

LESSON ONE: GOD AND THE BIBLE

The Existence of God

Your decision to obey God's teachings in the Bible rests of course on your belief that God exists. In spite of the claims of atheists and agnostics in today's skeptical world, there are irrefutable proofs that God lives and governs the affairs of men. Three of these proofs are briefly discussed here.

First, the very existence of the universe and of all that is in it proves that God exists. Either the universe created itself out of nothing, or else God created it. It is illogical as well as inconceivable that the universe could have created itself out of nothing, and thus God must have existed in order to create it.

Second, the intricate design of the universe demands a supreme designer. For example, the marvelous human body must have had a designer. It is absurd to think that the human eye or the circulatory system could have come about by accident or slowly developed on their own. David rightly said, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalms 13:14). Also the solar system itself, with the vast yet perfect movements and operations of the stars and planets, demands a creator and designer (Psalms 19:1-6; Romans 1:20). "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showed his handiwork" (Psalms 19:1).

Third, the presence of a moral sense in nearly all people demands the existence of an omniscient God who instilled, in man that moral sense. While an animal has no conscience, any right-thinking person recognizes that some actions—such as the murder of a small child—are morally wrong. Only an infinite being could have instilled such a universally recognized moral sense. Otherwise, man would be just another animal with no more sense of right and wrong than an animal has.

God lives. He is the creator and sustainer of us all, and to him we owe our love and our obedience.

The Nature of God

Since God exists and rules over us, our next concern is to determine his nature and characteristics. What is God like? The answer to this question is in the Bible itself.

First, God is one being. There is one God, not many gods (Deuteronomy 6:4). Yet this one God consists of three personalities—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Each of these three personalities is called God in the scriptures (1 Corinthians 8:6; John 1:1; Acts 5:3-4).

Second, God is spirit, not flesh (John 4:24). He does not consist of a material nature, but of a spiritual nature.

Third, God has certain infinite characteristics: He is omniscient (Romans 16:27), omnipotent (Gen. 17:1), and omnipresent (1 Kings 8:27; Psalms 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:27-28). He is infinitely just (Psalms 89:14), holy (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; 15:4), and good (Psalms 145:9). He is eternal (Psalms 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17) and unchangeable (James 1:17).

In view, then, of the power, majesty, and goodness of God, every man should want to learn of him and obey him. Your interest in this course indicates that such indeed is your desire.

The Bible: God's Word for Man

In order to learn of God's will, one must read and understand his word in the Bible. Perhaps you, like many others, are somewhat confused and uncertain about how to approach the study of the scriptures. The following information and suggestions will aid you in your study of God's word.

The Inspiration of the Bible

The sixty-six books of the Bible were written by approximately forty men over a span of about 1500 years. Yet all the books fit together without the errors or contradictions that inevitably occur in a human endeavor of such scope. The reason for this perfection of the Bible, and the reason why it is by far the most important book that has ever existed, is that its authors were inspired of God. That is, they did not write from their own ideas and opinions, but rather they were divinely guided by the Holy Spirit. Hence every word they wrote was the perfect word of God, without human error or human omission or addition. The apostle Peter wrote:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2, Peter 1:20-21).

See also John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Hence when one reads the Bible, he is reading the actual words of God.

The Divisions of the Bible

The books of the Bible are commonly divided into the Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books). Generally speaking, the teachings of the Old Testament were binding on men who lived before Christ, and the teachings of the New Testament have been and are binding on those who have lived since Christ.

The books of the Old Testament may be divided as follows:	
Law	Genesis - Deuteronomy
History	Joshua - Job
Poetry	Psalms - Song of Solomon
Major Prophets (long prophetic books)	Isaiah - Daniel
..	
Minor Prophets (short prophetic books)	Hosea - Malachi
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The books of the New Testament may be divided as follows:	
Accounts of the Gospel (Life of Christ)	Matthew - John
History	Acts
Paul's Letters (and possibly Hebrews)	1 Corinthians - Philemon
...	
General Letters	James - Jude
Prophecy	Revelation

Principles of Reading and Interpretation

In order to understand the Bible and derive the greatest good from it, you should observe these principles of reading and interpreting it.

- **Read with confidence that you can understand the Bible.** God wants you to know his will; therefore he has given you a book that you and all men can understand. While some parts of the Bible are difficult, most passages are clear and understandable, especially those that reveal what God wants men to do in obedience to him.
- **Read with confidence that the Bible is relevant to you.** No other book so directly addresses your present situation and needs as the Bible does. Give it the chance to affect and help your life.
- **Read with the understanding that the Bible is authoritative.** This is God's word, and man must obey it if he wishes to be blessed by God (Acts 5:29; Revelation 4:12).
- **Read with an open mind.** Do not begin with preconceived ideas about what the Bible says or what you want it to say. Rather let the Bible speak to you and accept what it says.
- **Read with recognition of who is being addressed.** While we are to learn from all of the Bible (Romans 15:4), some parts of it—notably the Old Testament—were not addressed to us today and are not to be regarded as binding on us today. Most of the New Testament, however, is binding on us.
- **Read with an awareness of the historical background of the passage you are reading.** The events of the Bible took place in history, and the historical background of each passage should be considered for a proper understanding of it.
- **Read with an awareness of the context of the passage you are reading.** Do not isolate a verse and ignore the verses that are surrounding it, but rather consider the verses together so that you will have the whole of the message conveyed in the verses.
- **Read and harmonize all of what the Bible says on a subject, not just what one verse says on it.** For example, Acts 16:30-31 discusses what is necessary for salvation, but Acts 2:38, Romans 10:9-10, and Mark 16:15-16 also discuss what man must do to be saved. All of the verses must be obeyed, not just one or a few of them.
- **Read with both faith and common sense.** The Bible is not a mysterious treatise unrelated to the real world, but a logical and sensible book for rational people. Its accounts of events—such as the creation story (Gen. 1-3), the story of Jonah and the great fish (Jonah 1-2), and the virgin birth of Christ (Luke 1-2)—are true and historically accurate, and the language used in describing these accounts should be regarded as literal. The language used in some other parts of the Bible, however, is obviously intended to be figurative or symbolic and should be read with the writer's intention in mind. Such passages are found, for example, in some sections of the book of Revelation.

Now that we have considered the existence and nature of God, and the Bible as his word, we are ready to study about his relationship with mankind. In Lesson Two, we will survey the history of God's dealings with man in both the Old Testament and New Testament periods.

Please feel free to read and study this lesson as many times as you wish to do so. After you are comfortable with the knowledge you have gained you may want to test yourself to learn how well you remember. Questions for review and study on this lesson may be found by going to <http://64.177.52.39/8LESSONS/1Q.htm> .