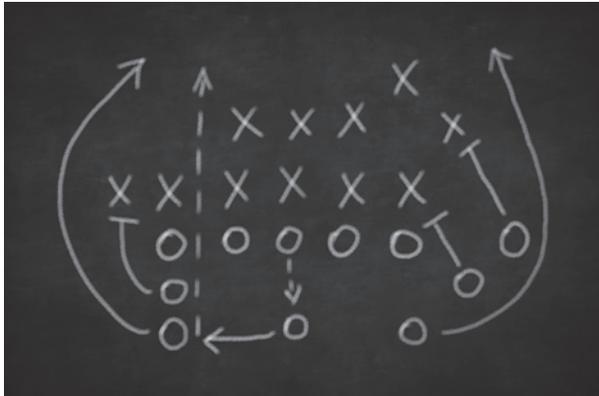


# THE BIBLE

## Its Origin, Preservation, and Impact

by Mark Adams



# Table of Contents

1. A Message From God .....	5
2. Writing in The Ancient World.....	11
3. Transmitting the Text .....	17
4. Old Testament Manuscripts .....	23
5. An Ancient Old Testament Translation .....	29
6. The Forming of the Canon.....	35
7. New Testament Manuscripts.....	41
8. Ancient New Testament Translations .....	47
9. Translation Under Persecution .....	53
10. The King James Bible .....	59
11. When Texts Say Different Things.....	65
12. Challenges for Translators .....	73
13. The Bible As We Have It .....	81

# Introduction

Everything we can know about God and our responsibilities toward Him is found in the Bible. This fact alone makes the Bible the most important book that has ever been written. But can a reasonable, educated person believe that today's Bible accurately contains the preserved message of God from thousands of years ago?

This study is designed to build your faith in the Word of God. God spoke and the Holy Spirit guided writers to record His message. The Bible has been carefully copied and preserved through the ages and translated into more than 500 modern languages. It has always been and still remains man's clearest vision into the heart and mission of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

To aid in your appreciation for the Bible, the author concludes each lesson with a focus on the value of God's Word in your personal life. Special study tools are also available with the PowerPoint™ downloads that can be purchased from the publisher.

## About the Author

Mark Adams is a minister at the Old Hickory Church of Christ in the Nashville area. He is happily married to his wife, Carolina, whom he met while the two were attending Harding University. Mark holds a Master of Divinity from the Harding School of Theology and is currently pursuing his doctorate in ministry at Lipscomb University. Mark is the author of three previous studies in our Flex Adult Bible Study series - *The Church of Christ in the 21st Century*, *Watershed Moments: Pivotal Points in Church History*, and *The Story of God's People*.



# Lesson 1

## A Message From God

### **WARM UP**



*Stacy's hand was trembling as she continued holding the phone to her ear. "I think he's stopped breathing...he's not breathing!" she gasped. Her eyes darted over her husband's face, searching for some response, or even a twitch. The operator responded calmly but firmly that an ambulance was already on its way, but Stacy would need to perform CPR in order for him to live. Stacy was frantic, "But I don't know how! I've never done this before." "Ma'am, you can do this. I'll talk you through it step by step. But it is critical that you do everything exactly as I tell you to." As the operator began to instruct her, it seemed as if time was both racing and standing still. Stacy hung on every syllable, anticipating the next, for her whole world hinged on these next few moments.*

I would wager that every person who has lived on this earth has wondered at some point, "Why am I here?" or similarly, "Is there really

a God out there?" Of just as much importance as these is another question that is central to our study: *If God exists, has He communicated with mankind?*

If the Creator of the universe were to send a message to His beloved creation, there would be certain things that we might assume about the nature of His communication with us. We would expect that whatever He had to say to us was critically important. Just as in the case of our scenario above, we would expect that whatever He told us would be something that we desperately needed to hear, understand, and obey. It would be key to finding meaning and happiness in life. It would be like a compass to guide us through the often murky waters of existence. And if God is good, we would also be able to trust that His message to us would be both true and accurate. Surely an all-knowing God would not make mistakes as He explained the workings and purposes of His world. A word from the All-Wise would bring clarity to matters that we could not possibly have understood any other way. In this book, we study an overview of how the Bible arrived to us in the form we have it today. But in this first lesson, we will explore how the message itself was given and received, as we believe it comes to us from God.

## ***WORK OUT***

---



### **Methods of Divine Communication**

Sprinkled throughout Scripture are claims that the collection of writings we know as the Bible have a divine origin. Often, these writings started off as verbal teachings or historical events, but at some point, they were recorded for future generations to remember how

God has acted in and impacted human history. Let us have a look at some of the passages where Scripture gives us insight into the means by which God's message arrived.

## **Conversation**

Though we see God's creation come about by the spoken word of the Creator, it is interesting to note the conversational nature of God's first communication with Adam. The first recorded statement that we have from God to man is when God explains to Adam what he can and cannot do in the garden, along with the consequences for disobedience (Genesis 2:16-17). If our criteria for what is divine communication requires that God's communication be useful to man, then certainly this first message passes the test. It is also fascinating to read of God walking through the garden after Adam and Eve had disobeyed. He simply asked, "Where are you?" as any person might call out to their child (Genesis 3:9). Early on, Adam and Eve must have enjoyed being with God, as much as any person enjoys spending time with a loving parent. Communication was so frequent and free that, doubtless, it did not occur to them that it would need to be written down.

## **Instruction to Speak**

Often in Scripture, particularly in the prophetic literature, the prophet will let us know that God gave him a specific message to speak. This was Moses' experience on many occasions. As He commissioned Moses at the burning bush to go back to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of slavery, again and again God told Moses, "Say to the people of Israel..." (Exodus 3:13-22). Isaiah's prophecies were given in a similar manner. When he first volunteered to speak on God's behalf (a good deal more willingly than Moses) God responded promptly, "Go, and say this to the people..." (Isaiah 6:8-9).

Not all spoken messages were given in advance as prepared speeches, such as Moses or Isaiah were sent to deliver. In the early church, Christ told His apostles that, as they would be captured and put on trial for the sake of the Gospel, they were not to worry beforehand about what to say or how to defend themselves. The Holy Spirit, who spoke through them in the very moment, who would provide the exact response that they needed (Luke 12:11-12).

### **Images, Dreams, and Visions**

Apparently, God has an affinity for visual aids. Many of the messages sent to and through His prophets were not simply words they would hear, but visions they would see. Sometimes, the prophet himself might be told to create something for the people to witness. In Ezekiel 4, Ezekiel is instructed to set up a brick, label it "Jerusalem," and lay siege to it. Then he was to lie on his left side for 390 days, demonstrating the years of the punishment that would come upon Israel. Daniel was shown striking visions of four strange beasts, symbolizing world empires that would come in and out of power (Daniel 7). Peter was three times shown a sheet full of all kinds of animals that descended, then ascended back into heaven (Acts 10:9-16). And of course, who could forget the powerful images from God in John's vision which provides the contents of Revelation? Just as God gave laws and instructions, He sometimes used pictures to illustrate what He had done or yet intended to do in the world.

### **Instruction to Write**

In many of the historical portions of Scripture, the word from God was not recorded immediately, but was delivered as a speech and later recorded for posterity. Similarly, many of the great miracles

throughout both the Old and New Testaments were not immediately written down, but were remembered by eyewitnesses and later recorded. Often, God instructed one of Israel's leaders that this was to be done. (See Exodus 17:14, Exodus 34:27, Joshua 24:26, and Jeremiah 30:2 for examples.) Luke indicates that he did careful research before he wrote his Gospel so that others could study a trustworthy account of Jesus' life (Luke 1:1-4).

Though there are some recorded correspondences in the Old Testament, the New Testament epistles ("letters") represent another way that men recorded messages from God. Rather than going and giving a speech, an apostle might sometimes send a letter to be read aloud in the assemblies of the churches who received it (Colossians 4:14-17). Much of the New Testament consists of letters written to individuals and to congregations. Paul also indicates that in these letters, he knew when he was writing something that was directly from God, or when he was writing his own opinion (1 Corinthians 7:10-12).

## ***COOL DOWN***



### **The Purposeful Word**

In this lesson, we have looked at some of the ways that God communicated His message, which we eventually have received as our Bible. It is important to understand that God was not merely speaking out of a desire to hear Himself talk, or to give us menial tasks to keep us running about. God's message was given for a purpose. Part of how we come to believe that the Bible is from God is that we experience what a difference this Word makes in us when we strive to embody it.

In Isaiah 55:11, God states that His Word (1) came from His own

mouth, (2) would not return to Him empty, and (3) would accomplish the purpose for which He spoke it.

Jesus was emphatic that His ministry was not to abolish or revise the past messages from God, but instead was to fulfill their true purpose in His life, teaching, death, and resurrection (Matthew 5:18). Jesus was able to create a new covenant by accomplishing God's full purpose for the former covenant. In Christ, we see all that the prophets had seen, preached, and written about, fully realized. Indeed, God's Word accomplished all of God's purposes for which He came (John 1:14-18).

---

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How would you rate your spiritual hunger in comparison to your physical hunger? What does that say about your priorities?
2. If you could choose the methods that God used to communicate with you, what would you choose? Why?
3. What do you typically think of when you picture God in the act of "inspiring" Scripture? How has the description in this lesson been similar or different from your mental image?
4. Even though we believe the Bible is all from God, the personalities of the men writing down the various books often shines through. How do you think God managed to inspire writers without fully possessing them?
5. When you reflect on Isaiah 55:11 and the purposeful Word of God, what purposes do you feel His Word has achieved in your personal life?