



Spiritual Due Diligence

Exploring questions of eternal significance

Study 4 The Nature of Scripture
presented by Links Players International

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Spiritual Due Diligence

Introduction to this study

WHEN A MAN OR WOMAN CONSIDERS making a significant financial investment, they normally do not rush into the decision. Rather, they begin a process commonly known as due diligence—a gathering of facts and considerations that will allow them to judge rightly whether this investment is appropriate for them.

Of course, due diligence does not guarantee success. However, if an investment fails and we ask the investors whether or not they did their due diligence, the most embarrassing answer they can give is, “No, we did not.”

While thousands of wise investors each year avoid that embarrassment by conducting due diligence in their financial endeavors, millions of people never take the same careful steps in their spiritual lives. While they have heard stories of God and the afterlife, and while they may have even toyed with such questions loosely in their minds, they have never set about the task of spiritual due diligence—considering the information that would support these eternally significant claims.

Intent of this series

The intent of this series, *Spiritual Due Diligence*, is to assist potential spiritual investors with regard to investigating the claims of the Bible, particularly as they point to a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. One study in this series will focus on the claims of other faith systems, but that is not our primary intent here. Instead, by a thorough examination of the Bible, you will have opportunity to study Christianity in depth, and thereafter you will have the tools necessary by which to measure other faiths and religions.

The audience for this series

At least three categories of readers should find great value in this series: those who are beginning their first serious investigation of the Bible, those who are desiring to increase their knowledge and understanding of the Bible, and those who may be speaking with others about their own established Christian faith.

Focus of this particular study

This study is the fourth in the series. Its particular thrust is to explore the veracity of the Bible. While revelation and faith are often criticized for being intangible, both can be built upon the strength of reason. And if we are going to make decisions with eternal significance based on what we read in the Bible (also called the Scriptures), we want to be increasingly sure that the words contained there are reliable and vital. This study combines interior studies of the Bible itself with the external observations of apologists and logicians as they piece together the evidences for the solid nature of the Scriptures.

— Jeffrey Cranford and Jeff Hopper, for Links Players International



The Nature of Scripture

Lesson One: The work of apologists

NEW FIELDS OF STUDY AND BUSINESS ARISE ALL THE TIME. As a manufacturer, if you do not understand or move toward “green” technologies, you’ll find yourself chastised by critics and ignored by buyers. If you are involved in communications or media and have no sense of the vast Internet landscape and its swift changes, you won’t remain competitive for long.

No one person can “know it all,” but today’s leaders must be ready to hire those who can round out a team that does.

The same can be said for matters of spiritual due diligence. With so much written about God and the Bible, it can be hard to know whether you are getting straight stuff—to know whether you are even getting the truth. In the quest for this knowledge, it is helpful to turn to apologists.

The field of apologetics sets as its goal the reasoned defense of Christian belief, including the Bible, which is the written basis for those beliefs. Apologists, much like detectives, present evidence for the consideration of a panel of hearers. In a detective’s case, this panel is of course a jury. In an apologist’s case, this panel may be any individual or group of people who are investigating the veracity of what is said about God in the Scriptures.

In the course of this study, much of what will be presented was first laid out by apologists, experts in the presentation of evidence for consideration by interested students. Whether you have persisted through the previous three studies on spiritual due diligence or this is your first, we’ll assume your interest as one studying the Scriptures and whether what they tell us can be true.

Tools of the apologists

Apologists depend on several different sources to establish their defense of God’s existence as presented in the Scriptures. Here are the sources from which they draw:

- **The Bible itself.** Apologists study how the Scriptures fit together. As we will discuss in the second lesson of this study, the Bible is comprised of many types of writing by a large number of writers working over a series of centuries. Apologists explore whether what is being said is complementary or contradictory.
- **The ancient manuscripts.** Because the Bible has been passed down through so many centuries, it has often been reduced by critics to the written form of unreliable oral traditions. Others have suggested that because of this long passage of texts through history, the Bible we read is likely tainted by error; they say we cannot know whether what we read now is the original word of

God. By reviewing the manuscripts, apologists can determine whether the critics or the Bible is more reliable.

- **The discoveries of archaeologists.** As scientists have made numerous archaeological discoveries through time, these findings all have the potential of supporting or disproving the biblical accounts of historical events. Apologists lean on these discoveries to make their case.

Using these forms of assessment, apologists state “the case” for the Christian faith. Through the course of this fourth study, we will include elements of apologetics. You will find yourself in a position to evaluate what is presented and consider its worth. As the detective in the courtroom, we are aware that some “jurors” may not find the evidence compelling enough; we have no illusions here. But we will show you what has been shown to many through the years and give you the opportunity to judge for yourself whether what you read—both here and in the Scriptures—is true.

BIBLE STUDY

Read Luke 16:27-31. In this passage, Jesus is completing a parable in which a rich man in hell pleads with Abraham in heaven to report his misery to his brothers, that they may avoid the same fate. How does verse 31 confirm that even the best evidence will be rejected by some?

Read Mark 4:13-20. In this passage, Jesus is explaining a parable He told earlier in this chapter. He speaks of the truth about Him and how it is “sown” among people. In this explanation, Jesus shows that there will be different responses to Him. What are those responses, and what are the factors that determine them?

Read Romans 1:28-31. Begin by considering these words: “...they did not think it worthwhile to have God in their knowledge.” What conscious choice were these people making?

To what earthly destiny did God “deliver them over to” for this choice?

In what ways are moral choices and intellectual choices tied up together? How do they affect each other?

LUKE 16

27“ ‘Father,’ he said, ‘then I beg you to send him to my father’s house— 28because I have five brothers—to warn them, so they won’t also come to this place of torment.’

29“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’

30“ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said. ‘But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

31“But he told him, ‘If they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

MARK 4

13Then He said to them: “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand any of the parables? 14The sower sows the word. 15These are the ones along the path where the word is sown: when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word sown in them. 16And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. 17But they have no root in themselves; they are short-lived. When affliction or persecution comes because of the word, they immediately stumble. 18Others are sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, 19but the worries of this age, the seduction of wealth, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20But the ones sown on good ground are those who hear the word, welcome it, and produce a crop: 30, 60, and 100 times what was sown.”

ROMANS 1

28And because they did not think it worthwhile to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them over to a worthless mind to do what is morally wrong. 29They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, disputes, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, 30slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.



The Nature of Scripture

Lesson Two: What is included in the Bible?

FOR A LONG SPAN OF TIME, educational studies as they were presented in nearly all parts of the Western world—even when the educational setting was labeled “secular”—included significant study of the Bible. The Bible’s influence on most other discourse was so great that it was considered, if not fully factual, at least foundational in the understanding of literary recitations such as “the little foxes spoil the vine” or moral codes such as “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

But with the scientific disdain of the Bible’s creation accounts in favor of evolutionary theory came the beginning of the end for biblical surveys in most public educational settings, and certainly in a compulsory fashion for all students. Therefore, when we discuss the Bible, sometimes we need to cover essential basics so that all those involved in the study have a common understanding. That is the intent of this single lesson: to provide a basic overview of the Bible’s contents, so that groups studying together can be certain of the knowledge that they share. Following, then, are the key categories of the Scriptures, as presented in the standard Christian Bible.

Old and New Testaments

The Bible contains two major divisions, called the Old Testament and the New Testament. A dictionary investigation of the word *testament* reveals that its roots include “a witness.” In the biblical sense, we might say more closely that a testament is “a recorded statement of witnesses.” The Old Testament, which includes 37 individual books, records the witnessed acts of God and His people prior to the coming of Jesus Christ. The New Testament (29 books) records the witnessed acts after His coming.

Although there is some overlap in the individual books, they each can generally be placed among a group of literary categories, or genres.

Historical accounts

One category of Scripture includes the historical accounts (which in the early part of the Old Testament also contain the Jewish Law). These are books that offer the genealogy of Israel and the events that surrounded the people’s lives. Even if you are extremely new to the biblical records, it is likely you have heard of Adam and Eve, Noah, Moses, David, and Jesus. We can partly thank Hollywood for that knowledge. Here is an example of an historical account from Scripture:

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you keep looking at each other? Listen,” he went on, “I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us so that we will live and not die.” (Genesis 42:1-2)

Wisdom books

The wisdom books are a series of books in the Old Testament that are poetically

written. As in general poetic instances, they may also contain historical offerings, but they are not worded in a standard narrative form, other than the first two chapters of Job. Here is a well-known example of writing from the wisdom books:

Again I saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or bread to the wise, or riches to the discerning, or favor to the skillful; rather, time and chance happen to all of them. (Ecclesiastes 9:11)

Prophetic books

The prophetic books, while sometimes including narrative histories, are primarily made up of the prophetic words spoken by God through selected prophets. Normally, each prophet recorded his own words, though at least one prophet (Jeremiah) used a scribe. In addition to prophetic words, prophets were sometimes directed by God to perform prophetic acts, symbolizing a lesson God wanted the prophet and the people to learn. It is important to know that in a biblical sense, prophecy includes “forthtelling” (speaking boldly to the people as God’s voice to them) and “foretelling” (giving foreshadowing of what will come in God’s future plans). The division between so-called major and minor prophets is simply about the amount of prophecy given to each of these men for the biblical record. Here is an example of prophetic literature in the Scriptures:

“Why do you spend money on what is not food, and your wages on what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and you will enjoy the choicest of foods.” (Isaiah 55:2)

Doctrinal letters

Finally, in the New Testament, you will find letters written from the early church leaders to those who believed and followed Jesus Christ. Most of these were general letters, written to all in a local fellowship, while others were written primarily to leaders to explain how they should lead. From these letters, much of what is now Christian doctrine is derived. Here is an example of the doctrinal letters:

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)

BIBLE STUDY

To increase your sense of the Bible’s contents, read each of the full chapters from which the examples above are taken.

BIBLE BOOKS CATEGORIZED

The books of the Bible are normally classified as shown below. These are not always pure classifications. For instance, Moses prophesies in the historical accounts, as does David in the Psalms. Likewise, Jesus prophesies in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Meanwhile, some histories are contained in the both the wisdom books and the prophets. But these major divisions help us understand how to approach each book according to its dominant genre.

HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts

WISDOM BOOKS

OLD TESTAMENT

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

PROPHETIC BOOKS

OLD TESTAMENT

Major prophets

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel

Minor prophets

Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT

Revelation

DOCTRINAL LETTERS

NEW TESTAMENT

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude



The Nature of Scripture

Lesson Three: How the Scriptures fit together

GOLF COURSE DESIGN IS STUNNINGLY IMPORTANT. The way a course is laid out not only presents a challenge to those who play it, but it builds a course's reputation. From that reputation, others avoid the course or make long treks to play it. And, as you might imagine, the best courses in the world are generally the most lucrative, either pulling in well-heeled members or ready-to-pay daily players.

These top courses are often known for their excellent balance between variety and congruity. While a designer does not want holes to begin looking one like another, he almost always seeks a fluidity throughout the course. Additionally, while two courses by the same architect may be quite different in their routing, their difficulty, and their amenities, an architect aims to weave his unique style elements into every course he builds. Alistair Mackenzie designed courses whose bunkers "disappeared" when you looked back at them; Donald Ross elevated his greens so each became a small target; Pete Dye features significant water hazards and vast bunkering, both often ringed with railroad ties.

The mark of a known golf course designer can be seen in nearly every hole, though every hole is unique in its own way.

A knitted congruity is also found in the Scriptures, and it provides one of the great reasons for considering the Bible not only as literature but as something laid out by a master designer. Today's lesson considers both the uniquenesses of the books of the Bible, as well as their common thread.

The variety of the Scriptures

Some people want only the facts, so here they are:

- The Bible contains 66 books.
- These 66 books were written by 40 different authors.
- These authors' lives spanned 1,600 years.
- Some of these authors were trained as scholars; many were not. Their ranks included kings, priests and prophets, shepherds and fishermen.
- Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the language of the Israelites. A few brief passages were written in Aramaic.
- Most of the New Testament was written in Greek, the language of the Roman Empire. Again, a few brief phrases were recorded in Aramaic.
- As we explored in the previous lesson, five major genres make up Scripture.

Looking at these pieces of information, we can conclude at least two things:

(1) The Bible is a book of amazing variety in the context and construction of its authorship.

(2) This kind of varied sourcing makes it unlikely that we would naturally find ongoing cohesion of accounts and themes of the writing.

Cohesion all the same

In spite of this second conclusion, however, we find in reading the Bible from front to back that there is a strikingly singular purpose in its writings. Simply, that purpose is this: to point to the Messiah (Promised One), Jesus Christ.

A common saying of Bible teachers states that “in the Old Testament, the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament, the Old Testament is revealed.” This makes sense because the Bible includes significant pieces of foreshadowing and prophecy. God expresses what His plans will be before He enacts them. We will review this more specifically in the next lesson, but it is an important piece of evidence that the Bible is on the level. With the various books being written by men who were not contemporaries, they wound up as corroborators of one another all the same—independent witnesses, as it were, all providing testimony toward a single purpose.

Henrietta Mears, a prominent teacher of the Bible in the mid-20th Century, wrote a survey of the Scriptures entitled *What the Bible is All About*. In her book—which is an outstanding aid worth owning if you are growing more serious about your reading of Scripture—Dr. Mears identified a unique way in which each book of the Bible (or pair of books if they are presented that way) portrays Jesus Christ. Remarkably, these portrayals are evident in the Old Testament, though none of the writers ever knew Jesus. The books of the Old Testament were completed more than 400 years before Jesus of Nazareth was born.

Where does all of this information lead us? To a point of realization, if not yet full acceptance, that there is a unified strand of focus among the varying books of the Bible. Of course, that realization presents for many people a whole new question: where did that unified focus come from? Our further lessons in this study will help address that question.

BIBLE STUDY

Read *Exodus 3:7,10-12; Exodus 4:4:10-13; and Jeremiah 1:1,4-8*. What did Moses and Jeremiah have in common in their response to God's call to deliver His word?

Does the reluctance of Moses and Jeremiah, both of whom wrote significant portions of the Old Testament, point more or less toward authentic authorship? Why?

EXODUS 3

⁷Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of My people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors, and I know about their sufferings... ¹⁰Therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead My people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

¹¹But Moses asked God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹²He answered, “I will certainly be with you...”

EXODUS 4

¹⁰But Moses replied to the LORD, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent—either in the past or recently or since You have been speaking to Your servant—because I am slow and hesitant in speech.”

¹¹The LORD said to him, “Who made the human mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now go! I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say.”

¹³Moses said, “Please, Lord, send someone else.”

JEREMIAH 1

¹The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests living in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin....

⁴The word of the LORD came to me:

⁵I chose you before I formed you in the womb;

I set you apart before you were born.

I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

⁶But I protested, “Oh no, Lord GOD ! Look, I don't know how to speak since I am only a youth.”

⁷Then the LORD said to me:

Do not say: I am only a youth, for you will go to everyone I send you to and speak whatever I tell you.

⁸Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to deliver you.

This is the LORD's declaration.



The Nature of Scripture

Lesson Four: Jesus Christ and the Old Testament

REDESIGN. In the 21st Century, the world begs for it. With technology so critical to all that is done—from the lights going out to the Internet going down, we are reminded too frequently and too graphically of our dependence on technology—we beg for bigger, faster, smarter. We cry out for redesign.

And yet, what thrills our aesthetic sense is when that redesign captures and retains classic elements of the old. New ballparks must have modern amenities but old-style looks. New cars must have the now-expected array of bells and whistles but also cool lines and sleek colors—as the popular cars have always had.

When the old and the new are rightly married, we have a sense that all is well with the world.

The Bible's two-part invention

Scripture, as we have already noted, is broken into two major divisions: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Separated by 400 years of “silence,” as the theologians suggest about God, the two testaments appear to have two different takes on God Himself and on life.

Some people find two Gods in the two testaments. They read the dramatic accounts of the Old Testament histories, as well as the strong pronouncements of God in the prophetic writings, and they declare God to be harsh, judgmental, overbearing. Then they read the healing miracles of Jesus and the open-minded cross-cultural arguments of Paul, and they say that this is another God depicted here, One who is loving, merciful, full of forgiveness.

But the Bible does not attempt to divide itself. The New Testament is rich with allusions to Old Testament passages, drawing connections to the patriarchs and the prophets. The New Testament writers make no apologies for “the Old Testament God.” Clearly, they marvel at Him as their forefathers did.

What's more is that the Old Testament is continually pointing forward, with particular interest in the promised Messiah, or Savior, of God's people. No wonder it has been said, as we noted in lesson two, that the Old Testament conceals the New Testament, while the New Testament reveals the Old. Like a two-part invention in music, the testaments of Scripture are woven together.

Christ ahead of time

This two-part nature of the Bible is particularly important when we consider Jesus Christ. Jesus was His given name, a derivative of the Hebrew *Yeshua* (Joshua), meaning “he saves.” Christ is a title, the anglicization of the Greek *Cristos*, or Savior. To the Jews who would believe and follow Him, then, the man Jesus of Nazareth was the

promised Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures. He was the One they had been waiting for.

This does not mean that the Jewish followers of Christ, including the Twelve, had a complete sense of who Jesus was and what He was supposed to accomplish. Indeed, when Jesus walked with two disciples who did not at first recognize Him after His resurrection, He had this conversation with them:

The one named Cleopas answered Him, “Are You the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that happened there in these days?”

“What things?” He asked them.

So they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a Prophet powerful in action and speech before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him. But we were hoping that He was the One who was about to redeem Israel. Besides all this, it’s the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women from our group astounded us. They arrived early at the tomb, and when they didn’t find His body, they came and reported that they had seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn’t see Him.”

He said to them, “How unwise and slow you are to believe in your hearts all that the prophets have spoken! Didn’t the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:18-27)

While the prophecies were steadily given in the Old Testament, even learned Jews did not recognize Jesus in all He was going to do. They expected a military redemption against Rome’s occupiers. What they got instead was a spiritual Redeemer. But it was not until after His life had been fully lived that they began to understand with certainty that He was the Chosen Messiah.

BIBLE STUDY

Read each of the prophetic passages shown at the right.

How do these passages each reveal an aspect of Jesus’ life and death?

What considerations do these passages provoke if we know that the Old Testament writings and the New Testament events were separated by 400 years?

MICAH 5

²Bethlehem Ephrathah,
you are small among the clans of Judah;
One will come from you
to be ruler over Israel for Me.
His origin is from antiquity,
from eternity.

(Compare with Matthew 2:1-6.)

ISAIAH 40

³A voice of one crying out:
Prepare the way of the Lord in the
wilderness;
make a straight highway for our God
in the desert.

(Compare with Mark 1:1-8.)

ZECHARIAH 9

⁹Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your King is coming to you;
He is righteous and victorious,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

(Compare with John 12:12-16.)

PSALM 22

⁷Everyone who sees me mocks me;
they sneer and shake their heads;
⁸He relies on the Lord;
let Him rescue him;
let the Lord deliver him;
since He takes pleasure in him.”

(Compare with Matthew 27:41-44.)

¹⁸They divided my garments among
themselves,
and they cast lots for my clothing.

(Compare with Matthew 27:35.)

ZECHARIAH 13

⁷Sword, awake
against My shepherd,
against the man who is
My associate—
the declaration of the Lord of hosts.

Strike the shepherd
and the sheep
will be scattered.

(Compare with Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75.)



The Nature of Scripture

Lesson Five: Scripture on Scripture

WHILE THE ADAGE “IT’S NOT BRAGGING IF YOU CAN BACK IT UP” leaves the door open for some pretty ugly pride, the truth is that we like to hear from leaders in life’s big endeavors. We want to hear from them because their performances and their products have already spoken loud and clear. And if we can find out what is behind their success, maybe we can gain a bit of confidence ourselves.

The Bible is one of those “products” that has spoken for itself. Through the centuries, people have turned to the Bible for wisdom and truth. And those who have lived their lives in obedience to Scripture have influenced those around them in beautiful and positive ways.

The principles of Scripture point to the Designer of the universe when they are faithfully followed. They work, freeing from worries and guilt those who live them out. Additionally, the Gospels, in their unveiling of Jesus Christ, have given readers access to the most remarkable man who ever lived, the one sent from God, as God. His life and teachings have accredited Him to us, and our fascination grows with each reading.

Because the Bible presents us with such pictures and accounts, and because its precepts make such good sense when they are lived, we want to know what the book has to say about itself. Does the book itself point to its author, to its structure, or to its worth? Yes, it does. In this lesson, then, we will explore what the Bible has to say about itself.

BIBLE STUDY

Read Psalm 19:8. David, the writer of the Psalm, spoke here and elsewhere of his love for the precepts (commands or principles) of God. What might cause a person to appreciate external moral discipline to this degree?

Read Isaiah 40:7. God’s Word is one of three things to which the Bible grants eternity (the other two are God and people). What qualities make the truths of the Scriptures timeless, able to speak to us even in our time?

Read *Isaiah 6:1-3,5-8*. This account established Isaiah's commission to speak prophetically on behalf of God. What was done to Isaiah to prepare him for this commission? How does a commission given in this manner speak of the Scripture's source?

Read *2 Timothy 3:16-17*. According to this passage, what is the specific source of Scripture?

What does the Scripture do?

What is the result of the Scripture's influence?

Read *Matthew 7:28-29*. What set Jesus' teaching apart in the minds of His hearers?

REFLECTION

In Hebrews 4:12, we read, "For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints and marrow; it is the judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart." From what you know about the source and purpose of Scripture, how does this passage make sense as it is applied to your personal life?

PSALM 19

⁸The precepts of the LORD are right, making the heart glad; the commandment of the LORD is radiant, making the eyes light up.

ISAIAH 40

⁷The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever.

ISAIAH 6

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and His robe filled the temple. ²Seraphim were standing above Him; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

³And one called to another:

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts; His glory fills the whole earth...

⁵Then I said:

Woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts.

⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He touched my mouth with it and said:

Now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, and your sin is atoned for.

⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying:

Who should I send?

Who will go for Us?

I said:

Here I am. Send me.

2 TIMOTHY 3

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NIV)

MATTHEW 7

²⁸When Jesus had finished this sermon, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, ²⁹because He was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.



The Nature of Scripture

Lesson Six: Mistaken purposes of Scripture

EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, YOU MAY SEE AN ANNOUNCEMENT for one of those tournaments where the golfers are required to make their way around with only a single club. It's a decision followed by a challenge. And here is where the challenge comes in: plenty of times during that round, you are going to find yourself using the club you have chosen to hit a shot for which it was not designed. Most players go with a mid-iron, and with it they will be forced to strokes putts, carry greenside bunkers from short distances, and sometimes extract themselves from those bunkers!

Throughout history, the Bible has been frequently misused, both to the detriment of individuals as well as to the disaster of millions. In this lesson, we will look at three ways the Bible can be mistakenly used and compare them to the Bible's true purpose.

The Bible as political text

In his best-selling atheistic roustabout, *God is Not Great*, Christopher Hitchens declares that "religion poisons everything." While the work is as much diatribe as exposé, Hitchens bases much of his thesis on the evil acts of political leaders who have exploited and murdered people in the name of their faith. Of course, in the cases of Christendom, Judaism, and to some extent Islam, those faiths rely on the Bible—hence, Hitchens' hyperbolic declaration about the far-reaching evils of religion.

Where Hitchens is actually gathering his supporting examples is from the purveyors of extremism, who do use the Bible to enact their wicked policies and practices, but who do so through the common error of proof-texting, where a man or woman arrives at a personal opinion, then seeks a particular Scripture to "back it up." The Scriptures are vast enough that it is easy for even those with no great power to find lines or passages to support their self-serving quests.

A full reading of the Bible would never lead to the conclusions drawn by national tyrants and lesser bullies. The Bible, for instance, has been used to support all sorts of racial oppression, but any honest reading of the book of Ruth shows the openness of God's heart to cross-cultural, cross-racial relationships. Moreover, in this matter of political considerations, Jesus repeatedly steered clear of political opportunities, seeking instead to reign in the individual hearts, minds and souls of His followers.

The Bible as literature

A second common misuse of the Bible is to relegate it to literature, in the manner of many other texts, fiction and non-fiction, ancient and modern. There is no question that while the Bible contains the genres common to literature, as we examined in lesson two, there was for the writers of the Scriptures a much greater purpose to what they were doing. Some, like Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah, received direct commissions from God to deliver His words to His people. Others, like the writers of the Gospels, spoke openly of their intent to lead others to God. The Bible may be good literature, but its own stated

purpose is to forge a connection between the God of eternity and the people of earth.

The Bible as a handbook

A third common misuse of Scripture is to call it a handbook (or guide, or recipe) for life. Among the practices of those who take this approach is opening the Bible randomly and dropping a finger of chance onto the page, hoping to find the answer to a troubling life circumstance or a wishful prayer.

Clearly, however, as has been noted wisely by many, not everything *described* in Scripture is *prescribed* in Scripture. Even ardent literalists know this, giving weight to some passages that they do not give to others.

The fact is that there is much to be learned from Scripture, and those who allow its precepts to govern their lives will find that their humble obedience will lead to peace before God. But the Bible is much more significant than to be used as just another self-help book.

The Bible is a revelatory book

So if the Bible “so much more” than the misconceptions that have been thrust upon it through the centuries, just what is that “more”? Chiefly and simply, the Bible is a revelatory book. That is, it was authored by God through men to reveal Himself to us. By studying and knowing God’s Word, we gain increased understanding of who God is. More than anything, that is what He desires from us: to call upon Him, honoring Him by acknowledging our need for Him and our needs to Him, and worshiping Him by living according to His precepts for our lives.

BIBLE STUDY

Read *Luke 1:1-4* and *John 20:30-31*. What was the stated purpose of Luke and John in setting down the accounts of their Gospels?

Read *2 Timothy 3:16* and *2 Peter 1:20-21*. How directly do these passages tie Scripture to the inspiration of God? Why is this significant in considering the differences between the Bible and other books?

REFLECTION

How much credence do you give to Scripture compared with other books? How much influence do you give Scripture in your own life?

(For further investigation of the veracity of Scripture, we recommend Mark Roberts’ Can We Trust the Gospels? published by Crossway.)

LUKE 1

¹Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. ³It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

JOHN 20

³⁰Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name.

2 TIMOTHY 3

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed...

2 PETER 1

²⁰First of all, you should know this: no prophecy of Scripture comes from one’s own interpretation, ²¹because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.

Mark Roberts on the Gospels

“The evangelists wrote reliable history because they cared about what happened in the past... their theology was anchored in past events. After all, one cannot very well believe that salvation came through the atoning death of Jesus if that death didn’t really happen. A nice story about a dying Messiah just wouldn’t cut it. In the prologue to his Gospel, John wrote, ‘And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth’ (1:14). Undeniably, this is a theological affirmation. But it is theology melded with history... Moreover, it’s theology that leads one to care about history. Believe that Jesus really was God in the flesh and you’ll pay close attention to what He actually said and did.”

—in *Can We Trust the Gospels?*



The Nature of Scripture

Lesson Seven: The great aim of Scripture

AT THE END OF A ROUND OF GOLF, YOU CAN EXPECT to wind up in one particular spot: back at the clubhouse. After all, that is the way all courses are designed. No matter what circuitous route they may wind from the first tee to the eighteenth green, that final approach will land somewhere quite close to the clubhouse, and you may even putt out in view of those assembled there.

The Bible, too, may often seem disjointed. As we have noted, the varying genres do not knit together a continuous story. But they are assembled with a common aim. That aim is to reveal Jesus Christ, both in the Old Testament and the New.

In this lesson, we will examine one full passage that demonstrates how the history and prophecy of Scripture pointed to Jesus and what that means for those who believe in Him.

The principal idea

Read Hebrews 8:5. In this verse, the writer of Hebrews used the phrase “a copy and a shadow” to describe how the instructions God gave to Moses for the construction of the earthly temple pointed to a greater temple to come—the eternal dwelling of God. Likewise, the priesthood of Israel was a copy and a shadow of the eternal priest, Jesus Christ, who became mediator before God for all who would believe in Him.

Two covenants

Read Hebrews 7:22. In this verse, the writer says that Jesus Himself was “the guarantee of a better covenant.” This implies, of course, that a lesser covenant was in place. When the Bible speaks of the old and new covenants, it is speaking of two pacts that God made with His chosen people. The first of these covenants was made with the nation-people called Israel. Its people were the Jews. God’s covenant with them included a system of laws that were designed both for individual righteousness and societal structure. In the old covenant, God essentially told His people that if they would follow His decrees, they would see reward.

It quickly became apparent, however, that no one could live by all of God’s standards. Without faith in God’s mercy, all would be judged as unrighteous by the Holy One. Justification came—and still comes—by faith (Romans 3:21-24).

Under the old covenant a symbolic appeal to God’s mercy was made through the offering of sacrifices. While these sacrifices could not do the perfect work of atoning for our sins, they were a reminder to the people that were dependent on God for their forgiveness, and that there was yet a set of righteous principles that guided their lives.

Still, a “once for all” sacrifice needed to be made. This would not be only a copy and a shadow of what was needed. This would be atonement made through a pure

sacrifice. Such a sacrifice was made through the “perfect high priest,” Jesus Christ (*read Hebrews 7:23-28*). His death introduced the better (or new) covenant—that by placing their faith in Him and the act of atonement He performed, men and women would be considered righteous before God.

Christ’s purpose now

This old-to-new pattern leads us to two important conclusions about Jesus Christ.

First, He is the focal point of all Scripture. Through the practice of priestly sacrifice, we find a picture of what Christ’s most significant work would be. Through the prophets of the Old Testament, we gain glimpses of the details of His life on earth (as we studied in lesson four). Through the lives of the ancients, we see people whose complete faith was placed in Christ, as ours can be.

Second, we understand where Jesus is now and what He is doing.

Read Hebrews 8:1. In His person, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God in the heavens. He has taken up residence, as He said He would do, with His Father.

Read Hebrews 7:25. Jesus lives to intercede—that is, to provide a bridge—between God’s people and God Himself. Those who come to God through Him will be saved. Those who appeal to God through Him will be heard.

What it all means to us

In conclusion, the new covenant enacted through Christ is offered not to an earthly nation, but to people in all nations, as individuals. In Scripture, we are each introduced to the saving work of Christ; thus we must each respond, either in rejection of Him or in faith.

REFLECTION

How does a passage and a study like this one help you to see the full flow of God’s plan in Scripture? Is what you see surprising, or does it confirm what you already knew about the Bible?

What is your reaction to the portrait of Christ painted in this passage, one in which He is depicted as making the perfect sacrifice for our sins? Is there resonant truth in it? Resonant hope?

HEBREWS 7

²²So Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant.

²³Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. ²⁴But because He remains forever, He holds His priesthood permanently. ²⁵Therefore He is always able to save those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede for them.

²⁶For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷He doesn’t need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do—first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all when He offered Himself. ²⁸For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak, but the promise of the oath, which came after the law, appoints a Son, who has been perfected forever.

HEBREWS 8

¹Now the main point of what is being said is this: we have this kind of high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ^{2a}a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle, which the Lord set up, and not man. ³For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; therefore it was necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. ⁴Now if He were on earth, He wouldn’t be a priest, since there are those offering the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For He said, Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain. ⁶But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree He is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been legally enacted on better promises.



The Nature of Scripture

Lesson Eight: In review—what do I know about the Bible?

WITHOUT QUESTION, THE BIBLE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT BOOK ever written. The initial chapters of its first book, Genesis, provide the foundations for the three most prolific of the world’s religions. It contains historical accounts supported by centuries of archaeology. It points not just to the past but very apparently to the future. And it contains the life story of Jesus Christ, a man who without these accounts would have been as obscure as anyone in history, but who with them has been regarded as God Himself.

It is an invaluable investment of time, then, to know whether the Bible is trustworthy in its presentation of moral laws, theological constructs, prophetic utterances, and historical events. That is where we have spent our time in this study. Let’s take some time to review the lessons, assessing what we now know about Scripture.

Apologists and apologetics

Apologists exist in many fields. Their role is to “make a case” for a product or theory. Those who are apologists for the Christian faith include the defense of Scripture among their discussion, employing the tools of ancient manuscripts, archaeology, logic, and the Bible itself to establish their arguments.

When presented with evidence like that offered by apologists, what responses are possible from those hearing their arguments?

The makeup of the text

The Bible is a compilation that includes two major divisions—the Old Testament and the New Testament—and 66 subdivisions, called books, written in varying forms. All of these materials are linked by a common thread: to reveal Jesus Christ.

How does Christ connect the Old Testament and the New Testament?

Scripture's own testimony

The Bible has much to say about itself. It describes its source as the breath of God. Its self-stated purpose is to teach, rebuke, correct, and train for righteousness, equipping God's people for every good work. But most of all the Bible is meant to be revelatory.

What is the Bible meant to reveal to us? How does it do this?

The great aim of Scripture

Outside observers often suggest that there are two Gods presented in Scripture. The first, they say, is distant and harsh, as God can appear to be in the Old Testament. The second, is near and gentle, come in the person of Jesus Christ as presented in the New Testament. But as this study has shown, the whole Bible consistently points in one specific direction: toward the sacrificial Savior, Jesus Christ.

How has this study increased your understanding of Scripture?

How has this study increased your understanding of Christ?

WHAT'S NEXT?

This is the fourth in a series of studies on spiritual due diligence. The complete set of studies allow for a thorough investigation of some of a number of spiritual matters, including:

- The need for due diligence
- The nature of man
- The nature of God
- What other religions teach in comparison to the Bible
- The invisible realm
- End times

The fifth study in the series, which you may explore next, is "Death and the Afterlife." The Bible tells us that each person is "appointed to die" once. That is, our bodies will decay unto death. But the ancient question remains: what happens next? In our next study, we will survey what the Bible teaches about death and life after death. Likely, you will find the study to be compelling combination, producing surprises and assurance both.

Our hope throughout these studies is that you will gain a greater and greater sense of who God is and how He promises to interact with you as taught in the Bible. If this occurs, you will have accomplished what many have not—you will have conducted your spiritual due diligence.

What you decide to do with the knowledge you gain is surely a matter between you and God. But we also believe that God has designed us to live in community with other people. Therefore, it is also important that you discuss what you are thinking with others who are also considering the claims of Scripture, be they "seasoned veterans" of Bible study or quite new at the task. If you are not in a study with others at this time and would like to be, call Links Players at 800-90-LINKS and we'll offer some suggestions for groups who might encourage you in your thought and discussion.



Spiritual Due Diligence

Leading a group study

IT CAN BE DAUNTING TO BE CALLED ON to teach the Word of God. Indeed, many potential leaders have told us that while they are capable of and eager to bring a group together, or to act as host, teaching is an entirely different level, one for which they do not consider themselves prepared.

Others don't feel so much weight when it comes to teaching. They know their Bibles well, or they're naturals when speaking to a crowd.

It is, then, the precise goal of the structure of these Links Players Bible studies to provide a fully operational Bible study for those teachers who need much assistance and yet a format that leaves room for experienced leaders to bring their own learning to the table.

The lessons include these features:

- An **introduction** providing connections for the reader between what they see and know in their lives and the topic of study at hand. While we are primarily a sports-minded ministry aimed at golfers, our materials are used by many non-golfers. Therefore, these introductions use examples from more common experiences, as well as those tied to athletics.
- A **narrative** progressing through the main ideas of the lesson. Some leaders may choose to read this with the participants verbatim (or nearly so). Others may use it as a general guide for presenting the material.
- A **Bible study**, drawing from particular specific Scripture passages. These passages are included in the light green bar on the right side of each lesson. You may find that you wish to provide the broader context for these passages from your own Bible. You may also wish to look up these passages in other translations to see how the alternate wording can assist in understanding.
- A **reflection**, which challenges participants to make some mental connections and decisions about what they have studied.
- Some of the lessons also include **further thoughts**, which are presented in the dark green bars on the right of the lesson. Again, these are intended only to offer the basic information; your own study and knowledge can help expand these ideas.

In addition to these studies, as your group grows together, you will want to include opportunity for prayer among the participants. Even with a study like this one, which may include a number of participants who are just beginning their investigations of God, Christ, and the Bible, prayer is often an open door for those who are truly seeking God. Offering to pray for personal and family needs is often the best way to begin this practice.

We also strongly encourage leaders to stay in touch with participants throughout the week, simply making themselves available for further questions and discussion.

In the same way, we are available to talk to group leaders about their experiences and to answer questions regarding the studies. You may call us Monday-Friday at 800-90-LINKS.

What is a Links Player?



Spiritual
Due Diligence

THE LINKS PLAYERS BIBLE STUDIES, including "The Nature of Scripture," are produced by Links Players International, a Christian sports ministry aimed primarily at golfers. The good news is that sometimes in that aim, we miss! That is, there are plenty of non-golfers who have found benefit in the Daily Devotional, Bible studies, and magazines we have published through the years.

There is a reason for this, of course, and that is because truth transcends our human experiences. For instance, while we often hate to admit it, in many ways we cannot improve on how the previous generation lived. Technologically, we may have made some nifty advancements, but in terms of human interaction—and, we believe, humans interacting with God—we don't make any real progress through time.

Therefore, whether or not you are a golfer, we think that the chief principles we teach and learn can apply to you. A Links Player tries, by the power of God's Holy Spirit in them, to live according to the following principles:

LOVE GOD AND OTHERS. When asked the greatest commandment of Scripture, Jesus replied, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" He went on to say, "*This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*" (Matthew 22:37-39)

INTEGRATE CHRIST'S REIGN AND INTEGRITY INTO ALL OF LIFE. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the crowds, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (the necessities of life) will be provided for you.*" (Matthew 6:33)

NETWORK FRIENDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST. When the followers of Jesus met together after His ascension into heaven, it was said of them: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.* (Acts 2:42)

KINDLE COMPASSION FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY. Jesus told a parable of the eventual judgment of each man and woman by God. In it, He provided insight into the standards of this judgment: "*The King will answer them, 'I assure you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'*" (Matthew 25:40)

SHARE CHRIST. One of the chief of Christ's apostles, Paul, wrote to the church at Corinth this reminder: *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; certain that God is appealing through us, we plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God."* (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Today, you may find that you have reason to be reconciled to God and to become a Links Player yourself. If so, you need to tell God in prayer: *Heavenly Father, Through Your Son Jesus Christ, I am prepared to offer my life to You. Please take it and all of my sin, and begin to renew me as Your ambassador. Amen.* If you have prayed that prayer, you will also want to share your decision with a trusted friend who knows Christ. This way they can encourage and lead you in your new walk of faith. It will be a challenge worth every step!

