

## Session 3

### God Speaks to Us

#### The Nature, Authority and Function of the Bible

##### THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE

1. The Bible has been described as "the revelation *of* God *from* God *through* men *to* men" (source unknown). The Bible is the record of God's revelation of Himself through people whom He chose to interpret events in history in the light of spiritual truth. It is the *record* of that revelation and not the revelation itself although God does use His written Word to reveal Himself to people who read it.
  - a. Persons, including God, cannot be known except as they choose to reveal themselves. We have mentioned this in previous material. We can only really know each other as we choose to reveal ourselves to others, sometimes accidentally and sometimes on purpose. When we become angry and burst out in bad attitudes expressed in bad language, we reveal something about ourselves often accidentally. When we give a speech or a lecture or speak formally, we reveal ourselves on purpose. As we listen and observe others in life situations, we form opinions and even convictions about their character and personality. We know God only as He reveals Himself to us, first in Nature (Psalm 19; Rom. 1:20) and then in other ways. He speaks to us through other people, through events and through His Word, and supremely through Jesus, God in human flesh.
  - b. Biblical revelation is rooted in historical events, not the result of human speculation. Many world religions are based on the teachings and meditations and conclusions of men. These man-made religions are the results of the intellectual work and emotional experiences of their founders. In addition, there are some who believe that God dictated their holy books to human receptors who later wrote down or had others write down what their god had said to them.
  - c. On the other hand, the God of the Bible revealed Himself to chosen people like Moses, David, Isaiah and Paul both directly, through visions or inner convictions ("*The word of the Lord came to me saying . . .*") and indirectly through historical events such as the exodus from Egypt and the daily events in their wilderness wanderings and in their daily lives. He gave them spiritual insight for the interpretation of those events (understanding of their spiritual significance) which they then recorded and then passed on to others.

- d. God revealed Himself supremely through Jesus Christ, His Son, our Savior. He said that He came to "*show us the Father*" (Jn. 14:8-11).
2. The Bible is, therefore, a divine-human book in which the will and purpose of God are expressed in human terms.
    - (1) God supervised the entire process so that what is written is framed in terms of the personalities and experiences of the writers but expresses the truth of God as He revealed it to them and they understood it. (2 Peter 1:19-21: *You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*)
    - (2) The Bible is inspired ("God-breathed") in a way that is different from any other "inspired" literature. It is supernaturally, not naturally, inspired. (2 Tim. 3:16: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*) Some other world religions may make similar claims for their holy books.
    - (3) The unity of the Bible is sufficient proof of its divine origin and message. Some 40 writers composed the Bible over a period of some 1500 years. Most of them had no direct contact with the others. They wrote from places as far apart as Babylon in the east and Rome in the west; yet the message is one and the same -- God loves His people and has prepared and arranged for their salvation and blessing, if they will only believe His word and obey His commands.
    - (4) The apparent difference in moral values in the Old and New Testaments (e.g. approval of war, total destruction of all men, women and children of the enemy, lack of condemnation of polygamy or slavery) may be explained on the basis of God's judgment on sin, the concept of social solidarity and progressive revelation.
      - a. God's judgment on sin
 

Since God is, by His nature, a moral God, He therefore commends what is morally good and condemns what is morally bad or evil. God has revealed His moral standard in the Ten Commandments. What is morally evil is anything which is contrary to the literal and moral/ethical implications of those commandments. In the New Testament Jesus raises our understanding of the meaning of those commandments and shows that sin is basically selfishness, desire for self-elevation and power to rule over others. God judges and punishes those who fail to obey the full spiritual

meaning of His basic commands or moral principles.

b. Social solidarity

In the Old Testament people were judged sometimes as individuals but more often as social groups who acted mostly as groups. Individual good deeds were often overwhelmed by the serious sinful attitudes and actions of the groups of which they were a part. Individual good could be rewarded and individual evil could be punished, but more often it was whole nations or tribes and clans which were rewarded for good or punished for evil. In the New Testament there is more emphasis on individual responsibility for moral choices but in the Old Testament when the human race became morally corrupt and violent, the moral God who created them also punished them and wiped them out with a flood except for the morally righteous remnant of Noah and his family.

In Genesis 15, when God revealed His plan for Abram, He predicted that *in the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure* (v.16). In His perfect foreknowledge God planned to give the Amorites about 400 years in which to reform themselves and become obedient to God's good will, but God foreknew that, in spite of their freedom of choice, they would refuse to become good and would remain evil. In the fulness of time God would bring the descendants of Abram back from Egypt just in time to be God's instrument of punishment for the evils of the Amorites in order not only to punish them, but to remove their evil ways from the land of Canaan, the land promised to Abram and his descendants. God's foreknowledge of the inherent selfishness and pride and often morally evil character in people's hearts makes it possible for Him to predict the future results of their selfish, immoral choices.

When God's people, the Israelites, failed to obey God's moral laws and committed all kinds of moral evil, God allowed them to be conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians and be driven out of the land in which He had planted them, and taken into exile. A remnant of them returned to the land but again rejected the way of the Lord and they were then conquered and ruled over by the Romans. The city of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord were destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70 and the nation of Israel ceased to exist in A.D. 135.

The Bible says, *The soul who sins is the one who will die* (Ezek. 18:4) which agrees with what God told Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden:

*You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die* (Gen. 2:17). In the New Testament Paul expressed the same truth when he says, *The wages of sin is death* (Rom. 3:23).

c. Progressive revelation

It is obvious when we look at the Bible as a whole, that God's revelation of Himself in history was progressive as humans were able to understand it. The more God revealed about His character and morality, the more people were able to understand more deeply His nature and ideals.

In the Old Testament people understood God as moral Power with ability to reward and punish. His aim was to produce a people who respected and obeyed Him for their own benefit and good. This is expressed in Ex. 19:5-6: *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole world is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.* This is what the Lord had in mind for the people of Israel. They were to become separate and different from all the other nations of the world. A "kingdom of priests" would be a nation which interceded with God for other nations and expressed God's will to them. A "holy nation" would mean a nation that lived out what they taught the others. They were to be holy in the sense of "set apart for God" and therefore different from others in character and actions.

Unfortunately, they failed to see that God's choice of them was for the purpose of blessing others while they thought of His choice as a blessing for them only; blessed with special privileges and not for special service to carry His Word and Way to others.

The final step in progressive revelation is the Person and teaching of Jesus Christ. He taught us that the motive for action is just as important as the action itself and that pride is the essence of sin and the only way to overcome it is to live a self-disciplined, self-sacrificing life all for the sake of others.

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

**God's Holy Word is totally reliable and authoritative.**

1. The Bible is not authoritative as a book on science or technology, though what little it says in those areas is true. It is totally reliable as to the subjects it addresses (i.e., the history of the Hebrew people and God's plan for their redemption and ours.)

- a. It is historically accurate. Over and over again the bible has been authenticated by the discoveries of archaeology. Biblical names and numbers present some difficulties because of spelling differences or the placing of dots within symbols for numbers.
  - b. The Bible is also spiritually and psychologically accurate. The penalty for sin is death because, by our poor use of our freedom of choice, we destroy ourselves. Bad choices lead to bad consequences. The only remedy of those bad choices is our submission to the authority of Christ whom we receive by faith in His substitutionary death as the price/payment of our sins which is symbolized in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. This acceptance of, and trust in, Jesus as our *"Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,"* (John 1:29) results in the forgiveness of our sins and the possibility of a new beginning in our relationships with God and with others.
2. The Bible is authoritative as a guide for all our relationships with God and with others. It is absolutely authoritative:
- (1) **as to how we may be saved and accepted into fellowship with Him.** The conditions for the reception of salvation from the penalty, power, and eventually from the presence of sin is repentance (turning away from sinful, selfish thoughts, habits and actions) and believing in Jesus as our perfect substitute who suffered the tragic consequences of our bad choices and trusting that His death and resurrection are what God required in order to forgive us and to change us and give us victory over our sin and selfishness.
  - (2) **as to moral values and all our relationships with others.** Those who fail to follow its precepts must pay the price of such failure.
  - (3) **as to church doctrine and practice.** At the beginning of this seminar we gave two recent statements of faith agreed upon by Southern Baptists as their understanding of what the scriptures teach about our theological beliefs and life-style choices and practices. No other source, except the Bible, can provide such guidance.

#### **THE FUNCTION OF THE BIBLE**

- 1. The Bible functions as our guide to God and to salvation and LIFE.
  - (1) All that we know about God comes from the Bible and from nature. (Psalm 19)
  - (2) All that we know about God's plan of salvation and restoration of fellowship with Him comes from the Bible.

- (3) All that we know about how to relate to others in love and forgiveness and in positive, up-building ways comes from the Bible.
  
- 2. The Bible should serve as a unifying force for all Christians. It is not the Bible which divides Christians, it is their differences in interpreting and applying what the Bible says that divides them. It is not obedience to the Bible which unites and blesses us; it is obedience to the God of the Bible as He is revealed in Jesus Christ which unites and moves us forward to the common goal of sharing His love with a lost and dying world.