

FAITH REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY SCHOOL

CURRICULUM PROJECT ©

**** Grades 9-12, Year I ****

Robert C. Walton, Editor

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DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

by Robert C. Walton

**Grades 9-12
Year 1
Quarter 1**

THE NAMES OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To give students insight into the richness of the Word of God by examining the words that the Bible uses to describe itself.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:1 - “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.”

Lesson Background

Four quarters in this course of study (the first quarter in each of the four years) are given over to the study of doctrine. Doctrine simply means “teaching,” and in these studies we will be looking at the teaching of the Bible on its most central topics. The first of these quarters must, of necessity, deal with the Bible itself, since the reliability and authority of the Scriptures provide the groundwork for whatever those Scriptures teach about God or anything else. It is also essential that the student understand something of how the Scriptures are to be used and interpreted, for such interpretation is a necessary tool in later work.

The first lesson deals with the various words the Bible uses to describe itself. The study of these words should give some insight into the richness of the Word of God and its functions. Much of the lesson will be occupied with a search of Psalm 119, which uses many synonyms to describe the Scriptures (in fact, only four verses in the entire Psalm do not contain such a synonym). It is important that tools be provided

to help the students in their work. These tools should include dictionaries, Bible dictionaries, and concordances (ones such as Young's with brief definitions).

For your own information, you should know that Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem. It is divided into twenty-two sections of eight verses each, and each section is headed with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the original Hebrew, each verse in a given section begins with the indicated Hebrew letter (for instance, verses one through eight all begin with the letter *aleph*).

Lesson Procedure

1. Begin by pointing out that we use several words to refer to the Bible. Probably the most common are "Bible," "Scripture," and "Word of God."

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word *biblion*, which means "book." Though it is a term we use frequently, the Bible never uses it to describe itself.

The word "Scripture" is derived from a Latin root, and means "writing." This is a word the Bible uses to describe itself (e.g., II Timothy 3:16), though the same Greek original is used to refer to other kinds of writings as well.

The phrase "the Word of God" is one the Bible often uses to describe itself, but we should note that it also refers to other things besides Scripture. Ask your students to come up with some examples. Some of the examples they may come up with include God's spoken Word, the Word delivered by the prophets, and Jesus Christ Himself, the Living Word.

2. The main portion of today's lesson involves a search of Psalm 119 by the members of the class. The class should be divided up into groups, with each group assigned a portion of the Psalm. Each group will be responsible for writing down all synonyms and illustrations used in their section in reference to the Scriptures, writing down the word, the verse where it is used, and a definition derived from both a common dictionary and a Bible dictionary or concordance. Results will obviously vary slightly according to the versions your students are using. I have given below a fairly comprehensive listing based on the New International Version.

SYNONYMS:

LAW: 1, 7, 13, 18, 20, 29, 30, 34, 39, 43, 44, 51, 52, 53, 55, 61, 62, 70, 72, 75, 77, 85, 91, 92, 97, 102, 106, 108, 109, 113, 120, 126, 136, 137, 142, 149, 150, 153, 156, 160, 163, 164, 165, 174, 175.

STATUTES: 2, 14, 22, 24, 31, 36, 46, 59, 79, 88, 95, 99, 111, 119, 125, 129, 138, 144, 146, 152, 157, 167, 168.

WAYS: 3, 15.

PRECEPTS: 4, 15, 27, 40, 45, 56, 63, 69, 78, 87, 93, 94, 100, 104, 110, 128, 134, 141, 159, 168, 173.

DECREES:	5, 8, 12, 16, 23, 26, 33, 48, 54, 64, 68, 71, 80, 83, 112, 117, 118, 124, 135, 145, 155, 171.
COMMANDS:	6, 10, 19, 21, 32, 35, 47, 48, 60, 66, 73, 86, 96, 98, 115, 127, 131, 143, 151, 166, 172, 176.
WORD:	9, 11, 16, 17, 25, 28, 37, 42, 43, 49, 57, 65, 67, 74, 81, 89, 101, 105, 107, 114, 130, 133, 139, 147, 158, 160, 161, 169, 172.
PROMISE:	38, 41, 50, 58, 76, 82, 103, 116, 123, 140, 148, 154, 162, 170.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

COUNSELORS:	24.
HONEY:	103.
LAMP:	105.
LIGHT:	105, 130.
GOLD:	127.
SPOIL:	162.

Conclusion

When the students have finished their work, discuss together the words and definitions they have found. Be sure to apply these meanings specifically to the lives of the students. The following are among the aspects of the Word of God that you should be sure to bring out:

- **Authority** - “Law,” “Commands,” etc., indicate that we are not dealing with one of many possible options, but with that which demands obedient submission.
- **Standard** - “Decrees,” “Precepts,” etc., indicate that right and wrong, truth and falsehood, are measured against God’s Word, not the other way around.
- **Guidance** - “Way” shows that we have here guidance to be followed, not simply abstract information to which we must give assent.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

**THE NAMES OF
SCRIPTURE**

- 1. Find as many places in other parts of the Bible as you can where synonyms or illustrations for the Bible are given. Look up their definitions, and complete the chart below. (HINT: start with Psalm 19.)

WORD	VERSE WHERE FOUND	SYNONYM OR ILLUSTRATION?	DEFINITION

- 2. In what ways is the written Word of God different from the other forms of God’s Word?

- 3. In what ways are Jesus (the Living Word) and the Bible alike?

THE CONTENT OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To familiarize students with the general structure of Scripture, with emphasis on the relationship of the Old and New Covenants, the role of Christ in Scripture, and the divine oversight of the contents and limitation of the canon.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:2 - "Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge."

Lesson Background

The basic divisions of Scripture, though they should be reviewed briefly, are familiar to most of our students. The emphasis of the lesson falls in three areas - the relationship of the Old and New Testaments, the centrality of Christ, and the coming together of the canon of Scripture, especially the New Testament.

Some background for the teacher on the canon question might be helpful here. The books included in the Old Testament were never really a matter for debate, either among the Jews or among Christians. The books of the Apocrypha, officially included in the canon by Roman Catholics at the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century, were never recognized as canonical by the Jews.

The New Testament books, however, came to us only after centuries of debate. The authority and canonicity of the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen Pauline epistles, I Peter, I John, Jude, and Revelation were never seriously questioned in orthodox circles, though the last two were the subjects of minor disputes.

Hebrews, James, and II Peter were debated because of questionable authorship, while II and III John were rarely mentioned.

The successors of the apostles did not consider the content of the New Testament to be an issue. In the middle of the second century, however, a Gnostic heretic named Marcion began teaching that only a truncated Gospel of Luke and the letters of Paul were binding on Christians. The church was forced to respond by defining the content of the New Testament and centuries of debate ensued. In addition to what is mentioned above, several books ultimately declared non-canonical were considered, the most prominent of which were *The Shepherd*, by Hermas, and *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (also known as the *Didache*). It must be emphasized that, though political maneuvers and faulty human reasoning were abundant (Hebrews was finally included on the basis of being Pauline), the same sovereign God who superintended the writing of the text also superintended its compilation. When the church accepted the canon of the New Testament as we now have it (367 in Athanasius' Paschal Letter in the East, 382 at the Synod of Rome in the West), they gave us what God wanted us to have.

Lesson Procedure

1. The Structure of the Scriptures

Go over the basic divisions of the Old and New Testaments, reviewing the general content of each, as follows:

Old Testament

Law (Pentateuch)	Genesis - Deuteronomy
History	Joshua - Esther
Poetry	Job - Song of Solomon
Major Prophets	Isaiah - Daniel
Minor Prophets	Hosea - Malachi

New Testament

Gospels	Matthew - John
History	Acts
Pauline Epistles	I Corinthians - Philemon
General Epistles	Hebrews - Jude
Prophecy	Revelation

It is also interesting to note the Jewish divisions of the Old Testament:

Law (Torah)	Genesis - Deuteronomy
Former Prophets	Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings
Latter Prophets	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea - Malachi
Writings	Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, I and II Chronicles

The division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments is intended to convey a distinction. Have your students discuss the nature of that distinction. They should come up with some of the following ideas:

- The Old Covenant (“testament” means “covenant”) was preparatory and temporary, while the New Covenant is permanent.
- The Old Covenant conveyed in symbol what the New Covenant accomplished in reality.
- The Old Covenant looked forward to the first coming of Christ, while the New Covenant looks back to His first coming and forward to His second coming.

But above all, the distinction should be seen to center in Christ Himself, the focal point of history. Even as we measure time by B.C. and A.D., so that which comes after Christ must be forever different from that which went before.

2. The Christocentricity of the Scriptures

In the same way that Christ is the dividing line, distinguishing the Old Testament from the New, so He must be seen as that which unifies the whole. Passages such as Luke 24:27 and Acts 8:35 make it clear that the Bible as a whole has Christ as its theme and focus. Ask your students now to think of ways in which the Old Testament points to Christ. Type and prophecy are obvious answers, but draw specifics out of them, helping them to see the pervasiveness of this emphasis.

3. The Canon of the Scriptures

Ask your students this question: How do we know that the books we have in our Bible are the right ones? As they answer, play devil’s advocate, using enough information from the Lesson Background to shoot down facile answers and generate some doubt. Don’t even accept the “right” answer at this point - keep pressing.

Next, suggest some possible “criteria” for deciding which books belong and which don’t (these were actual criteria used by the early church). If the students can’t see through these criteria, give them a little help:

- Apostolicity - a book belongs in the New Testament if it was written by an apostle (but Mark and Luke weren’t apostles, and the apostolic letters of Paul to Corinth [I Corinthians 5:9] and Laodicea [Colossians 4:16] were not included).
- Antiquity - the oldest Christian books are the ones that belong in the canon (but the epistle of I Clement is at least as old as Revelation, and, again, the lost Pauline epistles weren’t included).
- Public lection - books read in worship by the early church should be included (but *The Shepherd* and the *Didache* were read in worship, and there is no evidence that II and III John were).
- Inspiration - those works inspired by God were included (true, but were the lost Pauline epistles any less authoritative than the ones we have?).

Conclusion

Finally, we are reduced to faith. The Bible was not compiled on the basis of rational criteria and cannot be argued for in this way. The God who superintended its writing also superintended its compilation. God is the author of the Bible as a whole, not just of its 66 individual parts. Our confidence in the Scriptures does not stem from human reason, but from divine sovereignty.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

**THE CONTENT OF
SCRIPTURE**

Read through the book of Hebrews this week. Keep a record of the verses you find that show that the Old Testament pointed to Christ and was fulfilled or supplanted by Him.

VERSES	WAYS THE OLD TESTAMENT POINTED TO CHRIST	WAYS CHRIST SUPERSEDED THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To enable the students to understand what the concept of inspiration does and does not mean, and to motivate the students to respond to the Bible in a way unlike their responses to any other book.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:3 - "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."

Lesson Background

The concept of the inspiration of Scripture is both vitally important and widely misunderstood. It goes to the very heart of the relationship between God and the Scriptures and how that relationship is to be understood.

This lesson will attempt to deal with the subject of the inspiration of Scripture both positively and negatively. From a positive standpoint, we will begin by examining the word (Greek *theopneustos*) and its roots, as well as the concept as expounded in Scripture. From a negative standpoint, we will go on to sharpen our understanding of inspiration by critically examining numerous ways in which the term has been misused or misunderstood, both by evangelicals and liberals. Finally, we will end on a positive note with a definition of inspiration and a personal application to the students drawn from II Timothy 3:16.

Lesson Procedure

1. Biblical Definition of Inspiration

When we say that the Bible is divinely inspired, or inspired by God, what do we mean? When Paul, in II Timothy 3:16, tells us that all Scripture is “God-breathed” (KJV - “Given by inspiration of God” - the source of the term “inspiration”), he is using a single Greek word, *theopneustos*, which the NIV translates literally. It comes from two Greek roots, *theos* (God) and *pneuma* (breath, wind, spirit - cf. “pneumonia”). The Bible thus speaks of itself as having been breathed out by God. Since the word “breath” also can be translated “spirit,” it should come as no surprise that the Holy Spirit served as the instrument through whom the work of inspiration was carried out (II Peter 1:21).

2. False Views of Inspiration

Words that are often abused soon lose their meaning, and thereafter require qualification. Jesus’ followers were first called “Christians” in the city of Antioch a few years after His death. The meaning of the term was then crystal clear. In the ensuing centuries, one who used it in reference to himself often brought about a close encounter with a hungry lion. But then Christianity became popular and everyone started calling themselves “Christians.” “Real” Christians eventually began distinguishing themselves from “cultural” Christians with qualifiers such as “evangelical,” “fundamental,” “Bible-believing,” and “born again.” Yet even these qualifiers have, to some extent, been abused.

The same is true of the term “inspiration.” Many people claim to believe that the Bible is inspired, yet mean by that something we could by no means affirm. Note the following examples:

- Some mean that the Bible is “inspired” in the same sense as any great works of literature, such as the plays of Shakespeare, are inspired. But we should note that Paul, in I Corinthians 2:13, far from comparing the Bible to works of human wisdom, contrasts the two.
- Some affirm that the Bible is the product of the work of the Holy Spirit, but assert that the Holy Spirit has continued to work in the same way in believers throughout the centuries. Versions of this teaching vary from the Catholic insistence that church tradition has the same authority as Scripture to the Pentecostal dependence on the “revelations” of glossolalia to the extra-biblical writings of the cults.
- Some affirm that, while the basic concepts of the Bible are divinely inspired, the words, since they were chosen by human authors, cannot be. While this may sound good in theory, in practice it leaves room both for the rejection of any portions of Scripture deemed unpalatable and for the free-wheeling interpretation of that which is accepted (“this was what the author was really trying to communicate. . .”).
- Others maintain that the Bible is inspired in the sense that God speaks through it as people read it (this position is known as Neo-Orthodoxy, associated with the work of theologian Karl Barth). Of course, this implies both that the parts of Scripture that don’t “speak to me” are not inspired for me (different parts of Scripture can be inspired for different people, or even for the same person at different times), and that the words of the Bible have no objective authority.

- It is important to note that genuine Christians also sometimes misunderstand inspiration. Some Christians think of inspiration as a sort of dictation process, where the human authors of Scripture simply wrote down word-for-word what God told them. This approach to inspiration certainly upholds the authority and divine origin of Scripture, and there is no question that some things in the Bible were dictated (ask your students to think of examples - the Ten Commandments is an obvious one). But the dictation approach simply does not explain the very personal vocabularies and styles used by the authors of Scripture (Mark was thinking in Hebrew and writing in Greek; the author of Hebrews uses the long, complex sentence structure of a legal scholar; Paul uses forms of argument popular in the rabbinical schools of the first century, etc.).

3. Positive Definition of Inspiration

Because of these various misuses and misunderstandings of the term “inspiration,” we, too, must use qualifiers here. We affirm belief in the *plenary verbal* inspiration of Scripture - “plenary” because we believe the whole Bible is inspired, not just parts of it (“plenary” means “full”), and “verbal” because we believe the very words of Scripture are inspired, not just the ideas behind the words.

A good definition of inspiration is that given by Dr. Allan Macrae, founding president of Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, PA:

“Inspiration is a special act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the books of the Scriptures, so that their words should convey the thought He wished conveyed, . . . and should be kept free from errors of fact, of doctrine, or of judgment.”

Conclusion

II Timothy 3:16 indicates that the inspiration of Scripture is not a mere theoretical concept, but that it has significant practical application. Have your students discuss why the Bible would not be useful for “teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” if it were not inspired by God in the way just defined.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

**THE INSPIRATION
OF SCRIPTURE**

“Inspiration is a special act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the books of the Scriptures, so that their words should convey the thought He wished conveyed, . . . and should be kept free from errors of fact, of doctrine, or of judgment.”

By analyzing this definition phrase by phrase, you can think further through the whole idea that the Bible is inspired by God. To help you do so, the following table is provided:

PHRASE FROM DEFINITION	WHAT INSPIRATION IS	WHAT INSPIRATION IS NOT

THE PROCESS OF INSPIRATION

Lesson Aim

To give students a better understanding of the mechanisms of inspiration and to distinguish between inspiration and related theological terms.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:4a - "Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

Lesson Background

Last week the students saw that the Bible is inspired by God - that God exercised oversight in the writing of Scripture in such a way that the resulting document contained precisely what God wanted it to contain.

But how did God accomplish this? Today's lesson should have two basic thrusts. One of these is the balance between mechanism and mystery. The Bible gives us insight into some of the processes used by God to communicate His Word, but the ultimate means by which God guaranteed perfectly accurate wording while not in any way superseding the personality of the human author must remain a mystery, and thus a matter of faith.

The other basic thrust of the lesson is the uniqueness of the inspiration process. It is important to safeguard this because it is foundational to the uniqueness of the Word of God itself. Thus we must carefully distinguish between inspiration and other ways God communicates with man.

Lesson Procedure

1. How the Scriptures Were Inspired

Start by asking your class to list all of the different ways that the authors of the Bible got their information, including examples of each. The resulting list should look something like this:

- Verbal communication from God (the Ten Commandments)
- Written sources (the royal chronicles used to compile the historical books)
- Personal experience (the “we” portions of Acts)
- Conversation with eyewitnesses (Gospel of Luke)
- Dreams and visions (Ezekiel’s “Valley of Dry Bones”)
- Angelic visitation (Daniel, Zechariah)
- Subjective experience (Psalms)

Several things should be noted about this list. First of all, we should note that the list divides readily into two groups - supernatural means (A, E, F) and natural means (B, C, D, G). This indicates that inspiration did not always occur under obviously supernatural circumstances, but that God used natural processes to communicate information to the writers as well. It also implies that something must have been going on to distinguish the recording of human experience found in Scripture from all other recording of human experience (but more on that later).

We should also note that the list above is by no means comprehensive. Where could we pigeonhole the instructions given to the churches in the epistles, or the ancient account recorded in the anonymous poetry of the book of Job? It is important to realize that, while God has given us some insight into how He gave us His Word, there is much that we do not know. While we have access to occasional insights, we should not anticipate comprehensive explanations of the process of inspiration.

2. Distinctions Involving Inspiration

Continued consideration of the list with which we began the lesson leads to important distinctions between inspiration and two other related theological concepts. The first of these is revelation. Revelation, of course, is related to the word “reveal.” Thus the theological concept of revelation refers to that which is supernaturally revealed - something that God makes known by other than natural means that would not have been known otherwise. Thus, the Book of Revelation consists of a series of visions, supernaturally revealed to John on the island of Patmos. Notice that this description fits the first category of events from our list. This indicates that inspiration is a much broader category than revelation - not everything contained in the Bible was supernaturally revealed, but it is all divinely inspired.

This leaves the second category from our list - those events or pieces of information recorded in Scripture the knowledge of which came to the authors by natural means. Though the information came to the authors by natural means, the result was nonetheless “God-breathed” - the Holy Spirit took part in the writing process so that God’s Word was produced.

We must also affirm the uniqueness of the work of inspiration in both of these categories. In the area of supernatural revelation, that which produced the Scriptures is unique because God has sent us His final Word - His Son, the most comprehensive revelation of God to man (Hebrews 1:1-3). God no longer need speak to man audibly, or by dreams, visions, or angelic messengers. The second category of events, those

naturally known but recorded under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, is also unique. The Holy Spirit continues to work in believers today, of course, but His work involves what is known as illumination (cf. I Corinthians 2:14-16), which refers to the supernatural impartation of understanding. Christians today do not continue to write Scripture, but the Holy Spirit works within believers to help them understand the Scriptures in a way that the unsaved person cannot. This illumination, which is a work of the Holy Spirit in all believers, is a much broader concept than inspiration, which is a specific work of the Spirit in the authors of Scripture only.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us praise God for what He has given us in His Word: He revealed to a few by supernatural means those things that were needful for us to know but that could not be known by natural means (REVELATION); He superintended the recording of these events and others known by natural means so that what was recorded is precisely what He wanted us to have (INSPIRATION); He lastly gave the Holy Spirit to His children to impart understanding of that which He had produced (ILLUMINATION). Praise Him!

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE PROCESS OF INSPIRATION

1. Define and distinguish among the three key concepts from today's lesson - inspiration, revelation, and illumination.
2. How much do we know about the way in which God inspired the Bible? What aspects of the process do we not understand?
3. Explain why the inspiration of Scripture is a unique process.
4. Suppose you were asked to prove that the Bible was inspired. How would you do it? Could you do it? (This question will be discussed next week, so be sure to come to class prepared.)

INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To familiarize the students with the internal evidence for the inspiration of Scripture and enable them to understand the uses and limitations of this evidence.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:4b,5 - “In the heavens He has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.”

Lesson Background

It is important that the teacher understand the character of the evidence being presented in this and the following lesson. The inspiration of Scripture is not an open question that may be conclusively decided by the compilation of scientific data or legal evidence. Only the work of the Spirit of God can “convince” anyone that the Bible is God’s Word. All the evidence in the world will not suffice to enlighten one who is in rebellion against God. It has often been said, and rightly so, that defending the Scriptures is something along the lines of sticking a sword into the ground and attempting to defend it with your bare hands (see my *Defending Your Sword*, Planters Press, 2015, which deals with the issues in this lesson, and in much of the unit, in great detail).

If this, then, is not an exercise in apologetics, what is it? While these evidences may not suffice to argue anyone into the Kingdom, they are useful in bolstering the faith of believers. That is the main purpose of these lessons. Your students should be made to see that the gullible fool is not the person who accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God, but the one who blindly refuses to do so.

Lesson Procedure

The students were asked in last week's take-home paper to think about how they would prove that the Bible is inspired. Begin the class by discussing their answers (you should have warned them last week that this was coming). It's devil's advocate time again. Show your students how unbelievers would deal with these arguments (see below) until they are convinced that the inspiration of Scripture cannot be "proved" conclusively. Then indicate to them the value of what we are about to study, as outlined in the Lesson Background.

1. Direct and Indirect Claims of Divine Authorship

These claims can be divided into three categories:

A. Old Testament Claims for Itself

Examples include:

- Exodus 31:18 - the Law given directly to Moses by God.
- Deuteronomy 4:2 - an inscriptional curse similar to that found in Revelation 22:18-19.
- Jeremiah 1:7-9; Ezekiel 3:4; Micah 3:8 - prophets received their messages directly from God.
- In addition, the phrase, "this is what the Lord says," or its equivalent, occurs approximately 4,000 times in the Old Testament.

B. New Testament Claims for the Inspiration of the Old Testament

- II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20-21 - these general statements, strictly speaking, are referring to the Old Testament, though application of them to the Bible as a whole is not unwarranted.
- Acts 1:16; 15:15-18 - the citation of Old Testament teaching was taken as conclusively authoritative by the apostles.
- Matthew 4:1-11; 5:17-48 - Jesus' use of the Old Testament indicates that He saw it as God's inspired Word.

C. New Testament Claims for Itself

- Matthew 5:17-48 - Jesus considered His own teaching to be of equal authority with the Old Testament (in fact, in this passage He presents Himself as the authoritative interpreter of the Old Testament), and of greater authority than that of the human teachers of His day.
- I Corinthians 2:13; 14:37; I Thessalonians 2:13; II Peter 3:1-2 - the apostles claimed that their own writings were authoritative.
- II Peter 3:15-16 - in the most remarkable New Testament reference of this kind, Peter refers to Paul's letters as "Scripture."

- Revelation 22:18-19 - the inscriptional curse, though this, strictly speaking, applies only to the book of Revelation.

Of course, this evidence is of value only to those who accept the inspiration of Scripture in the first place. Just because someone writes a book and says, “this book is inspired by God,” does not necessarily make it true. (In fact, I recently saw such a book, written by an alleged Christian who claimed to have received the revelations on which the book was based directly from God. Needless to say, I’m not prepared to incorporate it into the canon.)

2. Observable Evidences of Divine Authorship

These, too, are ultimately convincing only to those who are already convinced.

A. Internal Consistency

Ask your students to spend a few minutes writing a description of the room. Invariably, the results will contain minor inconsistencies. In contrast to these - a uniform group of people at the same time in the same place - note the remarkable consistency of Scripture: 66 books written by approximately 40 authors over a period of 1,500 years in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) on two continents, yet without a single contradiction of fact, interpretation, or teaching. Only the Spirit of God could have produced such harmony.

But we should note, at the same time, that the observation of this harmony is totally dependent upon the presuppositions of the observer. While the Christian, who presupposes the divine authorship, and thus the unity, of Scripture, “interprets Scripture by Scripture,” using the writings of one author to shed light on those of another, the unbeliever is bound by no such assumptions, and, while viewing the books independently, sees many contradictions for which the Christian’s explanation seems inadequate.

B. Fulfilled Prophecy

This is probably the most common piece of evidence given for the inspiration of Scripture, as well as the most difficult to refute. In addition to the more than two hundred specific prophecies fulfilled in the earthly ministry of Christ, we have such remarkable passages as the predictions of the work of Josiah and Cyrus by name hundreds of years before their births (I Kings 13:2; Isaiah 44:28) and the detailed prophecies of the events of the Intertestamental Period in Daniel 8 and Daniel 11.

It is here that those who deny the inspiration of Scripture show the lengths to which men will go in their willful refusal to acknowledge their God. Beginning with the assumption that predictive prophecy is by definition impossible, they then conclude that these highly specific prophecies are not prophecies at all, but disguised history. As a result, they deny the authorship of the prophetic books and date them after the events described (Isaiah 44:28 is one of the major motivating factors, though not one of the major supporting reasons given, for the “two Isaiahs” theory).

With regard to the prophecies surrounding the life of Christ, the explanations reach their ludicrous worst. Explanations have ranged from the idea that Christ was self-deluded and mistakenly tried to fulfill prophecies to bring in the Kingdom Age (Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*), to the idea that Jesus manipulated various prophetic “fulfillments” in order to gain power for Himself (Hugh Schonfield, *The Passover Plot*).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we may be certain that the Bible is the Word of God - but it should not surprise us if the evidence that seems to us to be so conclusive is not convincing at all to those who share neither our presuppositions nor the indwelling Spirit of God.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Sit down some time this week with two friends, one a non-Christian and the other a Christian (preferably at separate times), and discuss their understanding of the Bible as the Word of God. Take note of the questions they ask, the reasoning they use, and the responses they give to the areas of evidence you raise. What conclusions can you draw from your “interviews?”

	CHRISTIAN FRIEND	NON-CHRISTIAN FRIEND
BASIC POSITION		
RESPONSES TO MY ARGUMENTS		
QUESTIONS RAISED		
REASONS GIVEN TO SUPPORT THEIR POSITIONS		

EXTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To continue to bolster the confidence of the students in the Scriptures by going over examples of external evidence that verify their truth.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:6 - "It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat."

Lesson Background

As with last week's lesson, we are seeking to bolster the faith of the students in the reliability of the Scriptures through the examination of evidence, this time corroborative evidence from outside of the Bible.

While the material we examined last week is generally rejected out of hand by the unbeliever, the external evidence studied in this lesson is the kind that the non-Christian not only accepts, but demands. The Christian accepts the Scriptures at face value, and rejoices, though without the least bit of surprise, when the work of scientists, historians, and archaeologists confirms what the Bible says. The unbeliever, on the other hand, assumes that the biblical accounts are unreliable unless they are independently confirmed, and even then limits his acceptance to the details that have been corroborated by the work of secular scientists.

Thus, students again should be made aware that the evidence provided here should not be seen as ammunition to argue someone into the Kingdom. Only the Spirit of God can change a heart that is oriented in opposition to God.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking the students to share the results of the conversations they had during the week (see last week's take-home paper). Hopefully, these conversations will have clarified in a very practical way the differences that exist between believers and unbelievers in the assumptions they bring to any discussion of the Scriptures.

1. The Evidence of History and Archaeology

History, of course, deals with the study of the past. Archaeology is a branch of history dealing with the ancient past, though archaeologists have been involved in studying everything from the ruins of Ur to the garbage dump of Denver, Colorado. Simply put, history becomes archaeology if you have to dig for it.

This portion of the lesson may be handled in one of two ways. You may present to the class a series of examples of archaeological verification of Scriptural accounts, or you may bring resource books to class, give topics to the students, give them time to look up and summarize the evidence on their topic, and have them share what they have found with the rest of the class. In either case, you will need a list of topics, plus Bible dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias, and books on biblical archaeology for reference. Following are some examples of what you may hope to find:

A. The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

The existence of ziggurats in the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations has been confirmed by archaeology, and an ancient Sumerian fragment speaks of a confusion of tongues in connection with the destruction of one of them.

B. Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19)

Not only have archaeologists noted that civilization in the Dead Sea area seems to have experienced a sudden break around 2000 B.C., but the comparatively shallow southern end of the Dead Sea has been covered with water since about that time and may well be the former site of the Cities of the Plain.

C. Rachel Stealing Her Father's Gods (Genesis 31)

The Nuzi tablets indicate that possession of a family's teraphim gave legal right to inherit the family's property, thus explaining Laban's rage at the loss of these small idols.

D. The Date and Structure of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy has the same structure as the treaties of the Hittites, who were an important power in Palestine during the years of the sojourn in Egypt. Not only does this structure argue for the unity of the book, but also for its early date, since the treaty formula passed out of common use after the fall of the Hittites from power.

E. The Existence of the Hittites

Most scholars doubted that the Hittites even existed until the end of the nineteenth century. But in 1906, excavations at Boghaz-koi in Turkey uncovered the Hittite capital and confirmed the biblical accounts concerning them.

F. Hezekiah's Tunnel (II Kings 20:20)

In 1880 an inscription was found that not only confirmed the biblical account of the tunnel's construction, but also incidentally provided the knowledge that a cubit was about 18 inches!

G. Belshazzar and the Fall of Babylon (Daniel 5)

Archaeologists long believed that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon and disputed the biblical account accordingly. But in the middle of the nineteenth century, clay tablets were discovered that stated that Nabonidus had gone into seclusion in Arabia and turned the kingdom over to his son, Belshazzar, who ruled as regent for his father (and thus could offer Daniel nothing higher than a position as "third ruler of the kingdom").

H. Paul's Trial Before Gallio (Acts 18:12)

Archaeologists have not only discovered that Gallio was proconsul of Corinth at the time of Paul's stay there (52 A.D.), but also that this Gallio was the brother of the famous philosopher Seneca. As a politician who gained his post because of whom he knew rather than what he knew, his attitude toward the trial is rendered more readily understandable.

2. The Evidence of Science

While historical evidence is certainly open to various interpretations, most of the material given above has been acknowledged even by critics of the Bible as confirming the accuracy of biblical history in those particular cases. But science is quite another matter altogether. It is entirely possible for two scientists to take the same set of data (fossils, for instance), and for one to conclude that the earth has been populated by living creatures for millions of years and that these creatures have gradually developed increasing complexity, while the other concludes that animal life appeared all at once, no more than several thousand years ago, and was at one point wiped out by a universal flood. Why the discrepancy? And in the light of it, is scientific evidence of any real value? The following should be noted:

- Science is limited to that which is observable and regular, and thus predictable. It is not equipped to deal with the supernatural, or with the question of origins.
- While Christians affirm that scientific fact may never contradict the Word of God, since the Author of the Word and the Creator of the world are one and the same, we must understand that scientific theory often may contradict Scripture.
- Conflict occurs when scientists fail to distinguish between fact and theory (as often occurs with the theory of evolution), or when Christians fail to distinguish between what is clearly biblical truth and that which is the product of interpretation (as the Catholic Church did when it condemned Galileo and put the writings of Copernicus on the Index of Forbidden Books). We must also acknowledge that the distinction between clear teaching and interpretation is not always easy to make.

Conclusion

What must be concluded, then, about the evidential value of science?

- Science may often corroborate Scripture, and this may be very encouraging to the Christian, but don't be surprised if non-Christians interpret the evidence differently.
- Christians must develop humility with regard to their own interpretations of Scripture and caution in the application of science to biblical issues.
- The Bible is the final standard. Ultimately, science must conform to the Word. Science is by nature tentative, and those who build their theology around popular scientific theories soon find themselves floating in a shoreless ocean.

THE CONFIRMATION AND ILLUMINATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Lesson Aim

To help students recognize the role played by the Holy Spirit in both our conviction that the Bible is the Word of God and our ability to understand it.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:7 - “The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”

Lesson Background

We have spent several weeks now attempting to establish the value and limitations of biblical and scientific-historical evidence in confirming the truth of Scripture. We have seen repeatedly that what serves as convincing evidence to the believer does little to alleviate the skepticism of the unbeliever. The reason for that difference, to which we have alluded occasionally and which has been implicit in all we have said so far, is the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian.

The lesson this week will deal with two specific works of the Spirit in connection with the Word - the work of confirmation, in which the Holy Spirit gives the believer assurance that the Bible is God’s Word, and the work of illumination, in which the Spirit helps the Christian to understand the Scriptures. The point of application to be stressed is that these are gracious works - the Christian can see that to which the world is blind, not because of his own superior insight, but because of God’s grace at work in his life.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by asking the students why the different perceptions observed in the last few weeks with regard to Scripture exist. Hopefully, they should be able to arrive at the conclusion that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian is what makes the difference. That work of the Spirit is the subject of today's lesson.

The following illustration may prove a helpful jumping-off point: Suppose that H. G. Wells had really invented a time machine that permitted travel into the past and the future. You, living in Victorian England, are a friend of Wells, and, on one occasion, you actually accompany him on one of his time travels. Wells, meanwhile, becomes so immersed in his time travels that he spends little time in his own era, but stops in periodically to leave with you written accounts of his travels and to discuss with you what he has seen. You proceed to send his work to a London publisher. When a magazine begins to run his stories in serial form, everyone is excited at the new science fiction series, but no one believes that they are factual accounts. In fact, when you try to explain that they are true, even the publisher threatens to call the men in white coats.

1. The Confirming Work of the Holy Spirit (I John 4:1-6)

Look together at I John 4:1-6. The passage deals primarily with the role of the Holy Spirit in allowing the believer to discern error, but also has application to the discerning of truth. The Christian is not convinced of the truth of Scripture because of the evidence we've talked about for the past two weeks. The Holy Spirit gives to the Christian an unshakable confidence in the Word of God. This confidence may then be bolstered by the evidence previously noted.

It may be helpful here to draw a parallel between the role of the Spirit in confirming the truth of the Scriptures and the role of the Spirit in giving assurance of salvation (Romans 8:16). In the latter case also, the subjective confirmation by the Spirit is strengthened by the kind of "evidence" that is the major thrust of the book of I John.

We should also note here that the internal subjective confirmation by the Spirit of the truth of Scripture is both the strongest and the weakest evidence available to us. To the believer, it is the unalterable foundation upon which all other evidence is built. Yet this same evidence that is utterly convincing to the believer is meaningless to the unbeliever, who does not share the same experience.

2. The Illuminating Work of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:9-16; John 14:22-27; 16:12-15)

Divide the class up into three groups and assign one passage to each group. Have them discuss among themselves and answer the following questions about their passage.

What is the nature of the illumination given?

- John 14:26 - "all things...everything I have said to you"
- John 16:13 - "all truth...what is yet to come"
- John 16:14 - "what is mine"
- I Corinthians 2:9 - "what God has prepared for those who love Him"

- I Corinthians 2:12 - “what God has freely given us”
- I Corinthians 2:16 - “the mind of Christ”

In what ways does the passage contrast believers and unbelievers?

- I Corinthians 2 - ignorance vs. insight; human wisdom vs. spiritual truth
- John 14 - Jesus revealed to believers, not world; obedience to Word of God vs. disobedience; peace vs. turmoil
- John 16 - contrast here must be taken from preceding verses and involves conviction vs. guidance

3. Application

Deal here with the students concerning the area of pride. The insight and understanding that Christians have into the Word of God is not the result of personal cleverness or ability, but rather the work of a gracious God through His Spirit. Thus the obstinate foolishness of those who refuse to see the truth of Scripture would be our condition as well were it not for God’s grace. Thus the study of this lesson should engender greater humility in dealing both with the Bible and with other people.

Conclusion

Sum up this three-lesson segment by emphasizing how the subject of today’s lesson helps us to understand better and even expect the responses to the evidence presented in support of Scripture in the previous two lessons.

THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To define and establish both the limits and necessity of the concept of the inerrancy of Scripture and familiarize students with the current conflict over this issue.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:8 - "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

Lesson Background

The inerrancy of Scripture is a matter of considerable debate in the church today. In the past century, numerous denominations have been rent by schism over the issue. Francis Schaeffer called the doctrine of inerrancy "the watershed of evangelicalism." If that is indeed the case, our students must understand its importance. Most of the attacks against the doctrine of inerrancy are attacks against "straw men" - the opponents of the doctrine are attacking a narrow definition of inerrancy to which few evangelicals would hold. Thus, the first part of this week's lesson deals with what we do and do not mean when we say the Bible is inerrant. The second part of the lesson then goes on to show that the affirmation of biblical inerrancy is an absolute necessity, both in terms of its implications for the character of God and the authority of Scripture.

Lesson Procedure

1. Inerrancy Defined

How often have you heard people say, “How can you believe the Bible? It’s *full* of mistakes!” Usually such people are unable to produce any concrete examples of these alleged “mistakes.” Under those circumstances, you may safely assume that their statements are no more than smokescreens designed to provide an excuse for their own rebellion against God.

Others, however, do manage to come up with examples of alleged contradictions in Scripture. How do you respond? If such conflicts cannot be satisfactorily explained, should that cause us to question the inerrancy of Scripture? How, for instance, would you deal with the following?

- Ephesians 3:1-7 - In the original Greek, this is all one sentence. Most modern translations break it up somewhat, but even then it would be called a run-on sentence by any self-respecting teacher of grammar and composition. How can you call the Bible inerrant if it contains grammatical mistakes?
- Psalm 114:6 - Mountains skipping like rams? Surely you jest! And you take this fantasy seriously?
- Psalm 50:1 - Obviously the biblical writers mistakenly accepted the geocentric theory.
- Matthew 6:9-15 contra. Luke 11:1-4 - Was the Lord’s Prayer given during the Sermon on the Mount, or much later, after the Transfiguration?
- Matthew 26:6-13 contra. John 12:1-11 - Did this anointing occur before or after the Triumphal Entry?
- Genesis 15:13 contra. Exodus 12:40 - Which was it, 400 or 430 years?
- Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10; Psalm 91:11-12 - Which way did Satan say it? However he said it, he obviously didn’t quote it correctly.
- Genesis 14:14 cf. Judges 18:29 - Why does Moses refer to the city as Dan when it wasn’t called Dan until several hundred years after Moses died?

You may not have answers for these or others like them. If you’re interested in answers, consult a good commentary. But that is not really the point of today’s discussion. The point is that, as far as inerrancy is concerned, these are “straw man” arguments. When we say that the Bible contains no errors, we do *not* mean the following:

- The Bible has no grammatical solecisms. The authors of Scripture were not always well-educated. A grammatical mistake does not undermine inerrancy.
- The Bible uses no figures of speech. Too many critics confuse inerrancy with strict literalism.
- The Bible always gives scientifically precise descriptions of natural phenomena. If you ask what time the sun rose this morning, are you making an error?

- The narratives of Scripture are always strictly chronological. Not even the authors themselves claim this. While Luke, for instance, claims to have set forth the facts “in order,” Matthew often chooses to group events topically.
- The Bible never uses round numbers. If it says that 15,000 men were killed in a battle, no one would insist that it could not really have been 14,972.
- The writers of Scripture always quote word-for-word. Sometimes they paraphrase, sometimes they quote the Septuagint, sometimes they make their own translation from Hebrew to Greek. In addition, the Gospel writers obviously condensed Jesus’ words on numerous occasions.
- The Bible contains no anachronisms. The text of Genesis that has come down to us uses a city name that would have been meaningful to the people of that time.

We should note that in none of the above cases would anyone really be misled concerning the truth. That, after all, is the real issue in discussing inerrancy. Does the Bible communicate the truth, or does it mislead? We must conclude that, if the Bible is indeed the Word of God, it must at all times communicate truth rather than misleading the reader.

2. Does Inspiration Require Inerrancy?

Is it possible to maintain, as some do, that the Bible is inspired by God but contains human error? In terms of the way we have previously defined inspiration, we must affirm that it is not. The following reasons are fundamental:

A. Because of the Character of God

God is Truth, and by definition cannot lie. In putting His Name on His Word, He guaranteed its accuracy. Any distortion or misleading language in Scripture would be a lie in the same way that what we call “half-truths” or “white lies” are lies, and thus totally inconsistent with the character of God.

B. Because of the Nature of Truth

If the Bible falls short of absolute truth in one area, it ceases to be the standard for truth. People then are justified in using their own reason as the standard by which the Bible may be evaluated. But people’s ideas of truth differ, and therefore there can be no such thing as absolute truth - everything must be relative. If the Bible is not all true, nothing is true at all.

Thus we must conclude that our belief in the inerrancy of Scripture does not rest on our ability to explain alleged “contradictions,” but on our confidence in the character of God.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

Take the “contradictions” discussed in class and look them up in a few commentaries to see what they say. Note that not all commentators agree on the explanations of these passages.

1. Ephesians 3:1-7 (grammar) -
2. Psalm 114:6 (figure of speech) -
3. Psalm 50:1 (scientific language) -
4. Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:1-4 (chronology) -
5. Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-11 (chronology) -
6. Genesis 15:13; Exodus 12:40 (round numbers) -
7. Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10; Psalm 91:11-12 (quotations) -
8. Genesis 14:14; Judges 18:29 (anachronism) -

GRAMMATICAL CONTEXT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To equip students to interpret Scripture by taking into account the grammar of the passage and using correctly certain basic interpretive tools.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:9 - “The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous.”

Lesson Background

Our study now shifts to the area of biblical hermeneutics. Much of what we have to say in this first lesson on hermeneutics is pure common sense - if you don't know what a word means, look it up; interpret words in the context of the sentence, sentences in the context of the paragraph, paragraphs in the context of the chapter, chapters in the context of the book. These are things you need to do no matter what you're reading.

It is also true, however, that interpretation of the grammatical context in the Bible involves special challenges, techniques, and tools not used in normal reading. These special situations arise largely through a combination of two factors. One is the fact that most of us read and interpret the Bible in translation rather than in the original language. The second is the fact that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God. The first of these factors is not unusual - we read writers such as Homer, Moliere, Voltaire, Dante, Augustine, Calvin and Luther in translation with no great use of complex hermeneutical methods. But since they are not verbally inspired, we're not at all tempted to do word studies on their writings, either.

Thus, it is important that the students be acquainted with the fundamentals of hermeneutics - its methods (how to proceed, what to look for) and its tools. For this class, it would be a good idea to have on hand samples of the following: a Bible dictionary, a concordance (preferably Strong's or Young's), an interlinear New Testament, and a lexicon.

Lesson Procedure

Hermeneutics is the name given to the study of biblical interpretation. The most basic principle of interpretation is that interpretation must be done in context. It is important to realize, however, that several contexts apply in the interpretation of a given passage. These contexts are grammatical, historical-cultural, and theological. We are going to be spending a week on each of these areas.

This lesson concentrates on interpretation within the grammatical context. Most of this is common sense, and differs little from what you do when you read anything. There are some principles to keep in mind, however, and review of them at this point may be helpful.

1. Principles for Grammatical Interpretation

A. Understanding Words

i. Words with many meanings

In Hebrew and Greek, as in English, a single word can have several different meanings according to how it is used. For instance, compare the uses of the word "world" in John 3:16 and I John 2:15. The same Greek word is used in each case, but the meanings are obviously different. Insist that the students point out clues in the context that indicate what "world" means in each case and not just give an intuitive answer.

ii. Unique words

How does one go about figuring out the meaning of a word that is used only once in the Bible and not at all in secular literature? Obviously, one can look it up - but how did the translator or compiler of the lexicon figure out what it meant? Two techniques can be used:

a. Cognates in other languages

Situations like this occur most frequently in the Old Testament, so cognate languages with similarities to Hebrew such as Arabic, Ugaritic, etc., often contain related words.

b. Poetic parallelism

Such words occur most frequently in the poetic books. Hebrew poetry consists of a repetition of ideas rather than a repetition of sounds. Parallelism can either be synonymous (the second line repeats the idea of the first line in different words, e.g., Psalm 24:1), antithetic (the second line provides a contrast to the first line - Psalm 1:6), or synthetic (the second line expands upon the concept expressed in the first - see today's memory verse). By determining the type of parallelism being used, scholars can often get clues to the meanings of unique words.

B. Understanding Sentences

There are some questions we can ask ourselves to help us understand the sentences of the Bible.

i. Who is speaking?

This is important, because the Bible often records people's false statements accurately:

- Psalm 14:1 says, "There is no God," but a fool is speaking.
- The theological speculations of Job's "comforters" should not be the source of doctrine, since God later condemns them.
- Jehovah's Witnesses derive arguments for soul sleep from Ecclesiastes (e.g., 9:10), but Solomon himself later declares this thinking to be vanity.
- There are limitations to this, of course. God not only spoke through Balaam's donkey, but, somewhat more surprisingly, brought forth a beautiful Messianic prophecy from the lips of the crass mercenary himself (Numbers 22:28-30; 24:17-19).

ii. What is the speaker's intent?

- Is he enunciating a general principle or dealing with a specific situation? (Mark 10:21 is a good example of the latter.)
- Is he speaking seriously, or with tongue in cheek? (I Kings 22:15 is a good example of the latter.)

iii. What kind of language is being used?

Figures of speech will obviously require a different approach than propositions, commands, etc.

iv. What type of literature is it?

Poetry demands a different interpretation than prose, parable than historical narrative.

v. Does the author clarify his statement later?

- Ezekiel 37:15-23 - Mormons say this prophecy refers to the "stick" (scroll) of the Book of Mormon, but the following verses indicate a uniting, not of books, but of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.
- Hebrews 6:4-8 - The figurative language of the later verses clarifies the difficult language of verses 4-6, indicating that we have here not saving grace that can be lost, but common grace that may be rejected (cf. Parable of the Sower).

2. Tools for Grammatical Interpretation

Take time here to go over with students how to use the four Bible study tools you brought along.

A. Concordance

This lists every occurrence of every significant word in Scripture in alphabetical order in English. Each concordance is based on a particular English version of the Bible, for obvious reasons. Good concordances such as Strong's and Young's also include the Hebrew and Greek words from which the English words are translated.

B. Bible Dictionary

This allows you to look up the English word in question and get a much fuller definition than a concordance would provide. It contains only major biblical words.

C. Lexicon

This is like a foreign-language dictionary, giving the words in Hebrew or Greek and the definitions in English. To use one of these, you must know the Hebrew or Greek alphabet, plus a few basic principles of grammar.

D. Interlinear

This is a Greek New Testament with a literal translation of each word written underneath in English.

Proper use of Bible study tools is not only an aid to good interpretation of Scripture, but a guard against faulty personal "insights" into a text that do violence to its context.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT GRAMMATICAL CONTEXT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Using the tools discussed in class today, do a word study on the word “shepherd.” Look up every reference to it in Scripture, record what you learn from each one, and use the results of your study to give an interpretation of Acts 20:28.

HISTORICAL-CULTURAL CONTEXT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To show students the importance of familiarity with the historical background and cultural setting upon which the books of Scripture are based and give them basic knowledge of the tools useful in bringing this information to bear upon the task of interpreting Scripture.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:10 - "They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb."

Lesson Background

The authors of the Bible not only lived in a world very different from our own, but often in worlds very different from one another. A poor farmer like Amos or a fisherman like Peter would have felt totally out of place in the Egyptian court where Moses was raised or the Babylonian palace where Daniel served. The books written by these men, though universally applicable, were not written in a vacuum, and thus reflect the times and cultures in which the authors lived.

Consequently, if we are to interpret the Scriptures properly, we must understand the history and culture of its authors. Anyone who reads the Bible as if it were a twenty-first-century book courts hermeneutical disaster. Students must understand the importance of knowing this background information and also become aware of how to find it. The examples given will hopefully accomplish the first of these goals. For the second part, you will need as many of the following resources as you can find: commentaries, surveys or introductions, Bible histories, Bible geographies, atlases, archaeology books, and Bible encyclopedias.

Lesson Procedure

Last week we talked about interpreting a passage of Scripture on the basis of its grammatical context and examined some of the tools useful in doing so. Other contexts must also be considered, however, and today we will examine the use of the historical-cultural context.

1. The Need for the Historical-Cultural Context

Here go over with the students the material given in the first paragraph of the Lesson Background. Impress upon them that studies of these things are not optional, but necessary for the proper interpretation of Scripture. Draw an analogy to the situation of someone going to live in a foreign country who must learn the history and customs of the people among whom he is to live. (Wycliffe Bible Translators publishes a bimonthly magazine called *In Focus* that contains excellent examples of the importance of understanding history and culture as a basis for accurate and effective communication.)

2. The Use of the Historical-Cultural Context

Here we will examine several examples to show how the use of the historical and cultural background of a passage serves as an aid to interpretation.

A. Genesis 14

Here we have an account of Abraham and his servants engaging in victorious warfare against a group of kings. This makes little sense unless the historical situation is understood. Palestine, the crossroads of the Middle East, has throughout most of its history been under foreign domination. It is coveted not because of its intrinsic value, but because he who controls Palestine controls the major trade routes of the Middle East. The only times the peoples of the region have enjoyed self-rule is when the surrounding major powers have been weak. At the time of Abraham, the two powers that would dominate the region for the next half-millennium were in no position to exercise influence. The Hittites to the north had not yet attained power and still ranked only as one tribe among many. The Egyptians to the south were preoccupied with dynastic squabbles. Meanwhile, the great Babylonian civilization of Ur, from which Abraham had come, was in a state of decline from which it would never recover. Thus, with no major powers dominating the area, petty tribal sheiks were free to rule and make war as they chose. Such were the “kings” fought by Abraham, and for whom his servant-army was more than a match. (NOTE: A similar situation existed at the time of the conquest under Joshua - the Hittites had declined to the point where they are listed simply as one of six Canaanite tribes, the Egyptians were in confusion, and the Assyrians had not yet extended their influence that far, leaving Joshua to conquer small independent kingdoms, but no major powers.)

B. Genesis 19:1

Examination of the culture of the time sheds light on the significance of Lot’s “sitting in the gateway.” The elders, or most respected men, of each city would serve as the judges when disputes arose. The gateway of the city served as the “courthouse” where cases were brought for adjudication. The point in this passage is that Lot had so immersed himself in the life of the wicked city of Sodom that he had become a respected elder and judge.

C. John 4:4

Knowledge of Jewish-Samaritan relationships is useful here. The Samaritans were the result of intermarriage between Northern Kingdom Jews and pagans conquered by the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians mixed conquered populations to prevent revolts, and this produced a hybrid people who practiced a hybrid religion. Jews looked down on the Samaritans, and the Samaritans hated them for it. This hatred was so extreme that most Jews going from Judea to Galilee would cross and re-cross the Jordan, going through Perea and Decapolis (and going 40 miles out of their way, which is quite a bit traveling on foot) just to avoid even traveling through Samaria (see why a knowledge of geography helps?). Jesus, of course, ignored this prejudice. It does, however, explain the surprise of the Samaritan woman when Jesus initiated a conversation.

D. Revelation 3:15-16

The town of Laodicea was located in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. On the other side of a nearby hill was the town of Hierapolis, famous for its medicinal hot springs. By the time the water from these hot springs reached Laodicea, however, it was less than hot and less than medicinal. In fact, anyone who drank from it was highly likely to lose his lunch. Thus Jesus' illustration of His disgust with their religion was perfectly intelligible to the Laodiceans.

3. Tools for Discovering the Historical-Cultural Context

The teacher should have as many of these as possible on hand so he can demonstrate as well as explain their uses.

A. Bible Commentaries

Verse-by-verse expositions of a given book or books. Any worthwhile commentary will include discussions of the background of a passage in its exposition.

B. Bible Introductions or Surveys

These usually go book by book and will give the historical setting of the book as a whole, along with a description of the author and his life, if these are known.

C. Bible Histories

These, rather than going book by book, generally give an overview of the period to be covered, paying particular attention to anything in the period that has a bearing on a passage of Scripture.

D. Bible Geographies and Atlases

These give information on the places where biblical events occurred, one through descriptions (and maps), the other through maps.

E. Bible Archaeology Books

These deal specifically with discoveries made by archaeologists that shed light on the text and narratives of Scripture.

F. Bible Encyclopedias

These contain extended articles on various subjects relating to the Bible and its milieu. Once you know what you're looking for, you can usually find information about it here.

THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To impress upon students that because the Bible is one book as well as sixty-six books, its unity provides an important foundation for the interpretation of its contents.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:11 - "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

Lesson Background

In examining the use of the grammatical and historical-cultural contexts in the interpretation of Scripture, we studied procedures and principles that for the most part are applicable to any piece of literature. This week, however, we will be discussing procedures that would be absurd if applied to any collection of books other than the Bible. The use of theological context rests on two specific aspects of Scripture's uniqueness - its unity and its inspiration. The sixty-six books are really one book; behind the forty-odd human authors is one Author.

The lesson is divided into two parts, dealing with the principles and procedures of theological context. The principles are those already mentioned - the unity and divine authorship of Scripture. The procedures build upon them, and include word studies, systematic theology, and the use of the concept of progressive revelation. It is important that, in going through this material, the students not only see how and why these procedures may be used, but also understand why such procedures are distorted or at worst rejected by those who deny the unity and inspiration of Scripture.

Lesson Procedure

While the interpretive principles discussed in our last two lessons can largely be applied to any piece of literature, the use of the theological context makes sense only when applied to the Bible. In simple terms, the theological context stems from comparing Scripture with Scripture. What principles underlie this seemingly simple procedure?

1. The Basis of Theological Context

Two assumptions form the basis of the concept of theological context. Apart from these, the applications to be discussed later would be ludicrous.

A. The Unity of Scripture

Because the Bible is a single unified work, as well as being many works, we are able to compare Scripture with Scripture as an aid to interpretation. If the teaching set forth by Paul in I Corinthians on the subject of divorce is difficult, we may shed light on it by examining the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. When we do so, we expect complementarity rather than contradiction. Such an interpretive process is only possible with a unified body of work. Could you imagine an English teacher comparing *Beowulf* and *Macbeth* to determine the basic position of English literature with regard to the supernatural? No such “basic position” exists, nor could we expect it to do so. (We should note in passing, however, that *Beowulf* and Shakespeare are much closer in time, language, and culture than are the books of the Bible; again, a marvelous testimony to the hand of God in the Scriptures.)

B. The Divine Authorship of Scripture

Without the underlying unity of Scripture, the use of theological context would be impossible. Without the divine authorship of Scripture, the use of theological context would be irrelevant. Not only does the unity of Scripture find its roots in the fact that the Bible has one Author, but we also must affirm that, if that single author were not God, any attempt to ascertain the teaching of the Bible on a given subject would be a matter of academic curiosity, but by no means normative for our life and belief. In other words, if the unity of the Bible makes interpretation by theological context possible, the divine authorship of the Bible makes such interpretation both important and necessary. The teaching of the Bible must be diligently sought and practiced because it comes from God.

Again, let’s use Shakespeare as an example. Setting aside the contention of some scholars that Shakespeare did not write the plays attributed to him, we here have a unified body of writing by a single author. We would thus expect that comparison of concepts as treated in different plays would illuminate what Shakespeare thought about those particular ideas. Consequently, interpretation by comparison is possible. Yet who would maintain that we are in any way bound to accept Shakespeare’s view of human nature, for instance? It may be interesting, but it is by no means normative.

It should be noted at this point that one’s view of the inspiration of Scripture will have a decided impact on one’s interpretation of Scripture. One who denies the unity of the Bible will come to it expecting no more agreement than one might find between *Beowulf* and Shakespeare. One who denies the divine authorship of Scripture may seek out the teaching of the Bible on a certain subject, but will not feel bound to accept that teaching, subjecting it instead to his personal judgment.

2. The Application of Theological Context

The examples given here are illustrative rather than exhaustive, but should give the students some idea of how theological context may be used in the interpretation of Scripture.

A. Word Studies

A word study involves tracing a single word through all of its uses in Scripture in order to get a full picture of the meaning of that word in the Bible. Word studies have both value and limitations. We may indeed gain insight into the meaning of a word when we see how it is used elsewhere in Scripture. On the other hand, word studies cannot be carried out mechanically. We must recognize that a single word may have different meanings in different places, or that different human authors of the Bible may use the same word in different ways (e.g. the use of the term “justification” by Paul and James).

B. Systematic Theology

Systematic theology does with subjects what a word study does with words. It examines the teaching of the entire Bible on a given topic by bringing together information from all parts of Scripture. This unit is an example of systematic theology, as we have brought together passages from various places in Scripture to find out what the Bible teaches about itself. We should note that the accurate practice of systematic theology is dependent upon correct interpretation of individual texts by use of grammatical and historical-cultural contexts.

C. Progressive Revelation

While the teaching of the Bible on a given subject is unified, it is also progressive. Systematic theology is needed because few biblical treatments of a given subject present an exhaustive discussion in a single passage. Thus comparison is necessary. An understanding of progressive revelation is important because we must realize that God unfolded His truth to men gradually, not all at once (cf. Hebrews 1:1-3). Consequently, we should expect the later revelation to be more complete and clearer than that which was given earlier. It should not surprise us, for instance, that the Old Testament is very vague on the subject of the afterlife in general, and the concept of the resurrection of the body in particular, while the New Testament contains very clear teaching on these subjects. At the risk of oversimplifying, then, we must affirm that later revelation should be expected to give a fuller exposition of a given topic than that which came before, and thus it is hazardous to interpret the biblical discussion of any subject on the basis of some early interpretive “key.”

THE TRANSMISSION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To give the students confidence that the Bible we have today is essentially the same as that penned by its authors thousands of years ago and to help them understand how it has come down to us.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:12-13 - “Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.”

Lesson Background

Many students are shocked and confused when they see newer Bible translations with certain passages omitted or accompanied by a footnote stating, “not found in oldest manuscripts.” We affirm that the original autographs are inspired and refuse to admit copyists’ mistakes as “errors” in Scripture. Yet we don’t have the original autographs - all we have are copies! How then can we be sure that what has been passed down to us is the Word of God and that it has not been significantly altered by copyists’ mistakes? Is verbal inspiration meaningless if some of the words have been changed, and we don’t know which ones?

This lesson may seem to be a bit on the technical side, but it is important for the students to have confidence in the Word of God as we know it, not just in some theoretical but unavailable form. They must be convinced that textual variants are relatively few and generally insignificant, and that the evidence available gives reason for overwhelming confidence in the biblical text in general.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by taking the students to the following passages: Mark 16:9-20; John 7:53-8:11; I John 5:7. Most of them should have footnotes in their Bibles indicating that these passages are not included in the oldest manuscripts available to us. Discuss for a while the effect of such passages on our understanding of the inspiration of Scripture, allowing students to voice any questions they may have. Do not be afraid to play “devil’s advocate” here and raise questions yourself. Student attention and response to the lesson depends on your establishing a real need for further explanation here.

Ultimately, of course, as with the compilation of the text, we can trust the transmission of the text because our God is sovereign and will not fail to communicate His Word to His people. But the following discussion should bolster the confidence of the students in the Bible they have before them.

1. The Transmission Process

The doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture applies, strictly speaking, only to the original autographs - the actual documents penned by the human authors of Scripture. We obviously cannot maintain that the copies are inerrant, since they differ from one another. Since the autographs are lost, must we then abandon the concept of inerrancy as a meaningless theoretical construct? Before giving up on the doctrine of inerrancy, we need to examine the transmission process.

A. The Old Testament

The transmission problem for the Old Testament is relatively slight. Several families of texts do exist, but they are few and their differences minor. The reason for this is the great reverence accorded the text of the Old Testament by the Jewish people. After the Babylonian Captivity, an order of scribes arose whose major task was the preservation of the Scriptures. Later, several hundred years after Christ, a group of Jewish scholars known as the Massoretes refined the process of preserving the text to the point where any copyists’ errors could be detected by a detailed counting process. Consequently, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1948, containing manuscripts a thousand years older than those previously available, the differences between the two were negligible. Thus, textual variants in the Old Testament are virtually non-existent.

B. The New Testament

The manuscripts of the books of the New Testament were copied and circulated among the churches of the first century. This informal sharing of manuscripts led to textual variation very early in the transmission process. It was not until the rise of monasticism in the fourth century that anything like professional copyists existed, and these scribes were not as careful as the Jewish ones had been. Scribal errors crept in through accidental omission and duplication, and even occasional additions to the text (for instance, a “gloss” was an explanatory note placed in the margin by a scribe; occasionally the next person to copy the manuscript would think the “gloss” was part of the text rather than a comment, and would insert it accordingly). Because no central “quality control” system existed, a great variety of manuscripts of the New Testament gradually came into being.

2. The Discovery Process

Manuscripts are not notoriously durable, and most of the older copies were rather quickly worn out, thrown out, or lost. Thus, when Bible translation began in earnest around the time of the Reformation, the

current copies, generally only a few hundred years old, provided the basis for the translation work. Only as archaeology developed as a science did older manuscripts begin to come to light. The oldest virtually complete manuscripts now available are Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, both from the fourth century. Codex Sinaiticus was discovered in the nineteenth century by Constantin von Tischendorf in the kitchen of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai - in a trash pile in the corner of the room. Codex Vaticanus has been stored and preserved in the library of the Vatican for many centuries, but was not available until recently because of the long-standing opposition of the Catholic Church to Bible translation. Consequently, the newer translations - those made in the twentieth century - are actually based on much older manuscripts than older translations such as the King James Version.

3. The Editorial Process

Because the original autographs are not available to us, it would not be wise to choose one of the thousands of available texts and use it as the basis for translation. Instead, Bible scholars use what is called an eclectic text, which does not correspond to any single available manuscript, but makes use of a wide variety of manuscript evidence to get back as close to the original autographs as possible. The principles used in doing this were developed by two nineteenth-century British Bible scholars, B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort. Their work is the basis for most of the translation work done in the twentieth century. Having said all of this, we must not lose sight of the following:

- The manuscript evidence available for the Bible is far greater than that for any other work of comparable age. The accuracy of the text may be known with far greater certainty than, for instance, the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Josephus.
- The variant readings, though numbering in the thousands, are generally insignificant, and do not in any way alter the content of the Scriptures.
- Ultimately we depend, not on scribes and scholars, but on the sovereign God to preserve His Word for His people.

NOTE: Here are possible explanations of the passages mentioned in the beginning of the lesson.

Mark 16:9-20

Probably an amplified conflation of material from the other Gospels produced by a scribe who was uncomfortable with a less-than-clearly-enunciated Resurrection at the end of Mark's Gospel.

John 7:53-8:11

This could have been an existing piece of oral tradition inserted by an over-zealous scribe (the narrative flows much more smoothly if it is removed) or, alternatively, a genuine part of the text removed by a very early "censor" who feared it would appear to make it look like Jesus condoned adultery.

I John 5:7

Universally acknowledged to be an insertion by some scribe who thought the Bible needed an overt statement of the doctrine of the Trinity.

THE TRANSLATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson Aim

To enable students to use wisely the vast array of English translations of the Bible now available.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:14 - "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

Lesson Background

It is a great privilege to be able to read the Bible in one's own language. Throughout much of church history, the Bible was generally available only in Latin, and even these manuscripts were scarce because they had to be copied by hand. The invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century greatly increased the availability of Bibles, though the Catholic Church impeded their dissemination because of its fear that laymen reading the Bible for themselves would be prone to heresy. Early translators of the Bible faced heavy persecution. John Wycliffe was fired from his teaching post at Oxford. After his death, his body was disinterred, burned, and the ashes thrown in the river. William Tyndale was forced into exile, hounded all over Europe, and finally burned at the stake.

There are still those today who cannot read the Bible in their own language. Wycliffe Bible Translators estimates that there are nearly 2,000 tribal groups who do not have access to the Scriptures. Many of their languages have not yet been reduced to writing.

Meanwhile, English speakers have an embarrassment of riches - we have access to more than 25 different English versions of the Bible or parts of it. But this blessing also brings with it a dilemma not experienced by many previous generations: which translation should I use? This lesson attempts to prepare the student to answer that question more effectively. In preparation for this lesson, collect as many different versions of the Bible as you can.

Lesson Procedure

1. The History of Translation

Go over briefly the material in the first part of the Lesson Background.

2. The Process of Translation

Translation is difficult because it involves far more than replacing one word with its equivalent in another language. Usage, figures of speech, idioms, and connotations all must be taken into account. (For instance, one translation of “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” produced something like “the wine is delicious, but the meat is underdone!”)

3. The Principles of Translation

Those who translate the Bible attempt to communicate faithfully the content of the original-language text in the language into which it is being translated. Three basic approaches to this problem have been taken by modern translators of the Bible.

A. Literal Translation or Verbal Equivalence

This is an attempt to duplicate as closely as possible the words of the original. Such translations attempt to keep as much as possible the same grammar, verb tenses, and word order as found in the original. While striving for accuracy, readability is often sacrificed. The most extreme example of this type of translation is an interlinear; the best one of this type is the New American Standard Bible.

B. Dynamic Equivalence

This type of translation is an attempt to communicate the ideas behind the original in the most accurate way possible. Dynamic equivalence translations do not seek conformity to grammar or verb tenses if the ideas involved can be expressed more faithfully in another way. This has the advantage of enhancing readability, and the disadvantage of requiring more interpretation of the translator, thus producing a translation containing theological bias. This approach has been taken most notably in recent years by the translators of the Good News Bible.

C. Paraphrase

These usually attempt to enhance communication by simplifying or enlivening the language of the Bible. In the process, accuracy is sacrificed and theological bias is maximized. Examples of this include the Living Bible, the New Testament in Modern English (J. B. Phillips), The Cotton Patch New Testament, and The Message (Eugene Peterson).

4. The Products of Translation

Now we need to get specific. A discussion of various categories of English translations, and a more detailed summary of some of the more popular ones, follows.

A. Categories

i. One-Man Translations

The lack of checks and balances tends to produce greater bias and more idiosyncrasies. Many modern-language New Testaments (Phillips, Berkeley, Barclay, Williams, etc.) are of this type, along with The Living Bible and The Message.

ii. Roman Catholic Translations

When the Catholic Church finally got around to translating the Bible into English, the translations were made from the Latin Vulgate rather than the Hebrew and Greek originals (Rheims-Douai, Knox versions). More recent Catholic translations (Jerusalem Bible, New American Bible) go back to the original languages, and are rather good.

iii. Broad-based Translations

These were produced by scholars of varying theological convictions, and include the King James Version and the New English Bible.

iv. Liberal Translations

These were produced largely by non-evangelical scholars and reflect their view of the Scriptures. These include the Revised Standard Version, the Anchor Bible (really a commentary series), and the Reader's Digest Condensed Version.

v. Evangelical Translations

The teams for these were made up only of scholars of evangelical persuasion. Included here are the Berkeley Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, the New King James Version, and the English Standard Version.

B. Popular Translations

i. King James Version (Authorized Version)

This was the dominant English translation for about 350 years. Its literary beauty is the greatest among English translations; archaic language makes understanding difficult; generally accurate, but based on *Textus Receptus*, a relatively late original-language manuscript.

ii. American Standard Version

Used ancient manuscripts discovered in nineteenth century, textual principles of Westcott and Hort; very accurate, generally readable.

iii. Revised Standard Version

Sponsored by National Council of Churches; shows liberal theological bias (see II Timothy 3:16); uses unwarranted textual emendation in Old Testament poetic books; good literary quality.

iv. New English Bible

Beautiful, literary work; contains British verbal idiosyncrasies; uses textual emendation; contains Apocrypha.

v. New American Standard Bible

Best formal equivalence translation available short of an interlinear; excellent study Bible; literary quality negligible, very awkward for public reading.

vi. Living Bible

Highly readable, easily understandable paraphrase; don't use it for studying.

vii. Good News Bible (Today's English Version)

Highly readable; intended for low-level readers, thus uses simplified vocabulary; lacks theological precision; not recommended for study.

viii. New International Version

Best of the dynamic equivalence translations, combining readability, literary quality, and accuracy. Unfortunately, later editions gave in to cultural pressure to use gender-inclusive language, causing it to be rejected by many evangelicals (this curriculum uses the 1986 edition, prior to the controversial changes).

ix. New King James Version

Improved readability and intelligibility, but literary quality is significantly diminished in the process; weakened by continued adherence to *Textus Receptus*.

x. English Standard Version

Prepared by scholars of a largely Reformed persuasion, it is more and more becoming the version of choice in Reformed churches. The level of accuracy is high, but readability is still an issue, as is true among most versions that seek some measure of formal equivalence.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE TRANSLATION OF SCRIPTURE

Find out what translations of the Bible you have around your home. Find out everything you can about them. Prepare a table containing the following information about each version: Name of the version, date of publication, translators (group or individual, American or British, Protestant or Catholic, liberal or evangelical), style or translation (verbal equivalence, dynamic equivalence, or paraphrase), and the types of study helps included. Which translations are best for reading? for study? for children? for new Christians? Why?