

## IS THE GOOD NEWS REALLY FROM GOD?

In Part 3 of the “*Good News From God*” brochure, published by the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Pennsylvania, the Society poses four questions: (1) Who is the Author of the Bible? (2) How can we be sure the Bible is true? (3) What is the Bible about? and (4) How can you understand the Bible? Overall, we see the purpose of these questions is to instill in the reader the confidence that we can rely on the ‘Good News of the Kingdom’ as set forth in the Bible. Our answers will keep this purpose in mind.

In formulating our answers to these questions, we find that the answers to the first three questions are interrelated, so we will answer them together. And then follow with the answer to the fourth question.

1. **Who is the Author of the Bible?**
2. **How Can We Be Sure the Bible is True?**
3. **What is the Bible About?**

The shorthand answer to the first question is that God is the author of the Bible as indicated by the Apostle Paul’s words to Timothy:

“All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.” – *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

This answer has satisfied millions. However, an in-depth examination of the Bible reveals that the answer is far more complex and requires maturity of thought, a reflective attitude and an open and receptive mind. Unless these things are present in the examiner, such a person could be stumbled. It would be like giving a premium steak to an infant. While there is nothing wrong with eating a steak, an infant would choke on it. He has not developed the teeth to chew it, nor the stomach to digest it. In the common vernacular, ‘he will have bitten off more than he can chew,’ and the result could be fatal. So for our readers who are not quite ready for such an examination, we encourage you to focus on the summary answer and return to these more complex ideas when you are ready.

For those who are ready for a mature examination of the authorship, reliability and content of the Bible, we invite you to consider the following ideas.

The Bible is a collection of 66 little books. The first 39 books, from Genesis to Malachi, are referred to as the “Old Testament” or the “Hebrew Scriptures;” the remaining 27 books, from Matthew to Revelation, are referred to as the “New Testament” or the “Christian Greek Scriptures.” As Jehovah’s Witnesses, we have been taught to refer to the two sections as the Hebrew and Christian Greek Scriptures rather than the Old and New Testament. However, the distinction of “Old” and “New” helps us to more clearly identify the author, assess its credibility, understand its content, and discern its meaning. So in the remainder of this article, we will refer to the two sections of the Bible as the Old and New Testament.

Though both sections are considered one united book, they each cover a distinct period in human history and the distinction is **highly** relevant. We can simply state the distinction like this: the Old Testament contains the Jewish revelation of God, whereas the New Testament contains the Christian revelation of God.

## **The Old Testament**

The Old Testament is a collection of writings of the history and activities of a people who came to be known as Israelites, or Hebrews or Jews. They were the descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac, and through his son Jacob who was re-named Israel. (*Exodus 3:6*) The books of the Old Testament are of three major types: (1) the five books of Moses; (2) the major and minor prophets; and (3) the general writings, including poems, songs and personal accounts. These books contain the best of the higher thoughts and longings of the Jewish people and are the best collection of religious wisdom and spiritual truth to be found in the world at the time.

The books of Moses provided the Jewish people with their law code and its associated rituals. At the time of Moses, the Jewish people were an oppressed, downcast, and uneducated bedouin tribe. But they were the offspring of the patriarch, Abram, later named Abraham, who demonstrated faith in the one God taught by the high priest Melchizedek. (*Genesis 14:18-20*) As a result, Abraham received a special blessing:

“And Jehovah proceeded to say to Abram: “Go your way out of your country and from your relatives and from the house of your father to the country that I shall show you; and **I shall make a great nation out of you** and I shall bless you and I will make your name great; and prove yourself a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and him that calls down evil upon you I shall curse, **and all the families of the ground will certainly bless themselves by means of you.**” – *Genesis 12:1-3*

During the passage of time between Abraham and Moses, the Jewish people had largely forgotten the one God and developed a form of worship similar to the surrounding nations where they worshiped many different Gods. But the time had come for the promise to Abraham to return to the forefront. Moses, being aware of this promise, accepted the heroic challenge of uplifting these dejected people and turning them back to the worship of the one God of Abraham.

Moses himself was an extraordinary combination of military leader, social organizer, and religious teacher. He was arguably the most important teacher on the world scene prior to Jesus. As such, he was no doubt aware that the challenge of educating and uplifting these ignorant and illiterate people would be a gradual process that would develop over time. Thus, he set in motion the beginning stages of their spiritual upliftment.

After leading them out of Egypt, we read:

“And Moses went up to the [true] God, and Jehovah began to call to him out of the mountain, saying: “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and to tell the sons of Israel, ‘You yourselves

have seen what I did to the Egyptians, that I might carry you on wings of eagles and bring you to myself. **And now if you will strictly obey my voice and will indeed keep my covenant, then you will certainly become my special property out of all [other] peoples**, because the whole earth belongs to me. And **you yourselves will become to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**’ These are the words that you are to say to the sons of Israel.” – *Exodus 19:3-6*

The elementary human mind responds more effectively to fear than to love. Think of how a parent teaches a young child. The child is given many rules of behavior with associated punishments and disciplines. The child responds, not out of love for the parent, but out of fear of the punishment, for godly love based on faith is the possession of a mature spiritual mind. (2 *Thessalonians 3:2*) Therefore, when Moses introduced the people to the one God, he presented God as great and fear-inspiring. And to keep them focused on the one God, Moses presented God as jealous and wrathful. (*Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 29:22-28*) The aspect of God that was most appreciated by these simple people was not God’s love, but His justice.

Moses’ successors continued to teach a concept of God that was in accordance with the light of their day. The books of the prophets contain counsel and correction for the people when they strayed from the teachings of Moses, and foretold a time when life on earth would be truly peaceful. The remaining writings were words of wisdom and various experiences that we can learn much from.

As time progressed, their concept of God matured, such that by the time of the latter prophets, God had become a loving Father of the nation. (*Isaiah 63:16; Jeremiah 31:9*) God had not changed; man had changed. Man progressed in his ability to comprehend more fully the true nature of God. And that explains why the God of the Old Testament appears different from the God of the New Testament, as taught by Jesus. Even the prophet Jeremiah told the Jews to expect a change in their understanding of God:

“Look! There are days coming,” is the utterance of Jehovah, “**and I will conclude with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant**; not one like the covenant that I concluded with their forefathers in the day of my taking hold of their hand to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt, ‘which covenant of mine they themselves broke, although I myself had husbandly ownership of them,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. For this is the covenant that I shall conclude with the house of Israel after those days,” is the utterance of Jehovah. “**I will put my law within them, and in their heart I shall write it.** And I will become their God, and they themselves will become my people. And they will no more teach each one his companion and each one his brother, saying, ‘KNOW Jehovah!’ for they will all of them know me, from the least one of them even to the greatest one of them,” is the utterance of Jehovah. “**For I shall forgive their error, and their sin I shall remember no more.**” – *Jeremiah 31:31-34*

The Old Testament served as a teacher or tutor that was preparing the Jewish mind for a better and greater revelation **of** God, accompanied by a better and greater relationship **with** God as contained in the New Testament. As Paul wrote:

“However, before the faith arrived, we were being guarded under law, being delivered up together into custody, looking to the faith that was destined to be revealed. Consequently **the Law has become our tutor leading to Christ**, that we might be declared righteous due to faith. But now that the faith has arrived, we are no longer under a tutor.” – *Galatians 3:23-25*

So to our question, Who is the author of the Bible?, we can confidently say that the Old Testament was **inspired by God**, because the men who penned the 39 books were writing according to best of their understanding of God, according to what had thus far been revealed to them. Yet at the same time, we must say that the Old Testament does not contain the final, infallible, absolute **word of God**, for if it did, why would Jesus say:

“All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one fully knows the Son but the Father, **neither does anyone fully know the Father but the Son** and anyone to whom the Son is willing to reveal him.” – *Matthew 11:27*

“Do not think I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I came, not to destroy, **but to fulfill**.” – *Matthew 5:17*

And why would the Apostle Paul write:

“In his saying “a new [covenant]” he has **made the former one obsolete**. Now that which is made obsolete and growing old is near to vanishing away.” – *Hebrews 8:13*

“For we have partial knowledge and we prophesy partially; but **when that which is complete arrives, that which is partial will be done away with**. When I was a babe, I used to speak as a babe, to think as a babe, to reason as a babe; but now that I have become a man, I have done away with the [traits] of a babe.” – *1 Corinthians 13:9-11*

“Thus the holy spirit makes it plain that the way into the holy place had not yet been made manifest while the first tent was standing. This very [tent] is an illustration for the appointed time that is now here, and in keeping with it both gifts and sacrifices are offered. However, these are not able to make the [man] doing sacred service perfect as respects his conscience, but have to do only with foods and drinks and various baptisms. **They were legal requirements pertaining to the flesh and were imposed until the appointed time to set things straight**.” – *Hebrews 9:8-10*

There was a greater understanding of God waiting to be revealed at ‘the appointed time.’ This further revelation is contained in the New Testament.

### **The New Testament**

Of all the ancient religious creeds, the Jewish creed with its ‘Ten Commandments,’ created the most successful and moral lifestyle, and continues to do so even down to this day. As a people of laws, the Jews had a distinct and cognizable social order. Their lifestyle, and its consequences, were predictable. When coupled with their monotheistic religion and their metropolitan location, the Jews would have provided the most secure setting for a monotheistic God of order to make an appearance to mankind. In this setting, Jesus appeared with a greater and more universal message – the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He taught mankind that God was not just the God of the Jews, but the God of all people; and that God was not just the God of all people, but the Father of all people – ever single one of us! (**Matthew 23:8-9**)

Jesus’ ministry was oral and demonstrative, meaning that he spoke and lived his teachings. It is noteworthy that Jesus did not leave any written records. The only account of Jesus ever writing anything was when he drew a cryptic message in sand. (**John 8:6**) Jesus’ reluctance to leave behind his own writings may explain why it took his followers so long after his death to publish narratives about Jesus’ life. The book of Matthew is said to have been completed in 41 C.E., Mark in 60-65 C.E., Luke in 56-58 C.E., and John in 98 C.E.

However, it appears that immediately after Jesus’ resurrection, his followers began sending written correspondence to one another telling them about Jesus, about their personal experiences, and encouraging one another to hold onto their new found faith. History reveals that there were hundreds of such letters circulating in the first few centuries after Jesus’ death.

Continuing up through the fourth century, the Christian community was very loosely organized. There were no centralized teachings or authorized dogma, other than having faith in Jesus and in the promise to be with him in heaven, and getting baptized to receive holy spirit. Each disciple taught about Jesus according to what they understood. The congregations were organized around their foremost teacher and in some instances, conflicts and dissension arose over what was the true good news, and whether the Gentile converts to Christianity would have to keep the law of Moses. (See **1 Corinthians; Galatians; Colossians; Hebrews**, as examples.)

Some groups accepted certain writings as authentic, other groups chose different writings. There was a lot to choose from. And, as the Apostle John wrote:

“There are, in fact, many other things also which Jesus did, which, if ever they were written in full detail, I suppose, the world itself could not contain the scrolls written.” – **John 21:25**

In time, the early Christians settled on 27 of those writings that they felt best represented the teachings of Jesus as they understood them. Those 27 books, consisting of 4 historical accounts of Jesus’ life, 1 historical account of the activities of the apostles, 1 book of prophesy, and 21 of the hundreds of letters that had been circulating, made up what came to be called the ‘New Testament.’ And shortly thereafter, these 27 books became the only authorized and

acceptable teachings of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, this demarcation and codification of acceptable Christian teachings changed the free-flowing nature of original Christianity and gave rise to a centralized clergy/laity class that had far reaching, and not always positive, implications. Nevertheless, the canonization of the writings proved to be an important development toward preserving enough of the teachings of Jesus so as to effect powerful changes even down to our day.

So, as to its authorship, we know that the New Testament writers were men who wrote about Jesus and his teachings to the best of their ability and understanding, and were thus **inspired by God**. However, except to the extent that they quote directly from Jesus, the writings are not the **word of God**. Instead, John wrote:

“In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was a god**. This one was in [the] beginning with God. All things came into existence through him, and apart from him not even one thing came into existence.” – *John 1:1-3*

So **the Word became flesh** and resided among us, and we had a view of his glory, a glory such as belongs to an only-begotten son from a father; and he was full of undeserved kindness and truth.” – *John 1:14*

Yes, **Jesus himself** is the word of God. He demonstrated God’s message to mankind by the way he lived his life. Thus, learning about Jesus is how we learn about God, and what is true, and the way to the real life:

“Jesus said to him: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” – *John 14:6*

Therefore, while we can learn much from the writings that were **inspired by God**, a true knowledge of the **word of God** can only come from a study of the life and ministry of Jesus. It is Jesus’ example that has the real power to effect change.

“For the word of God is alive and exerts power and is sharper than any two-edged sword and pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and [their] marrow, and [is] able to discern thoughts and intentions of [the] heart.” – *Hebrews 4:12*

### **The Good News of the Kingdom**

So we learn that the Old Testament served as a tutor or teacher that prepared the Jewish mind for receiving the Good News (*Galatians 3:23-25*), but the New Testament actually **contains** the Good News. As Paul explained:

“God, who **long ago** spoke on many occasions and in many ways to our forefathers by means of the prophets, **has at the end of**



**these days spoken to us by means of a Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the systems of things.” – *Hebrews 1:1-2*

Having laid the foundation for the message of the Good News, the Jews were the first nation invited to share in it. Accordingly, Jesus’ ministry was first to the people of his birth. And though he quoted from Jewish prophets and writings, he presented a new message that was not limited to the Jews. It was ‘new wine’ for ‘new wineskins.’ (*Mark 2:21-22*)

So, when we today attempt to understand the Good News of the Kingdom, we need only look to the writings of the New Testament which contain **the word of God** as spoken through and lived by Christ Jesus.

“On account of this I bend my knees to the Father, to whom every family in heaven and on earth owes its name, to the end that he may grant you according to the riches of his glory to be made mighty in the man you are inside with power through his spirit, **to have the Christ dwell through [your] faith in your hearts with love**; that you may be rooted and established on the foundation, in order that you may be thoroughly able to grasp mentally with all the holy ones what is **the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge**, that you may be filled with all the fullness that God gives.” – *Ephesians 3:14-19*

That is not to dismiss the Old Testament, for it contains lessons of faith and courage that can be looked to today. It provided the foundation for the further revelation of God through Christ Jesus and it provided, and continues to provide, guidelines as to appropriate conduct and the effects of sin. But when we are looking for God’s message to us today, we must look beyond the Old, and into the New. And we should also be mindful that at any time the Father wishes, He or His Christ can provide an even further revelation of truth.

For further discussion, please see also: **Revealing the Awe-Inspiring Father, Foreordained From the Founding of the World, Freedom of the Children of God, Fitly United in the Same Mind, Moving Forward in Faith and Hold Fast to the Sacred Secret.**

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#### **4. How can you understand the Bible?**

Open it. Read it. Meditate on it so that you can be receptive to the leadings of the Spirit of Truth, and let the Spirit of Truth do its work. Jesus said:

“I have many things yet to say to you, but you are not able to bear them at present. However, when that one arrives, **the spirit of the truth**, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak of his own impulse, but what things he hears he will speak, and he

will declare to you the things coming.” – **John 16:12-13**

While it is true that Jesus occasionally referred to verses in the Old Testament and explained and expounded on their meaning, the bulk of his teaching consisted of illustrations – pulling life lessons from daily affairs – and by his own living example. Thus, we can best understand the Bible, and specifically the Good News, by examining Jesus’ life and the way he worshiped the Father.

We understand that our answers may be controversial to some. But we also believe if you open your spiritual mind, heart and eyes to this unbiased examination of the Bible, you will be lead to a similar conclusion. The Father “well knows the formation of us, Remembering that we are dust.” (***Psalms 103:14***) He knows how the human mind operates and He knows best how to reveal Himself. We bask in His great wisdom of first laying a foundation – the tutor – and then introducing His true nature and eternal purpose through his Son, “in the likeness of men.” (***Philippians 2:7***)

For further discussion, please see: **Expanding Your Spiritual Vision, Does this Stumble You? The Bestowal of the Spirit of Truth, and Worshiping with Spirit and Truth.**

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We welcome your comments.

***“Elaia Luchnia”***

1. We deleted the reference to the Council of Nicaea as it appears their role was more in codifying teachings, not canonizing the New Testament.