# ON KNOWING THE BIBLE

LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

# ON KNOWING THE BIBLE

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## PREFACE

This book is composed of messages concerning the study of the Bible that were given in a service training conducted by Brother Witness Lee in Taipei, Taiwan, on October 5, 1959, through January 22, 1960.

# CHAPTER ONE

# WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

This series of lessons is intended to help a person learn to read the Bible, that is, to help him know how to read the Bible. Perhaps some brothers and sisters may think that during each lesson we will be studying the Bible itself, but this is not what we will do. Instead, we will help the brothers and sisters learn how to read the Bible and how to know the Bible.

## THE SPIRIT WITHIN AND THE BIBLE WITHOUT MUST BE BALANCED

To edify a person spiritually, we must help him to know the Bible. In the past two thousand years Christians all acknowledge that no one can truly know the Lord without knowing the Bible. We human beings are not merely a spirit. Although we have a spirit, we are not merely a spirit but a human being. If we were a spirit only, then God would need to give us only His Spirit and not the Bible; however, since we are not a spirit only, He must also give us the Bible.

The spiritual inheritances God has given us are the Spirit, which cannot be seen, and the Bible, which can be seen. Inside of us is the Spirit, and outside of us is the Bible. Christians throughout the ages can testify by experience that a proper Christian must be fully balanced in both respects—the Bible without and the Spirit within. These two aspects must be absolutely balanced. Any bias toward one side will result in serious problems. Among Christians throughout the ages, some have leaned toward the Spirit within, which has resulted in great errors. Still more lean toward the Bible without. Seemingly, they have not erred as much, yet among them there is a very serious condition of death. In other words, if there were only the Spirit within and not the Bible without, man would easily commit errors. Conversely, if there were only the Bible without while lacking the Spirit within, man would become extremely dead, altogether lifeless, and without any vitality.

Christians can be likened to a train. There needs to be the fuel inside as its energizing power. But a train needs to have tracks outside as well. If there is fuel within but no tracks without, the train would not be able to run. Even if it runs, problems will arise. However, if there are only the tracks without but not the fuel within, the train may be on the right track, but it cannot move. Therefore, for a train to run, and to do so smoothly, there must be the coordination of two aspects: the inner aspect and the outer aspect. Outwardly, there must be the regulation of the tracks; inwardly, there must be the energizing of the fuel.

It is the same with us. We have the Spirit within and the Bible without. Regrettably, throughout the ages Christians lean either toward the Spirit within or toward the Bible without. Even today many people are doing the same. Those leaning toward the Spirit within very much condemn those leaning toward the Bible without, saying to them, "What you are reading is but dead letters. Every day you are just using your mind to study the dead teachings. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Only we are living in the Spirit." Those tending toward the Bible without would likewise condemn those who stress the Spirit within, saying to them, "What you have is just emotions. There is only excitement and stirring up but no stability. Please consider all the people you claimed have been stirred up by the Spirit. Where are they today? Many things that were claimed to be initiated by the Spirit actually resulted in total disaster." Years ago we saw much of this kind of condemnation in northern China. When the so-called Pentecostal movement or the charismatic movement was in full force there, those involved in it very much opposed the outward interpretation of the Bible. They thought that it was sufficient enough to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to have the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. However, among them not only were there many errors but even odd stories. Those errors and odd stories really brought shame to the Lord's name. Not only did these things happen in China; they happened in western Christianity as well. Even to this day there are still these two tendencies and these two errors.

These things show us that a proper Christian should be balanced; he should be full of the Spirit within and should know the Bible without. When one is full of the Spirit within, he will be like the train with the energizing fuel. When he knows the Bible without, he will be like the train on the track. In this way he will be a Christian who is both living and stable, both moving and on the mark. He will be a living, stable, moving one who is also on the mark.

Therefore, we must put equal emphasis on the Spirit and the Bible; we must not neglect either matter. We must not overlook the Spirit within; neither can we despise the Bible without.

## TO KNOW THE BIBLE REQUIRING THE EXERCISE OF THE SPIRIT AND THE TRAINING IN THE MIND

The Spirit and the Bible are two sides of one matter. Similarly, in knowing the Bible, there are also two sides. Almost everything God ordained in the universe has two sides. For example, there is heaven and earth; there is male and female; there are two sides, the inside and the outside; there is the top, and there is the bottom—these are all two-sided. For a person to know the Bible, it is the same. There is the need for the mind, and there is the need for the spirit. No one can know the Bible properly by neglecting either aspect of this. To know the Bible, one must be trained in the mind; he must also be exercised in the spirit.

However, in knowing the Bible, Christians today are either for the mind or for the spirit. Those for the mind are too much for studying the letter, whereas those for the spirit are too free in spiritualizing everything, to the extent that the Bible becomes almost void of letters to them. Therefore, in studying the Bible, there is again the danger of being one-sided.

Many people bury themselves in the Bible day after day. They become experts in studying the letter of the Bible. For example, the Hebrew language is made up of an alphabet with twenty-two letters. Some have studied so much that they have counted how many times each letter in the alphabet is used in the Bible. Similarly, they have also counted the number of times each letter of the Greek alphabet is used in the New Testament. Not only so, the Hebrew and Greek languages are similar to Latin, in that each letter represents a numeral. For example, in Latin X is equivalent to ten, and V represents five. Similarly, each letter in Hebrew and Greek also represents a number. Some people buried themselves in study over this matter. They calculated the numerical value for every word in the Old and the New Testament. It is amazing that they found that the numerical value represented by each word in the Bible can all be divided by seven. I myself have never tried this, but there are writings that have confirmed this. Now you know to

what extent people have gone in studying the letter. Then there are the concordance compilers who are also into the letter and have researched much into the Bible.

At the same time there are people today who open the Bible and go entirely by their inner inspiration. This is really like "the wind [that] blows where it wills" (John 3:8). Whichever way the "wind" blows, they would speak accordingly. Sometimes they come on like a tornado. Originally, the train was running properly along the railroad tracks, but when the tornado came, the track was blown away, and the train was blown into the air. I believe that you have met this kind of person. Their exposition of the Bible is really up in the air; it floats all over. They are totally slanted toward the spiritual side.

Now let me repeat. To lean toward letters results in much death, and to lean toward the spiritual results in much danger. It is true that those who lean toward the spiritual can be very interesting and persuasive, even spirit-releasing, but after one hears them speak, he is easily carried away into the air. On the other hand, for those leaning toward the letter, every line they speak is backed by proofs, yet they are very dead. After less than half an hour of their speaking, one may fall asleep. Both sides are off.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, if we really want to know the Bible, we must be balanced. We must understand properly the letter of the Bible and must properly use our spirit to sense the spiritual meaning in the Bible. To read the Bible well, we must train our mind for this and, perhaps even the more, exercise our spirit for this. To train the mind is for the purpose of understanding the Bible. To exercise the spirit is for the purpose of touching and contacting the Bible. One is a matter of the mind; the mind has to understand the Bible. The other is a matter of the spirit; the spirit has to contact the Bible.

With the matter of electricity, to understand it is one thing, and to contact it is quite another. Understanding electricity is a matter of the mind, whereas contacting electricity is a matter of the body. Many times there is electricity, but a board insulates the body from it. Under such a circumstance, although a person's mind may understand electricity, his body cannot contact it. In contrast, some people do not understand electricity at all, yet their bodies have actually contacted electricity. They are able to contact electricity because electricity is there and because their bodies are not insulated from it. Once

they touch it, they come into contact with it. This is a good illustration. Our relationship with the Bible is the same. For our mind to understand the Bible is one thing, and for our spirit to touch it, to contact it, is quite another. Perhaps your mind understands the Bible, but your spirit has not yet contacted or touched it. We must not only use our mind to understand the Bible; we must also use our spirit to contact it. It is not sufficient merely to understand the Bible with the mind; we must also contact and touch the Bible with the spirit.

Nevertheless, while we need to touch and contact the Bible with the spirit, it is also necessary to have the understanding in the mind. We must realize that the reason we want the mind to understand the Bible is so that our spirit can contact and touch its words. One thing is sure: it is difficult for our spirit to touch the words in the Bible without the words first passing through the understanding of the mind. This is true with the words in the Bible; it is also true with the word that is preached. Even the words in this chapter cannot touch your spirit without first passing through the understanding of the mind. Suppose I am here preaching in Chinese, and there is one sitting here who cannot understand Chinese. Nothing will get into this person's mind. How can his spirit be touched? The truth must be grasped by the mind first before it will reach the spirit and touch the person. If there is a person here who is illiterate, and he opens up the Bible to read it, how can his spirit be touched? For his spirit to be touched by the Bible, he must put in some effort to first learn to read with his mind. He must at least be able to identify the words in the Bible before he can read it and be touched by it in his spirit. If we do not understand the words in the Bible, even if we pray for three hours with much inspiration, it will still be impossible for us to understand or be touched when we read the Bible, because its words cannot get through our mind. We must spend much time to learn the language with our mind before we can come to read the Bible. Only then will the words be able to get through our mind to touch our spirit.

Furthermore, the Bible itself is not that simple. One may know every word in the Bible but still not be able to understand its meaning. There are passages in the Bible that cannot be apprehended just by mere reading. The Bible has its own distinctive features and its own background knowledge. Many people with doctorate degrees and much learning open up the Bible to read it, only to find that although they know every word, they cannot understand some of the passages, because they do not comprehend the background knowledge or the

special terms of the Bible. Since they do not understand them, it is difficult for them to be touched. Of course, there are certain passages, such as John 3:16, which present no technical difficulty in their wording. As long as one understands the words, a mere reading will be sufficient for the mind to grasp. However, there are many other places in the Bible that contain special problems in their wording. For example, there are specific names of people and places, and there are the problems of the dispensation, the types, and the prophecies. In addition to these, there are numerous other matters such as numbers, allegories, and symbols. The ability to understand these specific expressions and terms definitely does not belong to someone who is merely literate or learned in worldly education.

This can be likened to the fact that although I am literate, I am entirely lost when presented with a book on electricity. I can read the words, but I do not understand their meaning, because of the many specific terms. To understand a book on electricity, we must first study some of its special terms.

In the same principle, the words in the Bible may be quite common, yet they are very specific and contain many particular terms. If we have not been properly trained in these specific terms and technical matters, we will have a hard time understanding as we read. For example, John 1:17 says that the law was given through Moses. *The law* is a special term, and *Moses* is also a special name. Without a background for these two terms, even a hundred Ph.D.'s put together would not be able to understand their meaning.

Hence, in order for a saved person to understand the Bible properly, he must spend time in the specific terms and wording and must be trained in his mind. With the training, the reading would be much facilitated. There would not be any difficulty when one encounters words such as *the law*, *Moses,* or *the shedding of blood for the remission of sins*, because one would already know these special terms. As soon as one reads them, they will be readily understood. The words of the Bible will immediately pass through the mind and will be touched by the spirit. Therefore, we will spend much time to look into the specific terms and wordings of the Bible. This aspect of training the mind is a preparation in helping us to use our spirit to contact and touch the Bible.

We hope that through this training, most of the brothers and sisters would, on the one hand, become trained in the technique of getting into the Bible and

in the specific terminologies to have the so-called Bible knowledge and, on the other hand, become exercised in their spirit. In this way when they read the Bible, the words will immediately penetrate through their mind. At the same time they will know how to use their spirit to contact the Spirit in the Word.

In short, this training is for everyone to learn to understand the Bible with the mind and to touch it with their spirit. The first half of this series is the training of the mind, and the second half is the exercise of the spirit. In the first half we will spend much time to get into the special terms and techniques used. This requires much patience. Sloppy people cannot know the Bible. One cannot expect a sloppy person to know the Bible properly. Perhaps once in a while God in His mercy would allow him a touch and an inspiration. However, this is like being hit by a bolt of lightning, which is extremely rare. All those who know the Bible properly have a proper mind and a proper understanding. Although we have a spirit, we are not spirit only. God never has the intention to make us a spirit; He only intends that we be spiritual persons. God still wants us to be human beings. As human beings, we not only have a spirit but also a mind. Therefore, for us to know the Bible, we need to exercise our spirit within and be trained in our mind without. Only when we have both aspects are we proper persons.

Now we will come to the first lesson of this series. We need to find out what is the Bible. What really is the Bible? If someone asks, “What is this table?” we can immediately say that this table is made of wood; one can put things on it. But few are clear what the Bible is. Even today it is difficult for us to fully explain it. We will speak what we can. We will use four points to explain what the Bible is. The Bible is one, but we will speak about it from four aspects to cover the matter fully.

## THE BIBLE BEING THE WORD OF GOD

The Bible is words, yet it is not man’s words but the words of God. In the universe, besides God, the greatest thing is the word. The Bible tells us that even the universe was created by God’s word (Heb. 11:3).

The word is above everything and greater than everything. It is also before everything. Before all things there was the Word. Even among men words are a great matter. Almost one hundred percent of a person and his activities have to do with his words. Just imagine where a person would be if he could not

speak or write or use any kind of language to express what is within him. It would seem like such a person did not exist. If you are one who cannot speak and can never use language to express yourself, then even if you are here, it will be as if you are not here. At least, you will not be expressed. Therefore, the expression of a person's life, character, and entire history depends fully on words.

How did words come about? Were they created by God? I dare not say, nor do I know how words came about. I think that if I were to ask scientists this question, they would also find it difficult to answer. How did words come about? This is a very interesting matter. How did Adam learn to speak at the beginning? No doubt the ability to speak was created by God, but where did the words he spoke come from? What language did he use in Eden? I believe that no one knows the answer. However, if in the universe there were not the existence of words, then there would be nothing for us to do here today; everything would be over. All of mankind, society, and the world would be over. Therefore, words are truly a great matter.

The Bible is the word of God. This is an even greater matter. It is impossible for man to research the universe, mankind, and the existence of God today without coming to the Bible. The entire story of the universe is contained in the words of the Bible. If you want to know God, the story of the universe, and mankind, you must read the Bible. These things all exist and are all contained in the words of the Bible. Moreover, this word is not the word of man but the word of God.

Second Peter 1:21 says that the prophecy in the Bible, that is, the words of the Bible, is spoken "from God while being borne by the Holy Spirit." There are two important points worth noticing. One is that it is borne by the Holy Spirit, and the second is that it was spoken from God. To be borne by the Holy Spirit, in Greek, means to be carried along. This is like a sailing boat being carried along by the wind. A sailing boat moves in the water through the propelling of the wind. Here it says that the words in the Bible were spoken by men borne by the Holy Spirit. This bearing is just like the carrying along of the wind. The Holy Spirit is like the wind, coming upon those speaking for God, to carry them along, bearing them in their speaking. The five books of Moses were written by Moses, but the Holy Spirit was there bearing Moses up as he wrote. It is true that many psalms are the words of David. However, the Holy Spirit was in and upon David, bearing him to speak.

In addition, we must also realize that the Bible is the word spoken "from God." Regarding this phrase, Bible translators and the authorities on the manuscripts have differing opinions. Some say the two words *from God* should refer to the persons speaking, meaning that these were "men of God," speaking while being borne by the Holy Spirit. Others say that the two words *from God* should not refer to the people who spoke but to the things spoken, meaning that their speaking came from God. The better translations, such as the Revised Standard Version, agree with the second concept. It tells us that the word in the Bible was not only spoken by those being borne by the Holy Spirit but also by man speaking from God. It is the Spirit of God that carries man along to speak. It is also man speaking from God. In other words, God spoke forth His own word from within man and through man's mouth. This is the Bible. What is the Bible? The Bible is God's Spirit coming upon man and carrying man along to speak forth God's word in him. When God declares His word in the universe from and through man, we have the Bible.

Second Samuel 23:2 says, "The Spirit of Jehovah spoke through me, / And His word was on my tongue." This was spoken by David. David was not only a psalmist but also a prophet (Acts 2:30). He told us that what he spoke was through the Spirit of God and that the word of God was in his mouth. Please notice that not only did the Spirit of God speak through him, but God's word was in his very mouth and was spoken through his mouth. This is the Bible. This is truly an amazing thing.

Not only do we have to admit that the Bible is God's inspiration, but we must also realize that the Bible is God's Spirit bringing man into God and is from God, speaking forth God's word. It is also the Holy Spirit speaking the word of God through man's mouth. This is the Bible. What is the Bible? The Bible is the word of God spoken through man being borne by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:16 says that the Holy Spirit spoke in the Scripture through the mouth of David. This shows us that not only did the Holy Spirit speak through the mouth of man but also that the word thus spoken is the Bible. So here the Bible and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are put together. The Bible is simply the Holy Spirit's speaking of God's word through the mouth of man.

Matthew 4:4 says, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God." The word that proceeds out

through the mouth of God is every word of the Bible. Hence, the Bible is nothing but the word that proceeds out through the mouth of God.

Therefore, we can draw a very clear, simple, and accurate conclusion: the Bible is the word of God spoken by His Holy Spirit through the mouth of man.

## Explaining God Himself

The Bible is God's words. First, these words explain God Himself. All words are for explanation and expression. The words of the Bible are for the expression and explanation of God Himself. If one does not read or understand the Bible, he will not understand or know God. For example, today, if you do not understand Chinese, you will not know me as a person. You may hear my voice, but you will not know what I am expressing. The Bible as God's words first explains and expresses God Himself.

## Explaining God's Desire

The Bible also explains God's desire. It explains what is in God's heart, what He desires, what He longs for, and what He loves and hates. All the interests and desires of God are explained in the Bible. Thank God that we have such a Bible. If we read it from cover to cover, we will know God's desire. This book not only expresses God Himself but also expresses His desire.

## Explaining God's Plan

The Bible also explains God's plan. God is not only a God with desire and emotion; He is also a God of plan and accomplishment. If we read through the Bible carefully, we will understand what God plans to do in the universe. Through the Bible we can understand God's plan.

## Explaining the Origin of the Universe and of All Things

The Bible also explains the origin of the universe and of all things. How was the universe with all the things in it created? How did they come about, and what is the end for them in the future? All this has been clearly explained in the Bible. The mystery of the universe is solved in the Bible. Without the Bible no one can understand the universe. The universe is indeed a mystery and is

incomprehensible to man. Although many astronomers, geologists, and other kinds of scientists have done much research, they do not know what the universe is about. We need the Bible to explain the mystery of the universe.

What the Bible explains are these four main things. Of course, if we want to say more, we can say that it also explains the condition of man and points out the way to man's salvation. But these can be included in the preceding four main things. It explains God Himself. It explains God's desire. It explains God's plan. (God's desire and God's plan include God's redemption.) It also explains the universe.

## THE BIBLE
## BEING GOD'S REVELATION

Since the Bible is God's word, it is God's revelation. As we mentioned before, the word is the expression and the explanation. As it is the expression and the explanation, it is a revelation. First Peter 1:10-12 says that the prophets who wrote the Bible had received revelation from God. *Revealed* in the original text means the removing of a veil and the unveiling of the mystery inside.

The Bible is the revelation of God. It reveals God Himself, His desire, His plan, and the origin of the universe. Through the Bible we are shown God Himself, His desire, His plan, and the origin of the universe. If we understand the Bible, we will see God Himself, His desire, His plan, and the origin, the history, and the end of the universe, that is, the complete story of the universe. The whole Bible is the revelation of God. When God removes all the veil and unveils to us what is inside, we have the Bible.

## THE BIBLE BEING GOD'S BREATH

The Bible is also God's breath. It is the breathing out of God Himself. Second Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is God-breathed; it is inspired by God.

The Bible is the breathing out of God, in the same way that my speaking here this morning is the breathing out of myself. Please excuse me for saying something about myself. Since five-thirty this morning, when I got up, I have been full of a matter within me. I wished that eight-thirty would come sooner

so that I could breathe this matter out. What was in me? It was the word. How could I let out my feeling, the things within me, and the word in me? It is by breathing. What I am speaking is the breathing out of myself. In a similar way, the Bible is God's word. It is also God's breathing out.

## Having God's Element

As the Bible is the breathing out of God, it has the element of God. I dare not say that the Bible is God. However, I dare say that if you touch the spirit in the Bible, you touch God Himself. This is something we cannot imagine or fully comprehend with our mind. But it is a reality in our spirit. Do you not feel many times when you read the Bible that you are touching God? We cannot say that the Bible is God. If we say this, we are almost superstitious. But we must admit that in spirit we surely touch God Himself when we touch the spirit of the Bible. It is not only a matter of being in God's presence but a matter of touching God Himself. When you touch the spirit of the Bible, you touch God Himself. Why is this so? It is because the Bible is the breathing out of God Himself. It is God breathing Himself out through the words. Therefore, we have to admit that within this breathing there is the element of God.

The Bible is the breathing out of God. This means that the Bible is not only the words breathed out by God but is God Himself breathed out in His word. Hence, within the word there is the element of God. This is the difference between the Bible and any other word. There is no element of God in any other word, whereas there is the element of God in the word of the Bible.

The Bible is the word of God. It is not only the breathing out of God but is God Himself breathed into the word. Thus, there is the element of God in this breathing out. Once you touch this breathing, you touch the element of God. For this reason, many times when we read the Bible, not only do we feel the presence of God, but we feel that we contact and touch God within.

## Having God's Taste

Within this breath there is the taste of God. Since there is the element of God, there is the taste of God. It is hard to describe taste. Who can describe what sweetness tastes like? Although no one can do this, there is such a taste. In a similar way, in the Bible there is the taste of God. When we read the Bible and touch God in our spirit, we do sense the taste of God. You may ask me

what this taste of God is. I would say that I cannot describe it. All I know is that I have touched the sweetness of God and have experienced His taste.

This is the reason that many times when we read the Bible, we have the joy. When we read worldly books and newspapers, sometimes there may be things that make us happy. But it is not the same kind of joy, nor the same intensity of joy, as when we read the Bible. When we read the Bible and touch God in the spirit, we have the realization deep within that we have absorbed God. We have the sense that we have eaten God, drunk God, and enjoyed God.

If you never have this kind of realization in reading the Bible, you must be reading the Bible in a dead way. You are reading only the letters and have not touched God's breathing out in the letters. This is not the proper way to read the Bible. If you read the Bible properly, not only will you feel that you have touched God, but you will feel that you have tasted God. If you read the Bible in the proper way, not only will you feel the presence of God, but you will have the feeling that you are touching God. You will also have the sweet sensation that you have tasted God Himself.

Brothers and sisters, the Bible is the breathing out of God. God breathes Himself out so that we can breathe Him in. When we breathe Him into us as our enjoyment, we sense a special taste. It is more than a sense of rest or peace or joy or sweetness. It is beyond the description of human words. The greatest joy or blessing of being a Christian is to touch and taste God Himself through the God-breathed word. This is to eat the spiritual meal. By this, one will be fed and satisfied.

We do not read the Bible only for enlightenment, teaching, or instruction. There is something higher and deeper than all these. It is to touch God Himself in our inward parts. The Bible is not merely God's thought, doctrine, truth, or teaching. The word in the Bible is the breathing out of God. It is God who breathes Himself out. God Himself is in the word. He Himself is in the breath. Therefore, we cannot understand the word only with our mind. This is not enough. We must learn to use our spirit to contact these words; we must touch God's breathing out in the words and must touch His element in the words. When we have such a contact, not only will we feel that we are in the presence of God and not only will we have touched God, but we also will feel that we have tasted God; God will become our enjoyment within. Whenever

we have a good Bible reading, we have a good eating and drinking. It will satisfy us within, and we will truly have tasted the sweetness of God Himself.

Since the Bible is the breathing out of God, it contains God's element and God's taste. Hence, whoever touches it will feel that he has touched God Himself.

## THE BIBLE BEING THE EMBODIMENT OF GOD THE SPIRIT

God is Spirit. The Spirit, however, is very abstract. It is as abstract as the radio waves in the air. It is hard for man to touch Him or to understand Him. But the Bible is the embodiment of this Spirit. The Lord Jesus said in John 6:63 that the words He spoke are spirit. This shows us that God's word is the embodiment of God's Spirit. This is like a radio receiver capturing the radio waves in the air; the radio receiver becomes the embodiment of the radio waves. When the radio waves are in the air, we neither hear, touch, nor understand them. As soon as they are captured by the receiver, the radio waves become manifested before us. What was abstract becomes real. We can feel it, hear it, and understand it. Thus, we can say that the radio receiver is the embodiment of the radio waves.

In the same principle, if there were only God the Spirit in the universe and there were no Bible, God to us would be the same as the radio waves; we would not be able to grasp Him or find Him. But thank God that His word is here. This word is the embodiment of Himself. God the Spirit is contained in the word. This is why the Lord Jesus said that His word is spirit. In the same way, we can say that the word in the Bible is the Spirit. To put this in a clearer way, we can say that the Bible is the embodiment of the Spirit.

### The Expression of God the Spirit

First, the Bible is the embodiment of God the Spirit; it is also the expression of God the Spirit. God the Spirit is expressed through the Bible as the embodiment. Since the day you heard the gospel until now, how many times have you been moved by the Holy Spirit apart from God's word? Probably very little. Almost every time we are moved by the Holy Spirit, it is through God's word. Never does the Holy Spirit urge us apart from the word. Sometimes, it is through a verse you have read in the Bible. Sometimes, it is

through your remembrance of a verse you have read. Sometimes, it is through some words that match the Bible in principle. These are all words. Although you are moved by the Holy Spirit, it is hard to separate the Holy Spirit from the word in these cases. It is hard for you to say whether you are moved by the word or by the Holy Spirit, because at such times the Holy Spirit is in the word. The word is the embodiment and the expression of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, we admit that many times we can have the word without the Spirit. It is like having a radio receiver without the radio waves. Surely, this is vain. We admit that many people read God's Word in vain. But there are also many times when we just open up the Lord's Word a little, and the Holy Spirit comes. The Holy Spirit is in the word, and the word is the expression of the Holy Spirit.

At any rate, it is hard for us to be moved by the Holy Spirit without God's word. To put it in another way, seldom are we moved by the word without the moving of the Holy Spirit within. Under normal circumstances one cannot separate God the Spirit from the Bible, since the Bible is the embodiment and the expression of God the Spirit. Please notice that it is the embodiment of God the Spirit and not the embodiment of just the Holy Spirit. This means that this Spirit is God, and this God is the Spirit. This God who is Spirit is God the Spirit.

## The Dwelling Place of God the Spirit

The Bible as the embodiment of God the Spirit is not only His expression but also His dwelling place. God the Spirit resides in His word. From our experience we know that this is true. Many times when we read the Bible, we touch God the Spirit. This is because the Bible is the dwelling place of God the Spirit. It is the place where God the Spirit resides.

## The Means of God the Spirit

There is another point. The Bible is the means of God the Spirit. God is Spirit. Whatever He does to us is through the Bible. Whatever God does toward us and whatever God wants us to do are done through His word. The word is the embodiment of God the Spirit. Hence, it is also the expression, the dwelling place, and the means of God the Spirit. Under normal circumstances

whenever we touch the word in the Bible, we should receive, touch, and feel the moving of God the Spirit and should contact God Himself.

This is the Bible. What is the Bible? The Bible is God's word, God's revelation, God's breathing out, and the embodiment of God the Spirit.

# CHAPTER TWO

# THE COMPLETION OF THE BIBLE

Now we will consider how the Bible was completed, based on the historical facts. We will also consider when it was written and how it was accepted after being written. Although these are only some facts, they are intimately related to us as Christians.

## BEFORE THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN

### Without the Written Revelation of God

In the first twenty-five hundred years of human history, there were no written revelations of God. There were only His verbal instructions, such as His instructions to the forefathers, including Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Genesis we see that before the Bible was written, God often appeared to the forefathers and gave them verbal instructions.

### There Being Instructions Handed Down through Oral Tradition

Before the Bible was written, although there were no written revelations of God, there were verbal instructions handed down from generation to generation by the fathers. This fact can be proved from inscribed stone tablets discovered in Egypt and Babylon. In 1901 a black pillar was discovered in Persia on which were inscribed some of the laws of the ancient times. Some of them were similar to the Law of Moses, yet it was inscribed five to six hundred years before the time of Moses. This proves that before the Bible was written, among ancient civilizations there were verbal instructions of God handed down through their forefathers.

### The Ancient Languages

If we want to know how the Bible was written, we need to know about the alphabets and languages used by the ancient civilizations.

#### *Akkadian*

Before the flood, it is not known what language man used. According to historical research, the earliest language spoken by man after the flood came from Akkad in the northwest region of ancient Babylon and is called Akkadian. The three terms, *Adam*, *Eden*, and *Sabbath* in Genesis 2 are probably Akkadian and not Hebrew. Akkadian was originally made of lines. These lines were drawn into wedge shapes. Eventually, the writing developed into the cuneiform script. This script was used until approximately two thousand years before Christ, about the time of Abraham.

## *The Babylonian Writing of the Tribe of Shem*

From about two thousand years before Christ, the Babylonian writing of the tribe of Shem replaced Akkadian. We believe that this is the origin of the Aramaic language that came later. This kind of writing was used until approximately six hundred years before Christ, at the time Nebuchadnezzar ruled in Babylon.

## *The Language of Canaan and the Hebrew Language*

Ur of the Chaldeans was the original dwelling place of Abraham (Gen. 11:31); it was in Babylon. The people there were descendants of the tribe of Shem, and the language they used was the Babylonian language just mentioned. When Abraham was called by God into Canaan, historians all agree that he would naturally have given up his native Babylonian language of Shem and would have taken up the local language of Canaan. This language of Canaan probably became the later Hebrew language, or a part of it. Some have taken the “language of Canaan” in Isaiah 19:18 to mean the language used by the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham. Historians have postulated that a large portion of the subsequent Hebrew language was developed from such a language of Canaan.

## *Aramaic*

About six hundred years before Christ, the Israelites were taken captive by the Babylonians to Babylon. They stayed there for a long time. Spontaneously, they gave up Hebrew and adopted the local Aramaic language, which was the Chaldean language. After their return from their captivity, history tells us that

they were still using this Aramaic language. At the time of the Lord Jesus, the Romans had already occupied the land of Israel. Although Greek was commonly used throughout the Roman Empire, the Jews nevertheless still used Aramaic among themselves. Only the rabbis spoke and read the Scriptures in Hebrew in the synagogues. If there were some in the synagogues who did not understand Hebrew, there would be someone to translate it into Aramaic.

Many historians have postulated that the language used by the Lord Jesus to speak with the people daily was probably Aramaic, not Hebrew. When He spoke in Mark 5:41, "*Talitha koum*," and in Mark 15:34, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,*" the words were all Aramaic.

### *Greek*

After the Roman Empire conquered the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea and spread the Greek culture everywhere, Greek became the common vernacular language used by all the people in the Roman Empire at that time.

All these languages are directly or indirectly related to the completion of the Bible.

## THE LANGUAGES USED IN THE BIBLE

### Hebrew

The main body of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew.

### Aramaic

In the Old Testament, there are four portions that were written in Aramaic. They are Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:4—7:28; Ezra 4:8—6:18; and 7:12-26. These four portions are absolutely related to the Aramaic people (that is, the Babylonians). That is why the Bible used Aramaic there instead of Hebrew.

### Greek

The whole New Testament was written in Greek. A few sentences in it were written in Aramaic. They are those already mentioned: “Talitha koum” and “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani.”

## THE AUTHORS OF THE BIBLE AND THE PLACES IN WHICH IT WAS WRITTEN

### The Old Testament

The Pentateuch of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—was written by Moses. Moses was raised in the palace. He was a scholar, a politician, and a military leader. According to the world, he was also a religious leader. The Pentateuch was written by him at Mount Sinai and in the wilderness.

The book of Joshua was written by Joshua. He was a military leader and a politician. He wrote most of this book in Canaan and a smaller portion in the plains of Moab.

There are a lot of contentions about the authorship of Judges, and it is hard to verify. However, many authorities have postulated that Judges was written by Samuel.

The book of Ruth is connected to the preceding book of Judges and the following books of Samuel in history and in time. Therefore, it was most probably written by Samuel.

The first twenty-four chapters of 1 Samuel were probably written by Samuel. Chapter 25, verse 1 says that Samuel died. Therefore, from chapter 25 on, the rest of 1 Samuel and the whole book of 2 Samuel were surely not written by him. First Chronicles 29:29 says that regarding the things of David, there was not only the record of Samuel but also the records of the prophets Nathan and Gad. Bible scholars have concluded from this verse that the records in the books of Samuel after the death of Samuel must have been continued by the prophets Nathan and Gad.

Why was 2 Samuel called by that name even though it was not written by Samuel? This is because these two books form one group in history. Therefore,

the author or authors continued to write from chapter 25 of 1 Samuel until the end of 2 Samuel. Moreover, in the original Hebrew Old Testament, the two books of Samuel were a single book, not two. It was only when the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the Septuagint that Samuel was divided into the first and second books, because it was too long and difficult to roll up into one scroll.

Samuel was a Nazarite consecrated to God. He became a priest, and he also became a judge and a prophet. In addition, he brought in the kingship. It is certain that his book was written in Canaan.

Both Nathan and Gad were seers. It is also certain that their records were written in Canaan.

The books of 1 and 2 Kings were one book in the Hebrew Old Testament. It was divided by the Septuagint. It is hard for Bible scholars to ascertain who was the author of Kings, but some think that Jeremiah was the author.

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles were also one book in the Hebrew Old Testament. It was also divided by the Septuagint. This book has been generally ascertained by many authorities to have been written by Ezra. If we compare the ending of Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra, we can see that the style, the grammar, and the phrases are all very similar and have to be from the same author. Therefore, it has been proposed that Chronicles was written by Ezra.

The book of Ezra was certainly written by Ezra. Ezra was a very learned scribe and priest. He knew the laws of God very well and therefore was also a lawyer. His books were written in Jerusalem.

The book of Nehemiah was certainly written by Nehemiah. Ezra was a descendant of Levi, the tribe of the priests. Nehemiah was a descendant of Judah, the tribe of the kings. One attended to religion, and the other attended to politics. At that time the Persian Empire treated Judea as a province, and Nehemiah became the governor of Judea. His book was also written in Jerusalem.

It is hard to ascertain the authorship of the book of Esther. Probably Mordecai was the author, because in 9:20 and 23 it is mentioned that

Mordecai recorded the happenings then. He was one who loved God and loved the Jews. If it was written by him, it was written in the heathen city of Susa.

There is a greater contention about the authorship of the book of Job. The things recorded in this book took place before the time of Moses and may have been concurrent with Abraham, which is about two thousand years before Christ. Some have said it was written by Elihu, and some have said that Moses was probably the author.

Among the Psalms there are some that do not mention any author, but the authorship of most of them is identified. Among the one hundred fifty psalms, at least seventy-three are designated clearly as the psalms of David. In addition to these, there are quite a few that were clearly written by David, even though the author was not clearly stated. Therefore, David wrote the largest number, nearly one hundred psalms. In addition, there were Asaph, Heman, Ethan, the sons of Korah, Solomon, and Moses. Therefore, at least seven authors were clearly indicated. The sons of Korah are plural in number in the manuscript, and this may therefore refer to more than one person. All the psalms of these people were probably written in the land of Israel. David was first a shepherd and then a king. Quite a number of his psalms were written while he was being persecuted in the wilderness. Some were written while he was reigning in the palace. We are not very clear about Asaph, Heman, and Ethan. It may be that they were common people. The sons of Korah were the descendants of Korah. Bible scholars admit that this Korah is the Korah recorded in Numbers 16 as the one leading the rebellion against God. However, from the descendants of this rebellious one, there came out such godly and God-loving people. They did not want to divulge their own names. They would rather show forth the greatness of the grace of God by acknowledging that they were the descendants of the rebellious one against God.

Most of the book of Proverbs was written by Solomon. There were a few words by Agur and Lemuel. Hence, Proverbs was written by at least three persons. Solomon was the most glorious king and the wisest one in human history. All his books were written in Jerusalem. Agur may have been a common person, and Lemuel was a king.

The book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon.

The Song of Songs was also written by Solomon.

There are seventeen books of the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi. They are written by sixteen prophets, with Jeremiah and Lamentations both written by Jeremiah.

Isaiah was a minister serving the king and was also a historian (2 Chron. 26:22; 32:32). His book was written in Jerusalem, the capital city.

Jeremiah was born a priest and became a prophet. He spent most of his time in Judea and the last period in Egypt.

Ezekiel was a priest turned prophet. He wrote the book of Ezekiel in the land of captivity in Babylon.

Daniel was of the tribe of Judah. His book should have been written in the land of captivity in Babylon and Ulai.

Amos was the most peculiar among the sixteen prophets. He was a shepherd, a caretaker of mulberry trees, and probably would not have received much education. His book should have been written in the land of Israel.

Jonah probably wrote his book in Nineveh.

Zephaniah was a royal descendant turned prophet. His book was written in the land of Judea.

Zechariah was also a priest turned prophet. His book was also written in the land of Judea.

In addition to these, Hosea, Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Haggai, and Malachi, eight altogether, were most probably common people who became prophets. Their books were written either in Judea or in the land of Israel.

Therefore, there were at least thirty-two authors of the Old Testament from Moses to Malachi. If Job was written by Elihu, and if more than one of the sons of Korah wrote, then there were more than thirty-two authors. Among them, all except Elihu, the probable Gentile author, and Agur and Lemuel,

whose tribal sources are unknown, were Israelites. Among these authors of the Old Testament, there were people of various levels and backgrounds. There were scholars, religious persons, politicians, military leaders, kings, priests, prophets, common people, shepherds, and farmers. Some were highly educated, and some, without much education. Some were persecuted and oppressed, and some enjoyed glory and honor. Some were living in Israel, and some were in the land of the Gentiles in captivity.

## The New Testament

The Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew. He was originally a tax collector, and his origin was not honorable. The Lord called him to be one of the twelve apostles. His Gospel was probably written in Judea.

The Gospel of Mark was written by Mark. He was a very ordinary disciple. His Gospel was probably written in Rome.

The Gospel of Luke was written by Luke. He was a Gentile doctor. His Gospel was probably written in a Gentile land.

The Gospel of John was written by John. John was a fisherman in Galilee and was not well educated. But he was also called by the Lord to be one of the twelve apostles. His Gospel was probably written in a Gentile land.

The Acts of the Apostles was also written by Luke, the doctor. This book was probably also written in a Gentile land.

The fourteen books from Romans to Hebrews were written by Paul. He was originally zealous for Judaism and was also a very learned person. He had capability, ability, and capacity and could accomplish things. He was specially called by the Lord early in life to become an apostle to the Gentile people. His books were all written in the Gentile lands, and some were written in a Roman jail.

The Epistle of James was written by James. He was the flesh brother of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 1:19) and was a devout Christian who became a pillar of the church (2:9), but he was rather full of Judaism from his background. His book was probably written in Jerusalem.

The first and second Epistles of Peter were written by Peter. Peter was also a fisherman without much education, but he was called by the Lord to become the first of the twelve apostles. His book was probably written in a Gentile land.

The first, second, and third Epistles of John were all written by the apostle John. These three books should have been written in a Gentile land.

The book of Jude was written by Jude. He was also a flesh brother of the Lord. He could have written this book in Judea.

The book of Revelation was also written by the apostle John. It was written in a Gentile land and probably on the island of Patmos.

Hence, there were eight authors of the New Testament. Among them, Paul was a Jewish scholar, and Luke was a Gentile physician. They were the only two who had received a high education. The rest were all common people and without much education.

The number of authors of the whole Bible was more than forty, and most of them were Jews. Luke was one who was a Gentile. This indicates that among the authors there were Jews and Gentiles, kings and common people, scribes and soldiers, scholars and uneducated ones. Some were in high places, and some were very lowly; some were rich, and some were poor. There were all kinds of people. As to the places where the books were written, some were written in the wilderness; some, in a palace; some, on an island; and some, in jail.

## THE TIMES WHEN THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN

The first few books in the Old Testament, the Pentateuch of Moses, were written about 1500 B.C. The last book, Malachi, was written about 400 B.C. Therefore, all thirty-nine books in the Old Testament were completed within eleven hundred years.

Matthew, the first book in the New Testament, was written between A.D. 37 and 40. Revelation, the last book, was written in approximately A.D. 90. Therefore, the whole New Testament was finished within fifty or so years.

Hence, the whole Bible spans about fifteen to sixteen hundred years from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation.

## THE RECOGNITION OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

### The Old Testament

#### *The Pentateuch of Moses*

Among the Old Testament writings, the Pentateuch has always been recognized by the Jews as being from God and having absolute and divine authority. This is because it was the written revelation of God to Moses, and it was handed down through their ancestors. Although the Jews acknowledge that the whole Old Testament was from God, they gave the Pentateuch of Moses a very special position. In all the Jewish synagogues throughout the world today, there are at least two or three copies of the Pentateuch of Moses. They may not have the other books of the Old Testament, but they always have the Pentateuch. Incidentally, the Samaritans acknowledged only the Pentateuch of Moses. Of course, the Samaritans' religion is a distorted one, but this proves the authority of the Pentateuch of Moses among the ancient worshippers of God.

#### *The Other Books*

The other books in the Old Testament were gradually acknowledged by the people of God to be from God by virtue of their own value and authority. One author put it very well by saying, "There is no need to declare a tree by its name. It only needs to grow up gradually, to bloom, and to bear fruit; spontaneously men will recognize what kind of tree it is. In the same way, whether or not all the other books in the Old Testament were from God is best answered by the test of time; there is no need for any explicit declaration. The values and authority of the books spontaneously manifest themselves." This is surely true. All the inspired writers among God's people after the Pentateuch had their writings recognized as being from God through a long period of testing and through the identification of authority in them.

In approximately 457 B.C. the scribe Ezra compiled the Pentateuch of Moses and all the other authoritative writings commonly recognized among

the people of God to become the various books in the Old Testament. (Nehemiah and Malachi were not included, because they were not written yet.) The Jewish historian, Josephus, and other Gentile historians all verified this fact.

After Ezra there was a group of scribes among the Jews called "The Great Synagogue" who continued with this compiling and ascertaining work. In 400 B.C. they completed the compilation of all the books we have in the Old Testament today. However, in their work there were not thirty-nine books but twenty-four books. We will speak about this later. Hence, by 400 B.C. the writing of the Old Testament was not only completed but was also acknowledged and recognized.

At any rate, by approximately 277 B.C. at the latest, when the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek was made, all the books of the Old Testament must have already been recognized.

## The New Testament

### *The Gospels*

The early churches frequently read the Gospels and the Old Testament during their meetings. Hence, the four Gospels were the earliest recognized books of the New Testament.

### *The Other Books*

After the apostles passed away, there was some confusion because some people wrote books in the names of the apostles. Therefore, the leaders of the early churches, the so-called Fathers, collected all the books written by the apostles and put them together with the Gospels. Not long after Polycarp was martyred, the New Testament was viewed basically the same way among all the different churches. However, there were still disagreements as to whether or not the seven books of Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation should be included. These books were truly inspired by the Holy Spirit and have spiritual authority and value, so after a long time of testing, a council of the leaders of all the churches was held. These seven books were acknowledged to be part of the New Testament in A.D. 397 at Carthage in North Africa. The New Testament was recognized as having the same

twenty-seven books as we have it today. Hence, by A.D. 397 at the Council at Carthage, the whole Bible, including both the Old and the New Testaments, was recognized and acknowledged by God's people.

## THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE AND THEIR SEQUENCE

### The Old Testament

The arrangement we now have of the books of the Old Testament is not the original sequence in the Hebrew Old Testament. Rather, this is the sequence adopted in the Septuagint. In 277 B.C. seventy scribes translated the Old Testament into Greek, and they rearranged the sequence of the books. They were arranged quite properly according to the spiritual context, and Bible scholars acknowledge God's sovereignty in this arrangement.

The original Hebrew Old Testament was divided into three parts, in accordance with the Lord's speaking in Luke 24:44 and 27. These three parts were the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

#### *The Law of Moses*

The Law of Moses consisted of the Pentateuch of Moses, five books in all.

#### *The Prophets*

The Prophets were divided into the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets consisted of four books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (without distinction of first and second), and Kings (without distinction of first and second), in that order. The Latter Prophets also consisted of four books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets. (The remaining twelve prophetic books, excluding Lamentations and Daniel, were combined into one as the Minor Prophets.)

#### *The Psalms, or the Other Writings*

The Psalms, or other writings, included quite much and were altogether eleven books: the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra and

Nehemiah were counted as one), and Chronicles (with no distinction of first and second).

The five books of the Law of Moses, the eight books of the Prophets, and the eleven books of the Psalms totaled twenty-four books. This was the ancient Jewish Old Testament and its sequence.

At the beginning of the church age, the Fathers preferred to consider the Old Testament as twenty-two books to correspond to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This division was also confirmed by the historian Josephus.

Some of the names of the Old Testament books were also first used by the Septuagint. Originally, many books had the first word of the book as their name. For example, the original name of Genesis was "The Beginning." Some took the meaning of the name of the prominent person of that book as the name. For example, the original name of the book of Samuel was "Given from God," the meaning of the name Samuel (1 Sam. 1:20). The original name for the book of Isaiah was "Salvation of Jehovah," the meaning of the name Isaiah. After the compilation of the Septuagint, these books were called by the names we use today.

### The New Testament

Since A.D. 397, after the recognition of the books of the New Testament at the Council at Carthage, the books and sequence of the New Testament became what we have today.

## THE APOCRYPHA

### Not Being in the Bible in the Beginning

There were fourteen books of the Apocrypha, which were not included in the Bible. Some have thought that these fourteen books were included in the Old Testament before the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek in 277 B.C. But we can find out from verified historical information that such a postulate is wrong.

### *The Proof of Josephus*

The authoritative Jewish historian Josephus (born in A.D. 37) said, "We [the Jews] are not like the Greeks, having a lot of books that do not agree and are contradicting. We have only twenty-two books, including all the past writings, as recognized correctly to be divine. After such a long time, no one has ever dared to add to, delete from, or alter them." This proves that even at the time of Josephus (first century A.D.), the Old Testament had only the original twenty-two books without the additional fourteen books from the Apocrypha. Therefore, to assume that the Old Testament contained the Apocrypha before 277 B.C. is not correct.

## *The Proof of Cyril*

There was a scholar in Jerusalem called Cyril, born in A.D. 315 who said, "Please read the Holy Scripture, the twenty-two books of the Old Testament, which were translated by the Seventy-Two." This shows that even as late as A.D. 315, the authoritative Jewish scholars still recognized their Old Testament to have only twenty-two books. His words also clearly prove this in the translation of the Septuagint (Cyril referred to the Seventy-Two, the number of scholars who translated the Septuagint. The historians are unclear whether it was seventy or seventy-two people there.) There were no fourteen apocryphal books in the Old Testament.

## *The Proofs of the Lord Jesus and the Apostles*

The Lord Jesus and the apostles quoted the Old Testament frequently. If the fourteen books of the Apocrypha were already among the Old Testament books, the Lord and the apostles should have quoted them. However, we cannot find them quoting from the Apocrypha once. This proves that at the time of the Lord Jesus and the apostles, these books of the Apocrypha were not there in the Old Testament.

## Having Been Added into the Vatican Manuscript

Among three manuscripts of the Bible that are considered some of the oldest in the world, one is kept in the Vatican, the place where the Roman Catholic Pope resides. It is called the Codex Vaticanus, or the Vatican Manuscript. According to the historians, this manuscript was finished in the

fourth century A.D., and in the Old Testament part, which was a Septuagint translation, it included the fourteen books of the Apocrypha. This must have been added after A.D. 315. It might have been the objection to this move that caused the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church to call a council at Laodicea in A.D. 361 to officially denounce these fourteen books of the Apocrypha. They also forbade the use of these apocryphal books in the church. This proves that up until A.D. 361 there was a big question concerning whether or not these apocryphal books should be included in the canon of Scripture.

## The Recognition by the Roman Catholic Church

It was not until April 8, 1546, that the Roman Catholic Church called a council in Trent directly under the pope to affirm the authority of these fourteen books of the Apocrypha. From that time on, these apocryphal books remained in the Roman Catholic Bible. This proves that until the sixteenth century, even the Roman Catholic Church did not officially acknowledge these apocryphal books as canonical. Although this matter was affirmed at the Council of Trent by the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutherans solemnly denounced that these apocryphal books were divinely inspired. In 1646 more than one hundred fifty Protestant Bible scholars put together the "Westminster Confession," which also declared that the Apocrypha has no divine authority and is the same as any other human composition.

By now we should be clear that the whole Bible consists of the present thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The fourteen books of the Apocrypha were added in by the Roman Catholic Church arbitrarily and cannot be trusted. Moreover, the contents of the Apocrypha include many ridiculous historical anecdotes. There is no way to trace some of the authors or the time and place they were written. For this reason they do not have any canonical value.

# CHAPTER THREE

# THE SUBJECT, THE CENTRAL THOUGHT, AND THE SECTIONS OF THE BIBLE

If we want to know any book, we have to grasp its subject and central thought. In addition, we need a proper analysis of its structure and a clear understanding of its sections. The Bible has its own subject, its central thought, and its sections. Although there are sixty-six books in the Bible, it has its subject and central thought; there are also distinctive sections within its structure. If we want to know the Bible, we must clearly understand these three things.

## SUBJECT

The subject of the Bible is contained in only four sentences: God planned and created, Satan rebelled and damaged, man fell and was lost, and Christ redeemed and built. Within this subject, there are four persons: the first is God, the second is Satan, the third is man, and the fourth is Christ. The whole Bible speaks almost exclusively of these four persons. For each of these four persons, we have two verbs. God planned and created. He planned in eternity past and created in time. Satan rebelled and damaged. God had His plan and created according to His plan, but Satan rebelled against God and damaged God's creation. All Satan did was to rebel and damage. These two verbs can include all of Satan's work in the universe. Man fell and was lost. Man fell and, as a result, was lost from God's hands and from being used by God. The story of man in the whole Bible can be summed up by these two verbs: man fell and was lost. Christ redeemed and built. In the past when Christians spoke about Christ, they spoke only of redemption; the matter of building has always been overlooked or missed. But we must not forget that our Lord not only said that the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost, but He also said that Peter was a stone and that He would build His church upon this rock. On the one hand, the Gospel of John says that Christ came "that they may have life" (10:10). On the other hand, it also says that although man may "destroy this temple," Christ will "raise it up" in three days (2:19). Whether it be the Lord's accomplishment of redemption or the Lord Jesus' coming to be life to man,

the result is for the building up of the church. For this reason we must not see redemption only; we must see the building also.

At the beginning of the Bible we see gold, bdellium, and precious stones, which are materials for building. At the end of the Bible we see a completed building, built with gold, pearl, and precious stones. This indicates that God will eventually have a building, which is built up as a result of the redemption accomplished by His Son as the Lamb. Hence, when we speak of Christ, we should not merely see Him as the redeeming One, but we must also see Him as the building One. He came to redeem, and He came also to build. The reason God created everything, including man, is to have a building in the universe.

We should remember these four persons very well, together with the two verbs associated with each. If we do this, we will understand the subject of the Bible. God created everything, including man, according to His plan. Satan was proud and rebelled against God; he maliciously damaged God's creation and caused man to fall and to be lost. Christ came to redeem man and to build him up as His glorious church and His mystical Body so that God can obtain a corporate vessel for His expression. This is the subject of the whole Bible. Now let us see the subjects of the Old and New Testaments separately.

## The Subject of the Old Testament

The subject of the Old Testament is that God created, Satan damaged, man fell, and God promised the coming of Christ for redemption. Although there are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament, it mainly shows us that God created the universe, Satan came in to damage God's creation, man fell, and God promised the coming of Christ for the accomplishment of redemption. Hence, the Christ in the Old Testament was only a hope for man, because He was only promised by God to the fallen man as a Redeemer.

## The Subject of the New Testament

The subject of the New Testament is Christ coming to redeem sinners and to build up the church according to God's plan. In the Old Testament we see how God created, Satan damaged, man fell, and God promised the coming of Christ to redeem man according to God's plan and promise. In the New Testament we see how Christ redeemed the lost sinners according to God's

plan and promise and how He builds up His glorious church as His mystical Body for God to have a corporate vessel to express Himself. When we put the subjects of the Old and New Testaments together, we have the subject of the whole Bible as presented earlier.

## CENTRAL THOUGHT

In Christianity there are many books of Bible exposition. Most of them say that the central thought of the Bible is Christ. But today, according to the light we have received through His mercy, we feel that it is insufficient merely to say that Christ is the central thought of the Bible. We should remember the words the apostle Paul spoke: "This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). Hence, we must say that the central thought of the Bible is Christ and the church. The Bible not only reveals Christ Himself; it also reveals the bride and the Body of Christ, which is the church.

No doubt the whole Bible shows us Christ. But at the same time it also shows us that Christ needs a church, in the same way that a man needs a wife. From the very beginning the Bible reveals this in a type—that it was not good for Adam to live alone. We know from the New Testament that this typifies the fact that Christ needs a bride. Therefore, at the beginning of the Bible, not only does it reveal to us the one Adam, but it also reveals to us how Eve was produced from Adam to become his bride and how they two became one. There was Adam, and there was Eve. The apostle said that this is a great mystery but that he was speaking with regard to Christ and the church. In the Bible one cannot just see Christ without seeing the church. Many talk about Isaac and forget about Rebekah. But there was Isaac, and there was Rebekah. In the Bible there is the story of God contacting man through Christ, but there is also man occupying a very important position. The central characters in the Bible are not only God in Christ but also man as the bride of God in Christ. The universal couple is God and man. In the universe God is the only male, and man is the counterpart of God. If man is without God, he is like a widow. If God is without man, He is like a bachelor. In the universe there has to be the matching of God with man.

For this reason the first scene presented to us in the Old Testament is the story of a man seeking a wife. This man typifies Christ, and Christ is the embodiment of God. This wife typifies the church, and the church is a group of men saved by God out of mankind to be built up by Him. Throughout the

Old Testament God was all the time standing in the position of a husband toward His people. God treated the Israelites as His wife. Later on, the Lord Jesus came. John, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, not only proclaimed Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world but also testified that He who has the bride is the Bridegroom. Not only does John introduce the Lord Jesus as the redeeming Lamb, but he also introduces Him as the Bridegroom who has the bride. Then in the Epistles, the apostle Paul says, "I betrothed you [the saved ones] to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2); he also says that the church is to Christ as Eve is to Adam (v. 3). In Revelation, at the end of the whole Bible, there is a proclamation that the marriage of the Lamb has come. When the New Jerusalem appears, it is said to be prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. That is the union of God and man. All the redeemed people and the Redeemer become one as the mystery of the universe, which is Christ and the church.

Therefore, the central character of the whole Bible is this mysterious couple. God and man become one in the same way that a man and a woman become one flesh. Man and woman becoming one flesh is a type of God and man becoming one. Christ is God becoming one with man, and the church is man becoming one with God. God comes in His Son Christ in order that He would become one with man. Man is built up in His Son as His church in order that he would become one with God. This oneness, this mysterious union, is Christ and the church, and it is also the union of God and man. This is the central thought of the Bible.

We can speak of the central thought of the Bible another way. Christ is the living word of God, and the Bible is the written word of God. Christ is the living word, and the Bible is the written word. Christ is the content of the Bible, and the Bible is the explanation of Christ. If we take away Christ from the Bible, the Bible will become an empty book, like an empty vessel without its content. At the same time no one can know Christ well without knowing the Bible, because the Bible is the explanation of Christ. Only when one reads the explanation in the Bible can he understand and know what Christ is. The Bible tells us that everything of Christ is put into the church and expressed through the church. Hence, the central thought of the Bible is Christ and the church. It is insufficient to know Christ only; we have to know the church as well. The Bible shows us that the universal central character has both a head

and a body. The Head is Christ, and the Body is the church. Hence, Christ and the church are the central thought of the Bible.

### The Central Thought of the Old Testament—Leading Man to Christ for Redemption

The Old Testament leads man to Christ that man would be redeemed by Him.

### The Central Thought of the New Testament—in Christ the Church Being Redeemed and Built Up

The New Testament shows us how the church is redeemed and built up in Christ.

## SECTIONS

There are many ways to subdivide the Bible into sections. We have selected four of the more important ways for our consideration.

### Subdivision according to Its Structure

#### *The Old Testament*

##### *The Pentateuch*

These are the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These five were written by Moses and therefore are known generally as the Pentateuch of Moses.

##### *History*

After the Pentateuch are the books of history. There are twelve books from Joshua to Esther: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

##### *Psalms*

There are six books, all in the style of poems. Five books—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs—are related. Lamentations is also

added because it is in the style of poetry rather than prose. In some translated versions, one cannot identify these six books as poems, but in the original, these are clearly in poetic forms, with couplets and matching phrases. They are not at all in the style of prose.

### *The Books of the Prophets*

This is the last part of the Old Testament. It can be divided into three categories chronologically.

### *The Books of the Prophets before Captivity*

There are a total of eleven books. If arranged in chronological order according to the time they were written, the earliest one is probably Obadiah, second is Joel, third is Jonah, fourth is Amos, fifth is Hosea, sixth is Isaiah, seventh is Micah, eighth is Nahum, ninth is Zephaniah, tenth is Jeremiah, and the eleventh is Habakkuk. Jeremiah was a little earlier than Habakkuk, but Jeremiah was extended into the captivity period. Jeremiah began as a prophet before the captivity and ended as one in the captivity. This is why some Bible expositors consider him as a prophet before the captivity, and others consider him as one during the captivity. We suggest considering him as one before the captivity because he spent most of his time as a prophet before the captivity.

### *The Books of the Prophets during the Captivity*

There are a total of two books, which are Daniel and Ezekiel. Daniel and Ezekiel were both prophets during the captivity.

### *The Books of the Prophets after the Captivity*

There are a total of three books. The first is Haggai, then Zechariah, and the last one is Malachi.

By dividing the prophets according to the time of captivity, there are these three categories of books of the prophets. The earliest prophet, Obadiah, lived at about 800 B.C., close to 900 B.C. The last prophet, Malachi, lived at about 390 B.C., close to 400 B.C. Isaiah lived at about 760 B.C. If we also consider Lamentations as a book of the prophets, there are seventeen books of the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi. If we take out Lamentations, we have sixteen books.

Some have grouped the longer books of the prophets as the Major Prophets, and the shorter books of the prophets as the Minor Prophets. In that case, there are four books among the Major Prophets, which are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The remaining twelve books are all the Minor Prophets.

### *The New Testament*

(1) The four Gospels: There are four books of the Gospel. They are the first four books of the New Testament.

(2) The Acts of the Apostles: there is only one book of Acts.

(3) The Epistles: there are twenty-one books, from Romans to Jude.

(4) The book of prophecy: there is only one book, Revelation.

The four Gospels, Acts, the twenty-one Epistles, plus the last book of prophecy, add up to twenty-seven books. An easy way to memorize the number of books of the Bible is to remember that three times nine equals twenty-seven; that is, there are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament.

## Subdivision according to Spiritual Experience

The best way to subdivide the Bible is by spiritual experience, and it is the way we recommend. There are three categories in the Old Testament and three categories in the New. The nature of the three categories in both Testaments is the same.

### *The Old Testament*

(1) History: From Genesis to Esther there are seventeen books on history. It begins from God's creation of the universe and continues until the Israelites were returned from captivity to rebuild the temple and the holy city. This is the history and journey of God's people before Him; it is everything that they have passed through before God.

(2) Experience: There are the five books of poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. There may be some history records in these books, but they are not on history. There are also some prophecies in them,

but their main emphasis is not prophecy. These five books emphasize the spiritual experiences of God's saints before Him. If there were only the history in the preceding category without the experience that followed, we could only see the historical facts without understanding the inward condition under those circumstances. These five books of poetry in the Bible precisely describe the inward condition of the chosen people before God under various circumstances and experiences. When we read these five books of poetry, we can find out the spiritual experiences of these people before God.

(3) Prophecy: From Isaiah to Malachi there are seventeen books. There are seventeen books of history at the beginning, and there are seventeen books of prophecy at the end, with five books of experience in the middle, making up a total of thirty-nine books.

### *The New Testament*

(1) History: The four Gospels plus Acts are five books on history. The four Gospels cover the experiences of the Lord Jesus on earth together with the experiences of His disciples in following Him. Acts shows us how the disciples testified for the Lord everywhere they went. These five books are all on historical facts.

(2) Experience: These are the twenty-one Epistles from Romans to Jude. These twenty-one books speak of the Christian experiences. The Gospels and Acts show us what Christ and the Christians encountered. They show us their activities, their moves, and their works. The twenty-one Epistles explain to us the inward spiritual experiences of Christians.

(3) Prophecy: There is only one book, the book of Revelation.

Whether it is the Old Testament or the New Testament, they both begin with the history, then proceed to tell of the experiences, and end with the prophecies. For individual Christians the order is the same. First, we have our history before the Lord. Next we develop some spiritual experiences during the course of the history, and then there is the hope and the anticipation for the future. The Old Testament recounts much history and many spiritual experiences; then at the end it speaks of the saints being filled with hope and anticipation of the coming of Christ. The New Testament is written the same way. There are many facts and experiences, and then at the end there is an

expectation and a hope, which is the return of the Lord Jesus. No Christian can avoid these three steps. There are the history, the experiences, and the expectation.

## Subdivision of the Old Testament according to the Jews or the Rabbis

The Old Testament was originally in the hands of the Jews. Some teachers among them were authoritative Bible expositors. The Jews called them rabbis. The word *rabbi* means "teacher." In the ancient time the subdivision of the Old Testament among the rabbis was like what the Lord Jesus said in Luke 24:44. In other words, the Lord's word in Luke 24:44 was based on the subdivision of the Old Testament into three categories by the rabbis.

### *The Law of Moses*

The Law refers to the Pentateuch. Sometimes the Jews abbreviated the Pentateuch as "Moses." When the Jews mention Moses, sometimes they are not referring to the person Moses but to the five books of the Law written by him. These five books are sometimes simply called the Law. When the Jews refer to the Law, they mean the Pentateuch. Therefore, among the Christians and the Jews, there are five different ways of referring to the first five books of the Old Testament. They are referred to as the Pentateuch of Moses, as the Pentateuch, as the Law of Moses, as the Law, and as Moses.

### *The Prophets—Divided into the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets*

(1) The Former Prophets: There are four books. The first one is Joshua. The Jews treat the book of Joshua as one of the books of the prophets, instead of as history as we see it. The second book is Judges, which is also treated as a book of the prophets. The third book is Samuel. First and 2 Samuel were one book in the original Hebrew Bible. There was no distinction of first and second, and it was called the book of Samuel. The fourth book is Kings. First and 2 Kings were also one book in the Hebrew Old Testament, having no distinction between first and second either.

Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles were divided up into first and second books in the Septuagint when the Old Testament was translated, because these

books were too long, and it was not convenient to roll them up into one sheepskin. In the original Hebrew Old Testament these books were together as entire books without the distinctions of first and second books.

The Jewish rabbis call these four books—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings—the Former Prophets.

(2) The Latter Prophets: Here also there are four books, which are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets mentioned here include twelve books, which the Jewish rabbis take as one.

Historically, the order of the Minor Prophets was not always the same. Sometimes they placed one at the front, and sometimes they placed another one at the front. The usual order is as follows: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi. This is the usual order of these twelve books. Sometimes the order is changed slightly. The Jewish rabbis treat the books after the Pentateuch generally as the books of the prophets, with the four books of the earlier period and four books of the later period totaling eight altogether.

### *The Other Books*

These include Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles, totaling eleven books. The Jews consider Ezra and Nehemiah as one book and 1 and 2 Chronicles as one book. These eleven books plus the eight books of the prophets add up to nineteen books. With the five books of the Law of Moses, there are altogether twenty-four books. The ancient church fathers combined these into twenty-two books to match the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This is why during the first, second, and third centuries they were called the twenty-two books of the Old Testament. Josephus, who was the most authoritative historian among the Jews, also called these the twenty-two books of the Old Testament when he spoke of it.

## Subdivision of the Old Testament by the Lord Jesus

Our Lord Jesus also had a way of subdividing the Old Testament. This is mentioned in Luke 24:44. This way is very similar to that of the Jewish rabbis;

there is not much difference between the two. He also divided it into three categories:

***(1) The Law of Moses: the first five books of the Old Testament.***

***(2) The Prophets: including the history books.***

***(3) The Psalms: including the Song of Songs.***

# CHAPTER FOUR

# PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

In this chapter we need to see some of the principles in interpreting the Bible. If we want to study the Bible, we have to understand the Bible. In order to understand the Bible, we need to interpret it. If there is no interpretation and no explanation, naturally we will have no way to understand the Bible. We know everything has its own principles. The more esteemed and important a matter is, the stricter are its governing principles and laws. If a matter is of no significance or importance and can be carried out in any way, there will not be any laws, principles, and regulations to speak of. But if a matter is proper, and it occupies a definite place and significance, and if it is great and noble, surely there are principles and laws governing it; one cannot carry it out haphazardly.

The Bible is an extremely great item in the universe. Besides our Lord and God of glory, I believe that the greatest item in the universe is the Bible we have before our eyes and in our hands. Since the Bible is so important, we need the proper interpretation before we can study or understand it. This interpretation must be governed by definite rules, laws, and principles. We cannot interpret it in this or that or any way we like.

Now that we have seen how the Bible was written, how it was translated into different languages and placed in our hands as an available book, we need to find out the governing principles and laws for its interpretation and study. Not only will this help us to understand the Bible, it will also help us to avoid many errors.

All rules are a kind of protection. If a train has no railroad tracks to run on, not only will it be unable to run smoothly, but it will also be without protection. When there are railroad tracks, the train will move smoothly and will have the proper protection. This is the same way with the study of the Bible. If one studies the Bible and expounds it blindly and carelessly, the result will be inconceivable and even dangerous. Our thoughts are often without restraints. It is very dangerous for a person to judge according to

what he thinks and to interpret according to what he perceives. If we want to study the Bible properly and understand it accurately, there must be the restrictive interpretation. If we want a restrictive exposition of the Bible, we need to find out the principles and laws of Bible interpretation. Here we will point out ten such principles.

## AS LITERALLY AS POSSIBLE

The first principle is to interpret and understand the Bible as literally as possible. We have to grasp firmly the fact that when God inspired men to write the Bible, He used words that are fully comprehensible to man. When we attempt to understand the Bible today, we must understand the thought of God strictly and accurately according to the letter of the words. We should not think that since the Bible is inspired by God, it will always transcend human language and is therefore open for spiritual interpretation. This is a dangerous proposition. We should interpret the Bible according to the literal meaning of the words. No matter how difficult or out of place a literal interpretation appears to us, we have to adhere strictly to the literal meaning.

Let us mention a few examples. An obvious one is the Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah concerning the Lord Jesus being born of a virgin. Today the Lord has already been born of a virgin. It is therefore no surprise to us when we read and hear this word. But at the time of Isaiah, when men read what he wrote concerning a virgin bearing a child and calling his name Emmanuel, would they not have had difficulty in their mind? A person would certainly have difficulty in understanding how a virgin can be with child. Some could have turned to a spiritual interpretation, suggesting that the virgin could mean something else rather than an actual virgin. But when this prophecy was fulfilled, it was fulfilled literally. The virgin referred to is an actual virgin.

Again, the book of Zechariah in the Old Testament prophesied that the Lord Jesus would enter Jerusalem the last time on a colt. When a person read this at that time, they could have found it hard to understand, because to them this One to whom others would proclaim “Hosanna,” the King worthy of praise, the most esteemed One of Israel, could not possibly enter Jerusalem on a little colt. Men would think that it is illogical to ride on a colt. For that reason they would interpret it spiritually to mean something else. However,

when the prophecy was fulfilled, it was fulfilled literally in every way. The word is *colt,* and it was in fact a colt.

When we read the Bible, on the one hand, we have to receive spiritual inspirations, but on the other hand, we must not alter the literal meaning to fit a spiritual interpretation. Only when a literal interpretation of a prophecy or parable leads to absurdities or improprieties can we interpret them spiritually. But such cases are few in the Bible.

One has to consider carefully whether a passage should be interpreted literally or spiritually. There is a big difference there. I have heard that some have interpreted the locusts in Revelation as today's airplanes, and the hail from heaven as the bombs dropped by the planes. This is ridiculous. We must be careful not to interpret the Bible too freely. If one wants to find examples of strange and irrational interpretations, he can read the *Signs of the Times,* published by the Seventh-day Adventists. There one can find many unrestricted and haphazard interpretations. We should not interpret the Bible this way. We should hold fast to the principles and adhere to the literal meanings as much as possible. It is only when a literal interpretation of some words in some visions, prophecies, and parables becomes too absurd and silly that we can interpret them spiritually.

## NO LITERAL AND SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION BEING WITHIN THE SAME SENTENCE, VERSE, OR SECTION

We cannot interpret a sentence, a verse, or a section of the Bible spiritually for the first part and literally for the second part. We should not do that the other way around either. If a passage is to be interpreted spiritually, it should be interpreted spiritually throughout. If a passage is to be interpreted literally, it must be interpreted literally throughout. For example, the Lord Jesus said in John 3 that unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Many Bible expositors have interpreted the water here spiritually as referring to the word of God. However, in the next phrase, they take the Spirit literally, referring to it as the Holy Spirit. This kind of interpretation is wrong and is against the principle of Bible interpretation. If one would interpret the Spirit in the second part literally, he must interpret the water in the first part literally also. If one interprets the water spiritually,

he must interpret the Spirit spiritually also. Since one cannot interpret the Spirit spiritually, neither can he interpret the water spiritually; it must be interpreted literally.

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist said, "I baptize you in water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is stronger than I...He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire, whose winnowing fan is in His hand. And He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor and will gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire" (vv. 11-12). Some expositors have interpreted the fire here spiritually as tribulations and trials. Some have even interpreted this to be the Holy Spirit burning as a fire. All these have interpreted the word *fire* spiritually. But in this verse the water mentioned by John is actual water, and the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit, literally. Therefore, the fire in the latter part should not be interpreted spiritually but, rather, literally. If the word *fire* has to be interpreted spiritually, then *water* should also be interpreted spiritually. However, it is impossible to do this. This is an important principle in the interpretation of the Bible. For the different parts within a same passage, either they must all be interpreted literally, or they must all be interpreted spiritually. They cannot be interpreted both ways.

## ONE PORTION NOT BEING SUFFICIENT TO REPRESENT A WHOLE TRUTH

In interpreting the Bible, we have to pay attention to one more thing: one portion of the Word is not sufficient to represent the whole truth. In other words, there is no truth that can be fully explained in a single portion of the Word. Therefore, in reading and interpreting the Bible, we should pay attention to the words *again, it is written.* This is the word spoken by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 4:7. When the Lord was tempted, the devil quoted to the Lord the words in Psalm 91 that God would give charge to His angels to bear Him up, lest He dash His foot against a stone. The devil argued that He could jump from the top of the temple and would not be hurt because there is such a promise in the Old Testament. This is how the devil tempted the Lord Jesus with an isolated passage of the Old Testament. When the Lord heard that, He answered right away, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not test the Lord your God.'" This shows us that we cannot consider one isolated portion of the Bible

alone. Instead, we must consider two, three, or more portions of the Word together.

If we neglect the principle of "again, it is written" but apply the words of the Bible in an isolated way, we will easily be deceived by the wiles of the devil. If the devil cannot stop someone from following the Bible, he will cause that one to quote the Bible in an isolated way. Of course, Satan would wish that we do not do anything according to the Bible. But many times he knows that this is impossible. All those who love and fear the Lord want to walk according to the Bible. The devil cannot stop us from following the Bible or walking according to the Bible. He can only use other ways, one of which is to cause us to follow the Bible in an isolated way. In this way we are driven to the extreme and forget the words that say, "Again, it is written."

This word *again* is too big a word. We should put a circle around it. This shows us that when we follow the Bible, we should not do so in an isolated way. We should consider both sides and even all sides. No single portion of the Bible can represent the whole truth, in the same way that no one face of a house can represent the whole house completely. Even we ourselves are the same. If we take a picture from behind, there is not a single hole in the head. But if we take a picture from the front, there are clearly seven holes. Any single side of a man cannot represent the whole person. The same can be said of the words of the Bible. Any one portion of the Bible cannot represent the whole truth, and we have to be balanced in every way. Hence, we have to remember the principle of "again, it is written."

## EVERY VERSE CONTAINING ALL THE TRUTHS

No single verse can represent the whole truth. However, every verse of the Bible contains all the truths. On the one hand, no single verse can include the whole truth, and to understand a truth, one cannot rely on one verse alone but has to consider many other verses. On the other hand, in determining any truth, one has to consider every verse. Each verse in the Bible contains all the truths.

One brother once said that any single verse in the Bible requires the whole Bible to explain it. This is very true. If one wants to understand Genesis 1:1, he has to understand the whole Bible. On the one hand, Genesis 1:1 cannot

contain the whole truth. On the other hand, Genesis 1:1 includes all the truths of the Bible.

Therefore, in determining any truth, we cannot rely on one portion of the Bible alone. Instead, we have to depend on all the words of the Bible. In a similar way, the exposition of any single verse cannot be based on its own context; instead, it must be based on the whole Bible. Second Peter 1:20 says that "no prophecy of Scripture is of one's own interpretation." The original meaning of this verse is that the prophecy of the Bible should not be interpreted according to its own context. This means that to interpret any prophecy, one has to study all the prophecies in the Bible and has to make decisions based on all the prophecies of the Bible. Only then will the interpretation be complete.

## NOT SACRIFICING ANY PORTION OF THE WORD

In determining a truth, sometimes many related verses indicate a certain meaning, but two or three among them cannot be explained in that kind of way. One cannot say that because there were only one or two verses that could not be explained that way, one can therefore sacrifice them and base the exposition on the majority of the verses. If one does that, he is sacrificing a small number of verses. We cannot do this. As long as one or two verses do not allow a certain interpretation, we have to give up that interpretation. We have to respect every portion of the Bible. Only when an interpretation harmonizes with the whole Bible can this interpretation be considered reliable. Any verse that forbids a certain interpretation of the truth must not be sacrificed. Instead, that certain interpretation must be abandoned, and we must wait for God's further revelation. If we study the Bible this way, we will not fall easily into error.

## ALL APPOSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS BEING EQUAL

There are many expressions in the Bible that are in apposition one to another. All these appositional expressions are equal and are not different. For example, Matthew 5 speaks of nine blessings. It says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (v. 3), and "Blessed

are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (v. 8). These are matching expressions, with the first expression matching the second one. In this case, with every blessing there is first the condition for blessing and then the blessing itself. All matching expressions are equal. If the first part of one expression specifies a condition, then all first parts of matching expressions specify conditions also. If the second part of one expression specifies a blessing, then the second parts of all expressions specify blessings also. This is another principle or rule.

## NEITHER BEING CONFINED BY THE BACKGROUND NOR IGNORING THE BACKGROUND

In interpreting the Bible, one should not be confined by the background, nor should he ignore the background. For example, in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, many words are spoken with a Jewish background. The Lord said, "Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you" (Matt. 5:23), and so on. This offering of the gift at the altar is based wholly on the background of Judaism. If you want to understand the original meaning of this word, you cannot neglect the background of the time. The Jews offered their gift at the altar for the purpose of drawing nigh to God and fellowshipping with Him. If you grasp hold of this principle, you will realize that the Lord's words refer to a man offering something before God and fellowshipping with God. Therefore, we cannot neglect the background. Rather, we should understand the background.

On the other hand, we should not be confined to the background. We cannot teach people to go to the altar to offer gifts now just because the Lord Jesus has spoken such a word. If you are confined by this background, you will have a big problem. Hence, we must see that we cannot neglect the background; if we do, we will not understand the exact meaning of the Bible. On the other hand, we must be careful not to be confined to the background lest we fall into error.

## PAYING ATTENTION TO THE DIFFERENCES IN THE DISPENSATIONS

God's words to man are divided into dispensations. Some words were spoken by God to man in the dispensation of the law. Some words were spoken by God to man in the dispensation of grace. When we try to understand these words, we must differentiate between the different dispensations. We should not apply the words spoken in the dispensation of the law to the dispensation of grace. This is the mistake of the Seventh-day Adventists in keeping the Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath is a commandment that God gave to man in the dispensation of the law. When one comes to the age of grace, it is a different matter altogether. But the Seventh-day Adventists hold on to Exodus 20 and say that since God clearly spoke about the Sabbath, we should therefore keep the Sabbath today. It is true that God spoke of keeping the Sabbath, but this is a matter in the dispensation of the law and not in the dispensation of grace.

There is another example. In Psalms it says that our children in the flesh are God's blessings. Please remember that this is a word in the Old Testament. In the New Testament this is no longer true. One cannot find anything in the New Testament that says that the children of the flesh are blessings. Although I cannot say that the children of the flesh are now curses, I dare to assure you that the children of the flesh are burdens and lessons. Today, in the dispensation of grace, the real blessing is the spiritual children.

In the same principle, God promised His chosen people in the Old Testament that they would prosper and enlarge their border on the earth (cf. 1 Chron. 4:10). But it is exactly the opposite in the New Testament. If you stood on the podium today and quoted the Old Testament words, telling the brothers and sisters, "Thank God, He has promised that if we fear Him, He will enlarge our border, and everyone will be a great landowner," this would be entirely wrong. There is such a promise in the Bible, but this promise is not under grace but under the law. In the New Testament age God said that we should forsake our land and sell it to give to the poor. This is exactly opposite to the Old Testament age.

Although all these are words of the Bible and are all inspired by God, we should not take the words of the old dispensation and apply them to the present dispensation. The Catholics and many Protestants err on this point. There are many things in Catholicism that come from Judaism in the Old Testament. Even the clothing worn by their priests and their rituals of worship are all a borrowing of the principle of the Old Testament. Surely,

those things are mentioned in the Bible, but they are not for our present dispensation. In expounding and interpreting the Bible, one cannot say, "Is not this the word of the Bible? If it is, we should keep it." We cannot speak in this way. We have to differentiate the ages; that is, we have to know clearly to which dispensation a word belongs. If you are not in a certain dispensation, then the words for that dispensation have nothing to do with you. In the future we will speak on the dispensations more.

## TAKING CARE OF THE DIFFERENCE IN THE PERSONS WHO ARE BEING ADDRESSED

In expounding the Bible, one has to take care of the persons to whom a word is spoken. Some words are spoken to the Jews, and they are not related to the nations or to the church. Some words are spoken to the nations and have nothing to do with the Jews or with the church. Some words are spoken to the church and have nothing to do with the Jews or with the nations.

First Corinthians 10:32 says, "Do not become a stumbling block, both to Jews and to Greeks [referring to nations] and to the church of God." In the Bible there are at least these three kinds of people to whom God speaks His words: the Jews, the nations, and the church. In the Old Testament the majority of the words were spoken to the Jews. In the New Testament there are many words that are spoken to the church. At the same time, whether in the New Testament or the Old Testament, there are some words spoken to the nations. We should differentiate between these when we read them and should find out to whom the words are spoken. We should differentiate clearly between the different persons to whom a word is addressed, whether it is to the Jews, to the nations, or to the church. First, we identify the persons spoken to; then we can make the proper judgment.

For example, some Bible scholars have had strong disputes concerning whom the book of Matthew was addressed to. There are many expositors who assert that Matthew was for the Jews and not for the church. They point out the Jewish background of the words in Matthew, saying that the Lord Jesus was clearly referring to offering gifts at the altar. To them this is a proof that these words are for the Jews. The Lord Jesus clearly spoke about the judgment of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was an organization of the Jews.

They also point out Matthew 24, which mentions the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place (v. 15). To them the holy place clearly belongs to the Jews. The Lord also said that when one encounters the great tribulation, he should pray that his flight may not be on a Sabbath (v. 20). Would the church still keep the Sabbath? Since these people who receive the word keep the Sabbath, are they not Jews? These scholars point out many examples like these to prove that the book of Matthew is spoken to the Jews. If it were so, this would be very serious, because the whole book of Matthew would no longer be our inheritance.

After we read through the book of Matthew carefully, we have to admit that the words in Matthew 5 certainly have their Jewish background, but they are not spoken to the Jews; rather, they are spoken to the people of the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom people not only include the saved ones among the Jews, but they also include the converted ones from among the nations. The kingdom people are the church. Because among the kingdom people there were some who had formerly been in Judaism and who had a Jewish background, the Lord Jesus had to use things related to that background when He gave the Sermon on the Mount at that time. There are more discussions in chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew. If you read carefully, you will find that a portion was spoken to the Jews, a portion was spoken to the church, and a portion was spoken to the nations. Verses 1 through 31 in chapter 24 were spoken to the Jews. Matthew 24:32 through 25:30 was spoken to the church. Verse 31 to the end of chapter 25 was spoken to the nations. In studying the Bible, before we make a decision on an interpretation, we must first ascertain the person to whom a word is spoken. Only then can we understand and interpret the words accurately.

## PERSONS, EVENTS, AND OBJECTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT NOT CLEARLY BEING REFERRED TO AS TYPES NOT TO BE TREATED AS TYPES BUT AS ILLUSTRATIONS

We know that there are many types in the Old Testament. Some types are simply individual persons, such as Isaac, who typifies the Lord Jesus as the inheriting son, and Rebekah, who typifies the bride gained by Christ—the

church. Some types are events, such as the passover of the Israelites, which signifies our salvation before God when we received the slain Christ as our Savior. Another example is the children of Israel's exodus from Egypt, which signifies our going out from the world. There are also some types that are objects, such as the lamb typifying Christ and the bronze serpent also typifying Christ.

In the Old Testament many persons, events, and objects are types, but it is not up to us to decide whether or not they are types. We have to find out the clear evidence from the New Testament. If there is no mention in the New Testament of the object, the events, or the person as a type, then we should not rashly surmise that they are a type. At the most, we can only borrow these persons, events, and objects as illustrations and use them to explain the truths in the New Testament. To say that something is a type means more than to say that it is merely an illustration.

Here we are only presenting and pointing out briefly these ten principles of interpretation of the Bible. These principles have evolved gradually from hundreds or thousands of years of experience of Bible study. They are like the cream of the milk and the honey of the bees and are very precious. I hope that we can all remember them clearly. These all are our aids and restrictions. I hope that from now on all the brothers and sisters will apply these principles in their study of the Bible. If we apply them, we will find new meaning to the Bible and will have a better, more accurate, and thorough understanding.