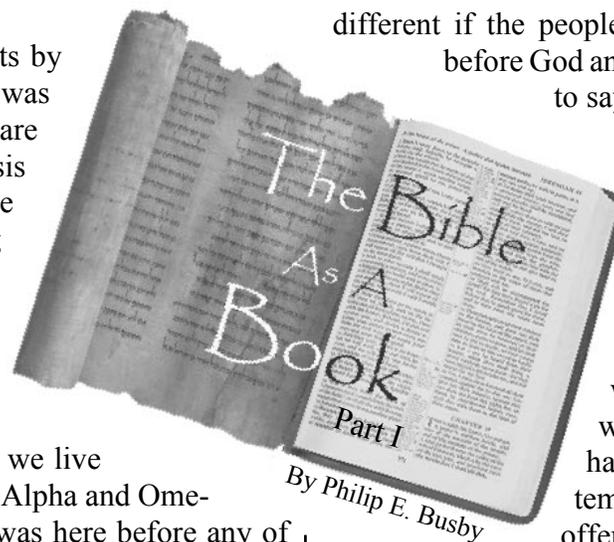


The gospel of John starts by telling us, "In the beginning was the Word,..." These words are not so different from Genesis chapter 1 verse 1. There we are told, "In the beginning God created..."; what this tells us is that unlike the creation we are part of, God has no beginning. Beginnings and endings have to do with the creation we live in. When God says He is the Alpha and Omega, He is telling us that He was here before any of what we know existed, and He is responsible for all its existence. He will also be here to finish what He started! God is not like man in that he creates something which he hopes will stand for many years but someday through ill health, age and even death will be forced to turn over control to someone or something else.

In the gospel of John, this fact is re-emphasized by the words which start chapter 1. Just as Genesis tells us, God was in the beginning, John tells us the Word was in the beginning. The wording of John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1 being almost identical was done intentionally to make it clear that John's Gospel is not teaching something new, it is simply reiterating a fact. The Word according to John is The Messiah who is Jesus Christ. He is not something new or separate from God Himself. The Word is God Himself, taking on a fleshly form and dwelling among us!

If we look into the Torah, which means "Law" and refers to the first five books of the Bible, we find that God literally gave the children of Israel written words. These words were and are instructions on how to live our lives. Moses goes over the story before his death. Deuteronomy records the conversation Moses had with the children of Israel. He reminds them that when they first came to the mountain, God spoke to them in an audible voice. It was at that point that God laid out the Ten Commandments. Moses talks about the fact that after God gave these ten laws, the people asked Moses to talk to God for them instead of God talking directly to them. I have often wondered what might have been



different if the people had been willing to stand before God and listen to everything He had to say, for themselves. If that had happened, would there have been a thick veil hiding the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies? Would there have been a priest standing between the people and the way into the Holy Place, or would the priesthood simply have been caretakers of the temple and administrators of the offerings? How close would the children of Israel been allowed to come to the presence of God on a regular basis?

I believe these are questions we cannot know the answer to in the here and now. The fact is, God knew they would not stand there and listen with their ears, and His plan for them was based on that knowledge long before Abraham and Sarah gave birth to Isaac. In fact, God told Moses that the children of Israel had spoken rightly. It is very difficult to stand in the direct presence of God. A purity is necessary (which most of us just do not have even in the slightest) or God's Holiness will destroy us. However, a healthy fear of God's Holiness will drive us from sin, and that is a good thing as well. (Deut. 5:23-29) God is perfect and we are told we need to strive to be like Him. (Matt. 5:48) Adam and Eve were not created in perfection, they were created in innocence. Once they took of the fruit of The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they needed perfection immediately, which they could not even obtain in a day. (Gen. 2:17) Thus, when God came down to walk with them, they hid, because they knew they had not appropriately handled the first thing which they realized was now their responsibility. (Gen. 3:6-11) However, the point is, in spite of all these facts, God did give the children of Israel a chance to stand before Him and hear Him with their own ears. While I would never judge Israel for being fearful, I think we fail to stop and grasp the fact it is not just post Jesus' first coming to this earth that God has desired a very direct relationship with His people!

The fact Moses wishes to remind Israel of is that God not only spoke these Words to them, but He

hewed the Words into stone tablets. (Deut. 4:12-13) This is where we get the expression, "Written in stone." The time had come for God to put His Law on this earth in a very physical way so that the knowledge of God and His desires for our existence would not be blotted out by the efforts of spiritual wickedness in high places. (Prov. 2:1-5, Hosea 6:6, Eph. 6:12) Moses would go on to receive many more instructions directly from God, for the children of Israel. While those instructions would not be carved in stone, they would need to be written down for the purpose of remembering and sharing them. (Ex. 24:7, Deut. 8, 17:14-20) However, instructions are not meant to be simply read, they are to be followed. The instructions God spoke directly to the people were instructions for how they should form their personal everyday lives. Moses reminds the people that the Ten Commandments were what God spoke to them and nothing more. (Deut. 5:22) That set the Ten Commandments apart from the rest of the Words in a way which should emphasize their importance in spite of every other circumstance which may come upon their lives. As Moses went up the mount to talk to God by himself, there would be a fair number of laws given which would also be about their personal lives, but a large part of the instructions, if followed, would create a living, breathing, righteous culture.

Because of these instructions, the tabernacle would be built; and many generations later, a more permanent structure called the temple would be built after the same pattern. These were not just monuments or grand structures. These structures had a functioning national purpose. There would be a group of priest who would administer daily rituals and routines of sacrifice, incense burning, the laying out of shew bread, etc. The children of Israel would all play a part by bringing sacrifices and offerings to the tabernacle. This would be done for more than just the fact people had sinned. Sacrifices could be done because they were to bring the first of everything to God. There was reason to sacrifice when a child was born, and when a process of cleansing had taken place. It could even be done just to say thank you and to praise the Lord, but it would be done in that place where God chose to put His Name!

The instructions given to Moses would also

include special days of remembrance. These are called feasts! These days would remember something God had done and prophesy of something God would do. Some of these days were Holy Convocations in which no work could be done. This would stop commerce and physical production for the day. Meaning, a government, business, home and person would need to be prepared for these days and literally work around them. The law also told of specific years when farm ground was to lay fallow, and how many years you had to wait before eating the fruit of a newly planted orchard or vineyard. All these things would affect how you went about your everyday life, not just at home, but in your business. This was true even if that business was with people outside the circle of those who also followed the law. It created for the children of Israel a culture and a way of life which many Jews do their best to hold right up to this very day!

My point is simple! There were words written down, but there was a point to those words which brought about something in physical motion. They were to bring about a demonstration - if you will - of a righteous culture which could stand before God and which God could commune with. These Words are not dead words or dusty words, they are Living Words; and this is why John refers to the Messiah as "The Word." The entire plan was not completed with the building of the tabernacle or even the temple in Jerusalem. The plan continued forward. It would eventually bring God Himself down to this earth to provide Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin! (Gen. 22:7-8) That is who Jesus was and that is exactly what He did, but the story still doesn't end there. We are told - not just in the New Testament but also in the "Old" - that the Messiah has not finished His work in our creation. The Word will return to this earth and establish a kingdom to end all kingdoms! (Zech, 14, Rev. 11:15) This is exactly what the children of Israel hoped He was here to do the first time, but the time was not yet. (Acts 1:6-8) So, we wait to see that time fulfilled, and in the meantime, we continue to allow The Word to live and breathe, not just in our hearts, but through the everyday actions of our lives!

Especially, if we are not descendents from Abraham through Isaac through Jacob, the Bible as a

book, is the most tangible thing we have available to us when it comes to our walk with the Lord. Unfortunately, many people see the church and its ceremony as the most tangible thing, but that is simply not the case. The truth is, many ceremonies of the church were created for the purpose of attempting to deprive people of that true tangible element of our faith. Because Satan and evil men have wanted to keep people from knowing and having the Word for themselves, there has always been efforts to destroy the physical written Word or, at the very least, hide It.

The devil has always desired to destroy the children of Israel, and that will not change as long as this world stands. Zechariah even tells us the attempt of the world to come directly up against Jerusalem is what keys the return of The Messiah. (Zech. 14) The devil wanted to destroy The Messiah Himself as He walked this earth. This is why Satan came to Jesus and tempted Him after Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights. (Matt. 4:1-11) Satan hoped The Messiah would cease to be the perfect example He was sent to be! Anything of God which resides on this earth, the devil will attempt to destroy and blot out. However, he is not alone! He has plenty of men walking this earth who would also like to see this very same goal achieved, and The Word is always going to be a priority target. (Rom. 1:28)

The fact God's Word is always going to be under attack in this world is why the Word Itself confirms to us that it will last, not just to the end of this world but forever! (Isa. 40:8, I Pet. 1:23) This physical world will end, but the righteousness the Word is attempting to create in man will not. It will live on in the next "physical" dwelling which Jesus went to prepare for all those who desire to live in the ways of righteousness. (John 14:1-3) In spite of all this being true, there are even many leaders in the "church" which have and do believe that the ritual and "authority" of the church is actually better than having the Word for yourself. In the past, the self proclaimed "Universal Church" tried to hide the physical Word from everyone, by literally putting it under lock and key. Men of God who understood the importance of having The Written Word in our personal lives worked under threat to their very lives

to free It from these religious leaders, and many of these men did in fact give their lives in the trying!

What is sad is that today many people of the world enjoy the freedom of not having someone telling them they can't have a copy of the Word, but they still don't know the Word. It is a great tragedy that many people have a copy of the Word available to them or multiple copies - they may even have convenient carry-with-you compact sizes or easy-to-read large print - yet they still allow the Word to set and gather dust! Many will allow other men to convince them that they cannot understand the Word for themselves, or that as times have "changed," so has the plan of God; therefore, people should just listen to "religious leaders" instead of bothering to study the Word for themselves. John explains to us that The Messiah and The Word are really the same. To have a relationship with The Messiah is to have a relationship with The Word, and to have a relationship with The Word is to have a relationship with The Messiah! This is a very simple point which is not reminded, taught or even understood as much as it should be. If we claim to be followers of God, if we want to be true believers, it's important that we study the Word!

Now, some may wonder if I am saying that the book we refer to as the Bible, which one can physically hold in your hand, is God Himself? The answer to that is no. The tables of stone which Moses brought down from the mount had been written on by the hand of God Himself, yet even they were only stone. That is why Moses could carry them with him. It is also why when Moses came down from the mount and found that the children of Israel had made for themselves a god of gold, in his anger, Moses was able to throw the tables of stone. When he did, the stone tables broke into pieces. This story shows us the point in a very illustrated way. The children of Israel had decided to make a golden calf so they would have something physical to worship. They could touch it, kiss it, dance around it, and carry it around with them; but the second commandment God had already spoken to them directly was that they not make to themselves graven images. (Ex. 20:4-6) The reminder of those words God spoke were on those tables of stone which Moses broke. Why was Moses so mad at the people? Because it

did not take the words being written down for them to be in effect or real. The truth that man should not make to himself graven images and worship them, was a truth which far preceded even the time in which the words were spoken directly to the children of Israel. It did not start the moment God spoke to the people, nor did it end with the breaking of the tables of stone. Truth is eternal. So, Moses ground the golden calf into fine powder and put it into the water which the people had to drink. However, Moses had to put tool to stone and carve out two new tables of stone, haul them back up into the mountain, have God write upon them one more time, and haul them back down to be put in the Ark of the Covenant. "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Romans 12:9

Whether covered with leather, cloth or paper, no matter if it is soft bound or hard bound, fancy, plain or any of a thousand or more various ways it can be produced, the Bible which you can hold in your hand is nothing more than the physical materials it's constructed from. The Word is truly God but the Bible is a notebook - of sorts - which contains the instructions and reminders of things which have always been, and which we need to understand if we are to have a true relationship with and be an emulator of our Creator! Thus, along with studying the Word Itself, we should understand why and how we have come to hold the physical "notes" we hold in our hands!

One of the truths we are reminded of in the Bible is that we should not just be hearers of the Word but doers of It as well. (James 1:22) Hearing the Word builds faith, which is a relationship with God, but faith without works is dead. (James 2:20) Just as the children of Israel were expected to enact the commandments given to them, we too must enact in our lives the principles of righteousness contained in the Word. Just as the law became a culture to Israel, so too should the Word and the righteousness it prescribes become a culture to our personal lives, even if that is a culture of only one! One should see how important our Bible is to us; and if Moses, in a righteous anger, was able to break stone tablets which God Himself had physically written on, we must realize that man can damage the physical copy we hold. It was very important that Moses carve out

new tables of stone even though he had to do it for himself and go back up that mountain to receive a written copy once again. The problem with physically tangible items are that anyone can get their hands on them, and evil men who wish to keep us from knowing the truth will do all they can to distort something of God as physically tangible as the Bible!

It bothers a great number of people that they do not understand what they read in the Bible, but that should only drive us to read it and seek to understand more. It bothers me that so many will run from church to church looking for the very thing they often or should be holding right in their hand. People search high and low, near and far, for a spoon-fed understanding, only to come up empty or be led astray. Are there teachers out there who can help you understand the Bible? Yes, but how will you know if they are telling you the truth if you have no acquaintance with the Word on your own? The truth of the matter is that you can be helped to understand the Bible, but in the end, there are no shortcuts. The only way to truly know the Bible is to open it up and read it for yourself.

What this simply means is that all true believers should be seekers of the Word, in much the same way those men who have given their lives to see It, have been. Because the Word is the very most important thing you will ever know, it is foolish to run out looking for the Bible which you find to be the most easy to understand. To truly get the meat of the Word into your life you must be reading the truth, and not some watered-down version of the Bible, written because it's easier to read and "understand." Watered-down versions do not help us understand the Word, all these versions do is put bad thoughts into our minds which confuse us, and in the end, make it harder for us to truly understand the truth! It's far better to read - even for many years - feeling you do not understand much of what you're reading, than it is to read some watered-down or flat out wrong version, believing you understand. To understand you don't understand is to keep seeking. To believe you understand when you have actually been led astray, is to end up never searching deeper. So, how do we know what we are reading is, at the very least, competent or a true attempt to bring to us the truth? The answer is that we should have a grasp on

how the Bible came to be the Book most of us know it as today!

That is what this series of teaching is going to be about, and just like some of the series I have done in the past, I cannot tell you how long this one will be. I'm writing this series because I received a Q&A submission through our website asking me about the Books of the Bible, who wrote them, how they got their names, and how they got into the configuration they are today. It has been my intention to write on this very subject for sometime, but I just never have gotten it started. With the submission of this question, I feel the Lord is saying now is the time! So, in this series, I will attempt to lay out many facts about the Bible which are not necessarily in the Bible, but are important to our confidence that we are receiving the truth. We will start out by looking at things such as why God gave us a physically readable Word, and why He entrusted it to a specific people! We will go on to look at how the Bible was written, when, and by who. How it is divided and why it is broke into books and groups, what it means to have an Old Testament and a New Testament, and even subjects like why are Paul's epistles named for the places he wrote to and Peter's simply bear his name. We will look at the Bible as a whole, and we will look at each specific book. We will talk about languages the Bible was originally written in and discuss the task of translation into other languages.

We will also take the time to talk a little about the history the Bible has seen in relationship to translations, ways the Jews handle the Bible to respect and emphasize its importance, how the church has treated the Bible over the centuries, and more. Finally, we will talk about ways to improve your Bible study with simple guidelines and perspectives. It's my hope that when we are through, you will have gained a great deal about how much the Bible should mean to you, confidence in knowing the Bible you are reading is truth, and enjoyed the information in a way which makes the Word more tangible than ever!

I have heard many people make the statement that they would believe in God if they could find Noah's ark or actually see God in the flesh. Well, Noah's ark is likely turned to dust; and when God

presented Himself in the flesh, man hung Him on a cross as if He was a criminal. We can say a lot of things and make a lot of excuses, but God's way of doing things is the truth and every man is a liar! (Rom. 3:4) The truth is, God has given man something tangible to hold on to. The only question is, do we care enough to explore it and know it? The Bible tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) God being the gracious God He is, has made faith His free gift! (Eph. 2:6-9) However, a relationship is two sided. God can offer it even free of attachments, but it does no good if we are unwilling to pursue a relationship with Him. We must desire to know Him and grow our faith. How do we do that? The Bible tells us only one formula: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

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