read a Bible) has the capacity to know that a God exists. This is through what is known as “**General Revelation**.” This type of revelation is primarily speaking about what can be perceived about God through nature. As John Piper states, “*God made man small and the universe big to say something about Himself.*”
- **Psalm 19** is the classic Old Testament text that describes God’s general revelation in nature. It says in verse 1: “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*” These words prove that everyone who has ever lived has access to enough revelation through the creation of nature to know that someone has created it. Does this mean that everyone who witnesses nature will admit that a God exists? We know the unfortunate answer to that is no. **Romans 1:18-23** tells us that the unrighteous “*suppress the truth*” because although “*what can be known about God is plain to them*” they decided instead to worship the creation instead of the creator. Russell Moore perfectly captures this truth when he says, “*It is not just that persons ought to know God through His general revelation. It is instead that they do know God through this revelation, and they despise Him anyway.*”

#### V) God, Can You Be More Specific?

- General revelation does make us aware that a God exists, but if that was all the Lord wanted us to know then He never would have given us the Bible. While general revelation makes us aware that God is present, “**Special Revelation**” makes us aware of who God is as a person. This special revelation is better known as “the Word of God,” and this includes the “Word of God *spoken*” (from God and the Prophets), the “Word of God *made flesh*” (Jesus Christ), and the “Word of God *written*” (the Holy Bible).

#### VI) What’s in a Word?

- “The Word of God” is the term that best describes the personal self-disclosure of God including His being, His nature, and His divine reasoning. In the beginning of creation, God spoke words directly to people (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses) and then **Hebrews 1:1-2** teaches us that God spoke through chosen prophets, followed by the incarnation of His Son Jesus Christ. **John 1:1** talks about Christ as the Word who was both *with* God and who was God. Another way of describing how Jesus is the Word of God is found in **Colossians 1:15** where it states the Jesus is “*the image of the invisible God.*” Finally, in **John 14:9** Jesus reiterates His role as the invisible God made visible when he tells Phillip, “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*” These verses teach us that Jesus is the self-disclosure of God to mankind so that when we know what Jesus is like, we will know what God is like.

#### VII) Put That in Writing

- When God spoke through the prophets to proclaim His Word, and then sent His Son to become a human being and incarnate His Word, there is one final stage that made His revelation to us complete: His Word written down through human authorship. **2 Peter 1:16-21** tells us that “*no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation*” but that “*men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*” This process that we call divine inspiration enabled the *spoken* Word of God to eventually become the *written* Word of God through Holy Scripture. The benefits for us to have the written Word of God today are many. This includes our ability to preserve and mass distribute God’s truth, as well as meditate on who God is and what He wants us to know about Him and His creation.

#### VIII) Hearing our Father’s Heartbeat

- Possibly the best way we can sum up the purpose of the Bible as the self-revelation of God to mankind is through the words of scholar Mark Strauss who says, “*In the Bible we learn about who God is, who we are, and what it means to walk with Him and to live as His people in this world. We learn to discern His purpose and will. We learn to identify the **heart** of God.*” We need to remember that when we study the Bible we are not just learning propositional truth about the world, but we are also learning personal truth about our creator. When we know the Word of God, we will be able to hear the heartbeat of God.