

A BOOK FROM GOD

- A. Introduction: The second coming of Jesus Christ is near and it is likely that many of us will see His return. We spent the better part of last year discussing the fact that the Bible reveals that perilous times will precede Jesus' return (II Tim 3:1-5). We focused on what will happen and why.
1. II Tim 3:13-15—In the last lesson of the year we pointed out that in the context of the coming chaos, Paul admonished Timothy, his son in the faith, to continue in the Scriptures or the written Word of God.
 - a. The word continue is translated from a Greek word that means to abide or remain: But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood (II Tim 3:14-15, NLT).
 - b. In order to navigate through the increasingly challenging days, months, and years ahead of us, we must heed Paul's advice to Timothy. We must learn to continue in the Scriptures—the Bible.
 2. In the series we are beginning tonight we're going to address one of the most important subjects we can tackle. I'm going to challenge you (and hopefully inspire you) to become a regular Bible reader so that you'll be able to continue in and stay faithful to the Scriptures in the face of what is coming on the earth.
 - a. For many, if not most Christians, reading the Bible is a challenge, and genuinely sincere people struggle with it. Most of these people fall into one of two groups.
 1. On the one hand there are those who admit that they don't read the Bible for a variety of reasons: It's boring; it puts me to sleep; I don't understand it; it doesn't relate to my life; etc.
 2. Then there are those who believe that they read the Bible because they read daily devotionals and random Scripture passages. Or they follow a "Read the Bible" in a year chart that directs them to read an Old and New Testament passage and a Psalm and a Proverb every day.
 - b. There's nothing wrong with any of those approaches to the Bible. However, none of that is actually reading the Bible. You're simply reading random verses and selected passages from the Bible.
 1. The Bible was not originally written in chapters and verses. Those designations were added centuries after the Bible was completed, during the Middle Ages (1200 AD to 1551 AD) to serve as reference points to help readers find particular passages.
 2. The Bible is divided into 31,101 verses. Even if you've read 3,000 verses you cannot claim that you have read the Bible—because you've read only a small portion of it.
 - A. The Bible is actually a collection of 66 books and letters. The word Bible comes from the Latin word for books (*biblia*) that is from a Greek word (*byblos*) used for papyrus, an ancient writing material made from reeds that grow along the Nile River in Egypt.
 - B. Each book and letter in the Bible meant to be read as is any other book or letter—from start to finish. Otherwise you cannot get the context of the individual verses. Even if you eventually read every verse on your yearly start you get no context because you don't read any book from beginning to end.
 3. In this series we're going to begin to talk about what the Bible is, who wrote it and why, what reading it will do for you, and how you can overcome some of the challenges that keep people from reading. I'll introduce some points tonight that we will elaborate on more fully in the next few weeks.
 - a. I'm going to give you practical instruction on how to read the Bible in a way that will equip you to deal with the chaos that is even now taking place all around us.
 - b. If you put the information in this series into practice, you will be a different person a year from now. You will be able to deal with life in this sin damaged world more effectively. And, you will be equipped to handle the troubling times ahead of us.
- B. The Bible is a unique book in that it is a book from Almighty God. We begin our series by first discussing what that means, along with how and why God gave this "one of a kind" book to humanity.

1. The writings that make up the Bible were written by more than forty authors from various walks of life over a 1500 year time period—from the time of Moses (1400 BC) up to the death of John, the last of Jesus' original twelve apostles (100 AD). Yet the Bible has a continuity that carries through from beginning to end because the writings (the words) were inspired by the Spirit of God.
 - a. II Tim 3:16—Inspiration is translated from two Greek words, *theos* (God) and *pneustos* (breathed). The word literally means God-breathed. God imparted something of Himself to the Scriptures.
 1. The writers of the Scriptures were not robots. They did not go into a trance and write. But they were clearly aware that the words they were writing were inspired by God Himself.
 - A. I Pet 1:11—They (the Old Testament writers) wondered what the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward (NLT).
 - B. II Pet 1:20-21—No prophecy in scripture ever came from the prophets themselves or because they wanted to prophesy. It was the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God (NLT).
 - C. I Cor 2:13—When we tell you these things, we do not use words that came from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths (NLT).
 - D. Gal 1:11-12—Dear friends, I solemnly assure you that the Good News of salvation which I preach is not based on mere human reasoning or logic. For my message came by a direct revelation from Jesus Christ himself (NLT).
 2. The ideas that the writers conveyed and the words they wrote were inspired by God. But their individual personalities, linguistic styles, and life experiences are also present in the writings.
 - A. Luke, who wrote one of the gospels, was a Greek doctor with a more literary (or educated) writing style. His book is written in very polished Greek, with a lot of detailed descriptions of people, places, and events.
 - B. Mark, a young Jewish man who grew up in Jerusalem, wrote his gospel in a much simpler style, using a number of Aramaic terms (the common language among the Jews in Israel at that time). He emphasized action rather than teachings and details in his narrative.
 - b. The Holy Spirit superintended the writing of the Bible. To superintend means to have or exercise the charge and oversight of something (*Webster's Dictionary*). The same God who placed the stars in the heavens with such precision that their movements are mathematically predictable was able to direct the writing and preservation of His written Word. (More on this in later lessons)
2. Although the Bible is a collection of writings, it has one main theme: God's desire for a family and the lengths to which He has gone to obtain His family through Jesus. Every book and letter adds to or advances this story in some way.
 - a. Far too many people approach the Bible in terms of: What does it mean to me? How will it help me live my life? But it doesn't matter what the Bible means to you because it wasn't originally written to us. The issue is: what did the information mean to the original writers and hearers.
 - b. Each book and letter was written centuries ago by real people (inspired by the Holy Spirit) to other real people for the purpose of communicating information related to God's plan for a family.
 1. The Bible was written to reveal God's plan of salvation, His plan to save men and women from sin and make them His sons and daughters. II Tim 3:15
 2. The Bible is a record of the progressive unfolding of His plan as He worked in and through the lives of men and women who lived many centuries ago. This doesn't mean that there are no timeless, eternal truths in the Bible, because there are. But to properly interpret Scripture we must consider who wrote to whom and why. Those factors set context.
 - c. We read the Bible to get to know Jesus—the one through whom God accomplished His plan. Jesus

makes Himself known to us through the pages of Scripture. Jesus, in a confrontation with religious leaders, reported that the Scriptures testify or bear witness of Him. John 5:39

1. On resurrection day Jesus went through the portions of the Bible that had been completed at that time (the Old Testament) and showed how, through His death and resurrection, He fulfilled what had been prophesied about Him. Luke 24:25-27; Luke 24:44-48
 2. God has spoken to us through Jesus. Jesus is called the Word of God, the Word made flesh. He is the visible manifestation, the visible expression of God. He is God become man without ceasing to be God (lessons for another day). Heb 1:1-2; John 1:1; John 1:14; John 1:18; etc.
 - A. The Living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is revealed through the written Word of God. We encounter Jesus in the Bible.
 - B. John 6:63—All the words through which I have offered myself to you are meant to be channels of the spirit and of life to you, since in believing these words you would be brought into contact with the life in me (J. Riggs, paraphrase).
 3. The Bible is the only 100% accurate, fully reliable revelation of God, superseding everything—including supernatural manifestations (dreams, voices, angels, prophecies, etc.).
 - A. II Pet 1:14-18—Peter, in a letter written shortly before he was executed for his faith, wrote that he and the other apostles had not followed cunningly devised fables. He stated that they were eyewitnesses of Jesus. (more on this in later lessons)
 - B. Peter made reference to having seen Jesus transfigured and hearing God the Father speak from Heaven (Matt 17:1-5). Then Peter stated that we have an even more certain Word that Jesus is Who He claims to be—We have something more sure, the prophetic word or the Old Testament writings (II Pet 1:19, ESV).
 1. Peter's point is not that he questioned what he witnessed, but rather that what Jesus did and said was confirmed by the written Word of God. In other words, genuine supernatural expressions are always fully consistent with the Bible.
 2. We are now in a period of rampant spiritual deception—as Jesus warned us we would be (Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24). It will culminate with the world embracing Antichrist.
 - C. To be deceived means to believe a lie. Jesus, the Living Word of God, is the Truth (John 14:6) and He is revealed through the truth, the written Word of God (John 17:17). The Bible (the truth) is our protection against deception.
 - d. The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books and letters, also known as epistles).
 1. The Old Testament is made up of writings written and preserved by the Jewish people (also known as Hebrews or Israelites) before Jesus was born. It is primarily a record of Israel's history and was written mostly in Hebrew. The Old Testament also has prophecies about Jesus—what He would be like and what He would do once He came to earth.
 2. The New Testament consists of writings written by some of Jesus' first followers once He came to earth. It is written was written in Greek.
 3. The names Old Testament and New Testament were given to each section in the early 3rd century (200s AD) by Tertullian (an early church father or leader) to distinguish between the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.
- C. Because the Bible is from God or God-breathed, it is a supernatural book. *Webster's Dictionary* defines supernatural as of or relating to an order of existence beyond the visible observable universe
1. The Bible is no ordinary book. It is the supernatural Word of Almighty God, and it works in us and produces change and transformation in those who hear, read, and believe it. I Thess 2:13; I Pet 2:2
 - a. Jesus compared the Word of God (the Scriptures) to bread. Bread was not a supplement to the

meal in that culture. It was a staple of their diet and often the entire meal (the staff of life). Matt 4:4

1. By His statement, Jesus clearly meant that human beings need more than physical sustenance—we need God. Just as food provides all the nutrients we need to live, so God, through His Word gives us what we need—what we must have—to live this life.
 2. The comparison with food gives us insight into how God’s supernatural Word works and what it will do in us and through us. When you eat vegetables you don’t have to understand how they impart vitamins to your physical body. But you must eat them in order for it to happen.
 3. You don’t have to understand how God’s Word works in you to produce growth and change, but you do have consume or eat it in order for transformation to take place. You eat God’s Word by reading it.
- b. The greatest gift you can give yourself in this new year is to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament so that you can become familiar with it in its entirety.
2. We start with the New Testament because the Bible is progressive revelation. God has gradually revealed Himself and His plan for a family in the Scriptures.
 - a. The Old Testament anticipates the coming of Jesus. The New Testament is the full revelation of what the Old Testament points to. The Old Testament is easier to understand when you learn to read it in the greater light of the New Testament. Save the Old until you are competent in the New.
 - b. Set aside fifteen to twenty minutes a day to read (or as close to that as possible). Start with the first book of the New Testament (the Gospel of Matthew) and read as far as you can in your allotted time.
 1. Don’t skip around. Don’t stop to look up words in the dictionary or consult a commentary. Just read. Leave a marker where you stop your reading, and pick up where you leave off the next day. Once you’ve read all the way through the New Testament, do it again and again.
 2. Don’t worry about what you don’t understand. You are reading to get familiar with the New Testament. Understanding comes as you become familiar with it. Familiarity comes with regular, repeated reading.
 - A. This doesn’t mean that you can’t ever skip around or stop to look up the definition of words, consult a commentary, or read the study notes at the bottom of the page. Just do that at another time besides your regular reading time.
 - B. This doesn’t mean that you can’t ever adjust your reading pattern. When I began to read the New Testament, after a few times through, I decided to read one gospel, all the epistles, and then another gospel followed by all the epistles, and so on. I skipped the Book of Revelation for a few years until I was more familiar with the gospels and epistles.
 3. Reading in this way helps you see context. No verse stands alone. Every verse fits with every other verse. Sometimes a passage that you don’t understand is explained in another book or letter—if you just keep reading. You begin to see themes—ideas that come up over and over—and you begin to understand what God’s plan is all about.
2. As I said at the beginning of this lesson, if you become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament (read it over and over, start to finish until you are familiar with it) you will be a different person a year from now.
 - a. God’s Book will impart peace, joy, strength, and hope to you. It will change your perspective which will change how you deal with life. You’ll learn how to respond to life’s challenges in a way that produces victory (more on these topics in later lessons).
 - b. We are entering dangerous times, unlike any the world has ever seen before. We need to know how to listen to the voice of God as He directs us through the challenges ahead. The same voice that inspired the Scriptures is the same voice that leads and guides us. If you aren’t a regular reader of the New Testament then you can’t possibly be familiar with His voice.
 - c. If ever there was a time to become a Bible reader—it’s now. Lots more next week!!