

Old Testament Survey - Part 2

by Dick Woodward

The Bible's purpose is to present Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of the world, and to equip believers for every good work.

Duration: 28:55

Scripture: John 5:39

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Jesus Christ"

Description

This sermon by Pastor Dick Woodward explores the organization, purpose, and history of the Bible, emphasizing the importance of understanding the Scriptures' intent and the central focus on Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of the world. It delves into the authorship, selection, translation, and preservation of the Bible, highlighting the miraculous nature of how God inspired men over 1,500 years to write these sacred texts.

Transcript

Please enjoy this original recording of the Mini-Bible College, also known as MBC, hosted by the author himself, Pastor Dick Woodward, in the 1980s. International Cooperating Ministries is privileged to make his timeless Bible lessons available. Each weekly episode is 30 minutes.

Together, these sessions create a three-year curriculum. This practical walk through the Bible is nurturing believers and equipping disciples speaking 31 languages in more than 50,000 small group Bible studies around the world. Now here's Pastor Woodward with the Mini-Bible College.

We continue our introduction to our survey of the Bible, again in the spirit of Jesus, where Jesus shared some information about the Scriptures with the Apostles that opened up their understanding of the Scriptures. I would like to share some information about the Bible, set some perspective on the Bible that perhaps will open up your understanding of the Bible. In our first session, we had something to say about the way the books of the Bible are organized, and I would like to suggest that you memorize the books of the Bible the way they're organized.

You may wonder why people always try to get us to memorize the books of the Bible. Well, one very simple answer is this helps you to be familiar with the Scripture and be able to feel comfortable with the Scripture. For instance, if you're in church and you have your Bible and the text is from Malachi, you'll know that that's the last book in the Old Testament, and you won't have but so much trouble finding it.

But if you don't have any idea about how the books of the Bible are organized, you wouldn't even know whether that's in the Old or the New Testament and wouldn't know where to begin to look for the book of Malachi. So it's a good idea to memorize the books of the Bible under the headings in which they're organized in the Scripture. Remember we said the Old Testament has five kinds of books, law books, history books, poetry books, major and minor prophets, and the New Testament has five kinds of books, Gospels, one history book, the letters of Paul, the general letters, and the prophetic book, the Revelation.

Never say Revelations with an S on it, but say The Revelation because the opening sentence of the book tells us that it's just one revelation. Now in our second introductory session, I would like to say something about the purposes of the Bible. I believe it helps our understanding of the Bible if we understand something of the intent of God when he gave us the Bible.

And I would like to list in this session four purposes for which God gave us the Scripture. The first reason why God gave us the Scripture is to present Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of the world. There are many people who feel that the Bible is supposed to be a history of civilization, a complete history of civilization.

Some feel that it's supposed to be a textbook on science or creation like paleontology, something like that. There are many people who feel that the Bible has purposes that it really does not have. Now if you come to the Bible realizing what its purpose is, it helps you to understand what you should get from the Bible and what you should not expect to get from the Bible.

One of the things Jesus shared with the apostles that opened up their understanding of the Scripture was this simple truth. The Scripture was all about him. He said, the Scripture is all about me.

He said in John chapter 5 verses 39 and 40, you search the Scriptures for you believe they give you eternal life, but the Scriptures point to me and you won't come to me so that I can give you this eternal life. Oswald Chambers says that John chapter 5 verse 39 is the key verse to the whole Bible because it tells us what the Bible is all about. The Bible is not a history of civilization.

It's not a textbook on creation. The Bible is a history of redemption and it is a history of the Redeemer through whom that redemption came. The Bible is a textbook on salvation and it is going to present to us the historical context through which the Savior who brought that salvation came.

It's important to understand that that's the purpose of the Bible. Again in Luke chapter 24, at the end of his time with the apostles, the Lord said this to the apostles. He said, you are such foolish, foolish people.

You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Then Jesus quoted to them passage after passage from the writings of the prophets, beginning with the book of Genesis and going right on through the Scriptures, explaining what the passages meant and what they said about himself. Then he said, when I was with you before, don't you remember my telling you, and now get this, that everything written about me by Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must all come true.

You see the important insight he's giving them there is, these prophets and Moses in his law books and the psalmist in the Psalms, they were all writing about me. That's all about me. No wonder it says that for the first time they understood the Scripture.

That's what the Scripture is all about, to present Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of the world. As we said, the second purpose for which the Bible is given is to present the historical context in which that

Redeemer and that Savior came. Now, in order to understand this, it's important to understand the different amount of space that the Scripture gives to different subject material.

For instance, take those four inspired biographies with which the New Testament begins, the Gospels. If you add up the number of chapters in the four Gospels, you'll come up with 89 chapters. There are 89 chapters in the four Gospels.

Now, four of those 89 chapters cover the birth and the first 30 years of the life of Jesus. Eighty-five of those chapters cover the last three years of the life of Jesus. And 27 of those chapters cover the last eight days of the life of Jesus.

In the Gospel of John, you have about half of the chapters given to the first 33 years of the life of Jesus, and the other half given to the last week of the life of Jesus. Now, as you look at the way the Gospels, the inspired biographies of Jesus, present the life of Jesus, what's important about the life of Jesus according to the author of these Gospels, the Holy Spirit? Well, obviously, the important thing is not his birth or his first 30 years. Two of the Gospels don't even mention that.

The important thing is that last week, that last three years of public ministry, but especially that last week. That's what's important to the writers of the four Gospels. Now, as you look at the four Gospels, then, as you realize that this was what was important, then you know what to look for when you come to those four Gospels.

Now, in the same way, if you consider the fact that there are 1,189 chapters in the whole Bible, and if you consider how they're distributed as to their content, you realize something of the purposes of the Bible. For instance, of these 1,189 chapters, the first 11 chapters tell us about the history of the universe and the history of the earth, the history of all the civilized peoples that God thinks we need to know about, the history of man, woman, language, sin, so many things are covered in those first 11 chapters. By the time you get to chapter 12 of Genesis, you meet a man named Abraham, and it's well within the mark to say that the other 1,178 chapters of the Bible are all about Abraham and his progeny, especially that one descendant of his through whom all the nations of the earth were blessed, the Messiah.

You see, what we're saying is this, the Bible is not concerned with the history of civilization or the universe or the earth, primarily. The Bible is concerned with a 2,000-year period of history, from Abraham to Christ. That's 2,000 years, and that's the period of history with which the Bible concerns itself.

1,178 chapters out of 1,189 chapters in the Bible are given to that man and his progeny because he did provide the historical context through which the Messiah came into the world. Again, in this same way, consider the fact that there are 260 chapters in the New Testament and 929 chapters in the Old Testament. Now, if God is very careful about how much space he gives to subject matter, doesn't it seem that it's very obvious that he really said something to us through the Old Testament? I think it's very obvious that the Old Testament is very important because it has 929 chapters and the New Testament has 260 chapters.

It's our prayer that as we survey the books of the Old Testament, the Old Testament will open up to you and you'll see what's in those 929 chapters of scripture classified as the Old Testament. Now, again, as you consider the amount of space the Bible gives to these different subjects, you realize something of the purposes of the Bible. The purpose of the Bible is to present Jesus Christ.

The purpose of the Bible is to say in the Old Testament, Jesus is coming, and to say in the New Testament, Jesus came. Now, a third purpose for which God gave us the Bible is explained by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3.17. God gave us the scripture according to Paul so that the man of God might be perfect or complete, absolutely equipped for every good work God wants him to do. There's a sense in which the Bible is not written to the unbeliever.

There's a sense in which God only has one message to the unbeliever, and that message is repent and believe the gospel. Now after that unbeliever repents and believes the gospel, God has 66 holy little books just filled with truth that he wants to share with that believer because the real intent and purpose of God in writing the Bible was that the man of God might be more godly, that he might be perfected for every good work God wants him to do. So the Bible then is for the man of God.

It's addressed to the man of God, and its purpose is to equip the man of God. There is one book in the Bible, however, that seems to be addressed to the unbeliever. There's much in this book to the believer, of course.

There's much in this book that perfects the man of God, but there's a sense in which the gospel of John, the fourth of those inspired biographies, is addressed to the unbeliever. John says that he recorded for us in that gospel some of the things Jesus did, not all of them, but some of them, so that if we would examine the record of these miraculous signs that Jesus performed, we would become convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because John said if you will believe that, you can have eternal life. So in a sense, the gospel of John is addressed to the unbeliever, but primarily the purpose of the scripture is to perfect the man of God.

So the purposes of the scripture are to present Jesus Christ, to present the historical context in which Jesus Christ comes, that the unbeliever might believe, but especially that the believer might be perfected. Now when we come to the Bible, and if you intend to do a serious study of the Bible, you ought to know something about how we got the Bible, what we call the backgrounds of the Bible. Have you ever had these questions asked you? Who were the people who wrote the books of the Bible? When did they write these books? Where did they write these books? In what languages did they write these books? Do we have any of the original documents upon which they wrote? Who preserved these books for us? Who translated these books into our languages? Who selected these books and decided that these books should be in this collection of books called the Bible? Who authorized men to make these decisions? When were these decisions made? Who collected these books and put them together? Did the individual authors have any idea that the book that they were writing was going to be part of a collection of books? There are many questions like this that people ask us, and if you consider yourself a serious student of the scripture, you ought to be able to answer some of these questions.

Let's consider now a little bit about the history of the Bible. Under the heading of the history of the Bible, let's think about the authorship of the Bible. Now, in facing the question of the authorship of the Bible, we make this statement.

We've already made it. God wrote these books. Through a process called inspiration, we have said, quoting Peter and Paul, God wrote these books.

Now, it's important that we should understand what we mean when we use this word inspiration or when we call the Bible the Word of God. There are two words that I think we should understand as we come to the subject of the divine authorship of the Bible. The first is the word revelation, and the second is the word

inspiration.

Revelation is the general term that covers all the various ways and means that God has and still does use to show man those things that man could never discover for himself. Now, the term inspiration refers to the specific miracle by which the Bible was written. This is referred to by the theologians as a special revelation of God, which was unique, very complete, and had a beginning and an end.

The whole project of giving man the Bible was just one form of revelation from God to man, and this miracle was about a 1,500-year project. Now, this raises questions if we get into these terms like revelation and inspiration. For instance, here's a question about revelation.

When God finished that 1,500-year project of giving us the special revelation of the Scripture, did that put an end to personal revelation? Does God reveal anything to us personally anymore since he's written the Scripture? Well, the answer has to be in the affirmative, overwhelmingly. Remember that during the New Testament period, people didn't have Bibles like we have today. In fact, if they had had Bibles, most of them couldn't have read them because many of the people in the New Testament church were illiterate.

So if God didn't reveal things to them on a personal level, or if there wasn't such a thing as personal revelation, how would they have really communicated with God? I believe if we examine the Scriptures, we affirm the fact that the special revelation of the Scripture did not put an end to personal revelation. But that raises this question. If there is still such a thing as personal revelation, which has more authority, personal revelation or special revelation? For instance, as a pastor, if a parishioner comes in to his pastor and he says, Pastor, I'm going to leave my wife.

And the pastor says, Why are you going to leave your wife? Well, I don't love her anymore, and I just want to. And if the pastor asks questions like, Well, has she been unfaithful or what is your biblical basis for leaving her? If he finds out there is no biblical basis, suppose the man turns to the pastor at this point and he says, Well, pastor, I'm going to leave my wife because God told me to leave my wife. Now, frankly, I think a pastor who hears that could say with great authority, God did not tell you any such thing.

Because personal revelation will never contradict special revelation. Special revelation has authority over personal revelation. Although personal revelation is still very much a reality, I believe personal revelation should always be checked out by the special revelation of the Scripture.

After all, how do you know it's God who is telling you to do something? The devil is a counterfeiter and an imitator, and his stratagem is to deceive us. How do you know you're not being deceived? Well, one sure compass is the Word of God. You can always check out your personal revelation by the compass of the special revelation of the Word of God.

When it comes to the subject of personal revelation, I think we need to take very seriously these words God told me. God does tell us things. God does make us know things, but we have to be very careful, I think, in saying that.

Sometimes we say it too lightly. Sometimes we just say God told us when we want to have the last word, or perhaps deify our own taste or our own opinion. I remember on one occasion we were choosing carpet for a sanctuary we were building, and people had their ideas about that.

People disagreed a great deal about the color that the carpet should be. All the Baptists in our congregation thought it should be red, and other people thought it should be something else. One evening

during the intermission in a Bible study, a woman who was a decorator came up with a big swab of carpet.

It was very long, shag carpet, long fibers, looked like it belonged in a friend's bedroom or something, and she said, batting her eyelashes, God told me it should be this. Now, frankly, I didn't believe God told her that it should be that or it would be in that sanctuary today. I believe she was deifying her own personal taste and her own personal opinion by saying God told her that that's what the carpet should be.

Now, we have to be careful about personal revelation, but we must believe in personal revelation. It is very important to believe in personal revelation, but always check personal revelation by the compass of the special revelation. Remember that the world today uses this kind of a criteria for determining what's right.

Rationalism, reason, logic, humanism, science. The world has its way of determining what the moral absolutes are supposed to be. The scripture says we know what's right by revelation.

God has given us the scripture to instruct us in righteousness. I believe when the church comes to the place where it gives up revelation, special and personal, and begins to substitute revelation for reason and logic, then I believe God is as good as dead as far as our churches are concerned. Norman Vincent Peale said years ago in the Reader's Digest that you can lay all the problems of the churches today at the door of the seminary that is robbing the seminary student of an absolute inspired word of God.

It's a serious thing when we give up our view of revelation and inspiration and substitute those concepts for things like reason and logic. Now we have said as we consider the history of the Bible and the background of the Bible and the divine authorship of the Bible, God wrote these books. But it is true, of course, that men also wrote these books.

The men who wrote these books were kings, fishermen, shepherds, prophets, generals. Some of them were political or civic leaders. One was a physician.

Some were priests and scribes. One was a publican. One was a converted rabbi.

And many are unknown or anonymous. They wrote over a period of 1,500 years. And if you study, for instance, if you look it up in a good encyclopedia and study how these men wrote these books, you come up with the conclusion that this is a very great miracle.

Truly, God did move these men. He did inspire these men to write these books. The poet Dryden puts it this way as he considers this phenomena of men writing the books of the Bible.

Once but from heaven could men, unskilled in arts, in several ages born, in several parts weave such a greeing truce? Or how or why should all conspire to cheat us with a lie, unasked their pains, ungrateful their advice, starving their gain, and martyrdom their price? That's a very profound question. Consider first of all how they could have done it, and then consider why they would have done it. It's impossible that they could have conspired to cheat us with a lie, and consider their motivation for doing it.

All they got for their labors was martyrdom. Now as you consider the human side of the authorship of the scripture, you need to consider some things like the selection of the books of the Bible. The books that we call the Old Testament had been selected from among many books that claim to be inspired, and put into a collection of books just simply called the scriptures by the 3rd or 4th century B.C., and then at a council of rabbis at a place called Jamnia at about 90 to 100 A.D. this was made official.

The New Testament books were collected by the year 367 A.D., and this issue was officially settled down by about 692 A.D. at a council called the Council of Trelon. Now the men who pulled this together and put this together in the Old Testament were scribes like Ezra, in the New Testament for the most part they were church fathers. In the case of the Old Testament books being selected, the standard they had to measure up to was pretty much a matter of the reputation of the author, if he was a prophet or if he was a scribe.

In the case of the New Testament there was a canon, they called it, or a standard of measurement which had three standards involved in it. First the question was asked, was the book written by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle? Second the question was asked, is there spiritual content in this book that really feeds the soul of the believer? And the third standard was, did all the people who were making these decisions feel unanimous in their agreement that this book should be in the canon of scripture? All the books that are in the New Testament, all 27 of them, met those three criteria in the opinion of the church fathers. Many people asked the question, what about the Apocrypha? What about those books between the Old and the New Testament that some Bibles have and some do not? These books, in their content, contain some of the issues that were very strongly debated during the years of the Reformation in the 16th century.

These books were not placed in the canon of the scripture when these decisions were made that we've already referred to at these councils, but in 1546 when the Reformation was underway, the Roman Catholic Church made the decision to bring these books into the canon of scripture because they supported their arguments that were raging there during the time of the Reformation. But when the decisions were made back then in the beginning, the Apocrypha books were not included. Now we ought to think about the languages in which the Bible was written.

You know, the Bible wasn't written in English. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written primarily in Greek. That means if you want to know the Bible, you need to know a little Hebrew and you need to know a little Greek.

Now I know a little Hebrew and I know a little Greek. The Hebrew runs a delicatessen in New York and the Greek runs a restaurant in Virginia Beach, Virginia. But seriously, if you're going to study the scripture and if you're not going to take somebody else's word for it all the rest of your life, you do need to study Hebrew and you do need to study Greek.

Because unless you're reading the Bible in Hebrew or Greek, you're reading a translation of the Bible. Someone had to translate it for you. Now we should also have something to say perhaps about the preservation of the books of the Bible.

How long does paper last? If you look at the Declaration of Independence under glass in Washington, D.C., it looks as if it would disintegrate if you touched it, and that's about 200 years old. Now these documents we're talking about, some of them are 3,000 years old. Well paper just doesn't last that long.

So we have to conclude that we have none of the original paper on which these books were written. This means that in order for us to have these books today, certain things had to take place. First of all, these books had to be copied by hand because printing didn't develop until 1454.

So all these years there was no such thing as the printing press. That means these documents had to be copied by hand, and they had to be preserved, and as we've already suggested, they had to be translated.

Now the translation of the Bible and its history is interesting.

First of all, about 280 to 240 B.C., all the Hebrew books of the Old Testament were translated into Greek by about 70 scholars, and this translation was called the Septuagint. Now this is significant because when the New Testament books were written, they were written in Greek, and this means that by the time the New Testament books were written, the Old Testament books were in Greek, and the New Testament books were in Greek, and Greek was the universal language of the world at that time. It's obvious that the providence of God was involved in that.

About 404 A.D., the Septuagint books and the New Testament books that were written by them were translated into Latin by Jerome, and this was the official Bible of the Church for 1,000 years, longer than any other translation of the Scripture. John Wycliffe, who died in 1384, translated the Bible into English. He was the first one to translate the Bible into English.

In 1610, the Roman Catholic Church published an English translation called the Douay Translation, and by 1611 there were many English translations of the Bible, and it was confusing in the worship services, and so King James published what we call the Authorized Translation or the King James Translation of the Bible, and for about 350 years that was the primary Bible among English-speaking Protestants. Now this has been revised several times in 1881, 1901, 1946, and again in 1963. This final revision of the King James Translation is called the New American Standard Version.

Now there are many good translations of the Bible today, and I recommend these translations. Remember this as you come to the history of the translation of the Scripture. The Bible could have been written in classical Greek or stilted Greek, the Greek of the cultured people, but it wasn't.

It was written in the Koine Greek, which means the everyday language of the people, the people out there in the marketplace. This means that it was the intent of God when the Word of God was written that the lay person understand the Scripture, that it be very readable, very understandable. As you understand the history of the translation of the Bible, you realize God wants people to understand it.

He wants them to read it in a translation they can understand because he wants them to apply it to their lives. Now again, just as Jesus shared some information about the Bible that opened up the apostles' understanding of the Bible, I trust that these facts that we've shared with you in this session about the Bible will open up your understanding of the Bible and guide you in your perspective as you approach the Word of God. Approach the Word of God always with the will to do, with the will to apply what the Word of God teaches you.

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