

Introduction to this Course

This is a study course on the Bible. The purpose of this course is to help you understand what the Bible is, so that you may read it and understand it and profit from it. There are many people in our country who read the Bible every day but they get no profit from it because they do not read it correctly. The Bible says that there are people who are “ever hearing, but never understanding; ever seeing, but never perceiving” (Isaiah 6:9), and sadly there are many such people in our country. They are ever hearing sermons and ever reading the Bible but they rarely get any profit from it. This is because they do not understand what the Bible is. In this booklet, therefore, we are going to try and understand what the Bible is.

This course has seven lessons:

Lesson One: What is the Bible?

Lesson Two: What is in the Bible?

Lesson Three: What is the central message of the Bible?

Lesson Four: Who wrote the Bible and why did they write it?

Lesson Five: How do we read and study the Bible?

Lesson Six: How do we interpret the Bible?

Lesson Seven: How do we preach and teach the Bible?

Lesson One: What is the Bible?

In seeking to answer this question, we will look at two passages from the New Testament.

In the first place, we shall look at 2 Tim. 3:14-17.

In this passage, Paul says, *“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

In this passage, Paul teaches us four things about the Bible.

1. The Bible is the Word of God.

Paul says, “All Scripture is God-breathed.” This means that it is God Himself who gave us the Bible. This, of course, is a very important matter. Imagine that you received a letter one day from a wise old man whom you held in very high regard. In the letter, he gives you some instructions to follow. What would you do about the letter? Would you just ignore it? The answer, of course, is that you will do your best to obey those

instructions because they have come from someone you hold in very high regard.

Now the Bible is the word of God, which means it is God Himself who wrote it. Every word in the Bible has come from God. Notice that Paul emphasises this point. He says, “ALL Scripture,” meaning every word in the Bible has come from God Himself. This means that there are five things we need to do.

(i) We must read the Bible each day. The Bible was written by God Himself and it is, therefore, the most important book in the world. Imagine that you received a book one day that was written by the president of America. You would not put it to one side and forget all about it, you would read it through. The Bible was written by God Himself and He has given to us His book: we cannot ignore this book, we must read it every day.

(ii) We must study the Bible. There is a difference between reading the Bible and studying it. When we read the Bible, we read a passage and then think about what we have read and how we should live our lives in the light of what we have read. But to study the Bible is to go deeper. Later in this course we will look at how we are to study the Bible. Sadly, many saved people never study the Bible. They seem to have the view that they do not have the ability to study the Bible because they are not pastors and only pastors know how to study the Bible. They also feel that the Bible is such a complicated and difficult book that even if they tried to study it they would fail. But we need to realise that this is not true. It is not true that only pastors can understand the Bible and it is not true that the Bible is too difficult for most people to understand. It is the duty of every Christian to study the Bible.

(iii) We must believe what the Bible teaches. There is no question that some of the things the Bible teaches are difficult for people to believe. For example, many people in our country like to believe that children are innocent little angels who are perfect and sinless. This is a belief that is very common in our country and this is the reason why a church would not teach children that they are sinners who need to repent of their sins. But is it true that children are sinless angels? Is this what the Bible teaches? The answer is that the Bible says children are born with sin in their hearts and that they sin from their earliest years. It says, “Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies” (Ps. 58:3). Regardless of what we would like to believe about children, this is what the Bible teaches, and this is what we must believe.

Sadly, it is the case that many people who are saved do not know what the Bible teaches on very important matters like who God is, why Jesus Christ came, why He died, why He rose again, why the Holy Spirit came, how we are saved, what it means to be saved and what will happen when Christ returns. These are subjects on which many saved people are ignorant, and so they believe the things that people say rather than what the Bible teaches. They have picked up some teachings from their childhood or from their friends or from their church and they hold on to such teachings even though the Bible does not agree with what they believe. Sometimes when you challenge such a person they will say, “Well, I don’t know what the Bible says, but this is what I have been taught and this

is what I believe.” This is not the way to honour God. The Bible is God’s word. We must, therefore, study it and believe what it says.

(iv) We must obey the Bible. A person can read the Bible every day, study it in great detail and believe every word of what it says. But until he actually obeys what it says it has not profited him at all. The way we offer worship and honour to God is to obey Him. A child who disobeys his parents is showing them disrespect and dishonour. Only when the child actually obeys the instructions of his parents is he showing honour to them. In the same way, a person may go to church each Sunday and sing songs and say long, loud prayers and listen to the preaching of God’s word. But until he obeys what God says in His word, he does not worship God. We cannot worship God with our lips and disobey Him in our lives. This is hypocrisy, a sin that God hates.

(v) We must teach the Bible. Since the Bible is the word of God then it is of the greatest importance that people hear and understand what it says. It is the duty of every believer to teach the Bible. We do not all have to teach from the pulpit. If you are a parent then you must teach the Bible to your children (Deut. 6:4-9). If you have neighbours, then you should seek to invite them to your house and teach them the Scriptures. The Bible commands women to teach other women (Titus 2:3-5). This is the duty that is laid upon us by the Scriptures: we are to teach the word of God.

2. The Bible was given to make us wise for salvation.

Paul says, “the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” God gave us the Scriptures to show us the way of salvation. The Bible tells us that man is lost because he has inherited Adam’s sin. This means that man is in great danger. There are two reasons for this:

(i) There is the danger that man will remain lost forever and never find the way back. Imagine that a child living in a large city one day gets lost. He goes to an area he has never been to before where there are many people and he loses his way. We can imagine that such a child will never find his way back home unless someone helps him. He can wander around for days and days hoping that he will somehow by luck find his way back, but that is very unlikely; once a person is lost they remain lost until someone helps them. In the same way, we are lost because of our sins. The Lord Jesus gave us parables like the lost sheep and the lost coin to show us this fact: that we are lost. This is the reason He said, “The Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10). Now if God had not given us the Bible, we would have remained lost and would have been sent to eternal punishment.

(ii) There is the danger that man finds a way which he thinks is the right one, but it is not the right one. Think again about the child who is lost in a big city. He comes to a road that looks a bit familiar: some of the shops look like the ones near his home. And so he goes down that road and keeps going. But the road is not the right one, it is actually

taking him a long way away from his home. This is the danger that people who are lost face. They find a road that looks right and so they follow it. The Bible says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov. 16:25). There are millions of people in the world today who think that the way of salvation is their own good works. They think that the way to get into heaven is to try your best to live a good life and to obey the Ten Commandments and to be a religious person. They are convinced that as long as they do all these things then God will be pleased with their efforts and will give them a place in heaven as a reward. It is a way that seems right to a man, but that road does not lead to heaven, it leads to hell. The Bible says that “A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16). This is why Paul says in the passage we are studying in 2 Tim. 3:14-17 that the Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The Bible was given therefore because man is lost in his sins and is unable to find the way back to God. God in His kindness and mercy shows us the way to heaven in His word. Without the word of God we remain lost forever.

3. The Bible was given to make us holy.

Paul says in this passage, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” The Bible was given to make us wise for salvation, but the Bible was also given to teach us, to rebuke us, to correct us and to train us in righteousness. In other words, the Bible was given to make us holy. The Bible tells us that when we get saved, we still have sin in us. It is not the case that on the day we get saved all sinful habits are removed from us: we are forgiven but we are still sinners. We still have all the sinful habits that we acquired before we got saved. These sins have to be removed from us, and it takes our whole lives for them to go. Once we are saved, God the Holy Spirit begins a work in us whereby He removes these sins from us, and the means He uses is the word of God. This is why Paul says that Christ will cleanse His church by the washing of the word (see Eph. 5:25).

4. The Bible is sufficient for all our needs.

Notice carefully what Paul says here. He says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be THOROUGHLY equipped for EVERY good work.”

There are people in our country today who accept that the Bible is the word of God but they do not accept that the Bible is a complete revelation from God. They believe that God is still speaking today and making His will known to us today through preachers and prophets and apostles. And so they say, “Yes I know the Bible says this, but there is now new revelation from God which is different and we follow that new revelation.” This, however, is completely wrong. The Bible was given so that the man of God (meaning all saved people) may be completely equipped for every good work. Everything that we need

in order to be saved and to live a godly life that pleases God is found in the Bible. Everything that God wants to tell us He has told us in the Bible; there is no new and continuing revelation from God. The last words in the Bible are these: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book” (Rev. 22:18).

If we think about this matter carefully, we will see how dangerous it is to believe that God is still speaking today through certain people. Let us take the example of a young man in a church who is looking for a job in the city. His pastor says to him, “God has revealed to me that you should remain in the city and continue looking for a job. In fact God told me that within a week you will have a job; you remain here, I know that you will find a job soon.” Then the next day, a pastor from another church says to him, “God has revealed to me that you should go back to your village and work in the shamba there. God will bless you when you do that.” What should this young man do? Should he follow the first pastor or the second? Let us imagine further that he decides to stay in the city and continues to look for a job, but after a month he still has no job. What then should he do about the pastor who said that within a week he will have a job? Has God really spoken through that pastor? And if God did speak through that pastor, why did he not find a job within a week? Did the pastor lie or did God lie? The answer, of course, is that God never lies: “God is not a man, that He should lie” (Num. 23:19).

These are things that we see and hear about in our churches every day. People speak in the name of God and make promises of jobs or healing or wealth that actually never happen. It leaves Christians confused and it tells unbelievers that the Christian faith cannot be taken seriously.

These are the four things that we learn from 2 Tim. 3:14-17: that the Bible is God's word, that the Bible was given to make us wise for salvation, that the Bible was given to make us holy and that the Bible is sufficient.

In the second place, we will look at 2 Peter 1:21.

This verse says, “*For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*”

In this verse when Peter speaks about “prophecy” he means the whole Bible, not just the books of the Bible we usually call the Prophetic Books. He teaches us a very important lesson about how the Bible was written:

Peter teaches us that the writing of the Bible was a work involving both God and human writers.

The Bible, says Peter, was written by men who were “carried along” by the Holy Spirit, meaning that it was men who wrote the Bible but when they wrote the Bible they were

under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit. He says, “Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man.” In other words the Bible was not written because some men decided to write it: its origins are not in the will of men. Rather, the word of God came when the Holy Spirit used men to write it. This is an important matter that we need to understand clearly. The Bible is at the same time the word of God and the work of men. Think, for example of the first letter to the Corinthians. Paul was in the city of Ephesus when he received some reports about the church in Corinth and the problems that were in that church. And so he made a list of all the problems and then composed a letter. We can say that Paul himself wrote the letter to the Corinthians: it was he who planned its layout and composed it and decided on which words to use when writing it. And yet it is the word of God. The Holy Spirit of God moved Paul to compose the letter and to write it, so that the letter is part of God's word: every word in it is the word of God.

Now because the Bible is the work of men does not mean that it contains mistakes. When a man writes a book usually that book will have certain things that are wrong simply because the man writing it does not know everything, and being human he is bound to make mistakes. But the Bible is the word of God. It was written under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit. Every word in it is the word of God. And so there are no mistakes or false teachings in the Bible.

This matter, that the Bible is the work of man, is a very important one when we come to interpret it. When we study a passage of the Bible and want to understand what it says, we use the same methods that we would use when interpreting any document written by an ordinary human being. Imagine that you receive a letter from a friend of yours in the city and there is a paragraph in the letter you do not understand. You would read the whole letter from the beginning carefully to see what the letter is about and how the letter is planned. Then you would read the paragraph again to see if you can understand it in the context of the letter as a whole. This is how we are to interpret and understand the Bible. There are many in our country who simply take a verse from some part of the Bible and preach on it without trying to understand the context in which that verse was written or the meaning of the words and phrases used.

Summary of Lesson One – What is the Bible?

In this first lesson we are asking the question, “What is the Bible.” In seeking to answer the question we have looked at two passages from the Bible: 2 Tim. 3:14-17 and 2 Pet. 1:21. From these two passages, we have learnt five things about the Bible:

1. The Bible is the word of God.
2. The Bible was given to make us wise for salvation.
3. The Bible was given to make us holy.
4. The Bible is sufficient for all our needs.
5. The writing of the Bible was a work involving both God and human writers.

Lesson Two: What is in the Bible?

In this lesson we look at the contents of the Bible. The Bible is a big book with many things in it. If we are to study it properly then it will help us to know something of what we find in the Bible when we open it.

1. There are 66 books in the Bible.

Some of these books are very short, consisting of just one chapter, and others are much longer. Those who are teachers of the word need to know the names of all the books of the Bible by heart. This is not a difficult exercise. You can memorise the names of five books per day and in two weeks or so you will have all 66 books in your memory.

2. There are two testaments in the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Christians are not always clear as to the relationship between these two. There are many people who believe that in the Old Testament people were saved by their own efforts in keeping the Law of Moses and that in the New Testament we are saved by faith in Christ. This, however, is not true at all. In Romans chapter 4 we are told very clearly that men like Abraham and David were saved not by their own works but by faith. People in the Old Testament were saved just like people in the New Testament and people today, by faith in the promises of God alone, because God never changes.

The Old Testament is the time before the Lord Jesus came to earth in the flesh. It describes how the world was created, how sin came into the world and how God embarked upon a wonderful plan to save His chosen people from their sin.

The Old Testament, therefore, is the preparation for the New Testament. It is a little like when we construct a house. We first do all the preparation by clearing the ground and then bringing in all the materials like stones and cement and wood. Once all the preparation is finished, we begin the actual work of building. God planned to create a huge kingdom here on earth that would consist of people from every nation of the world. The Old Testament is the story of how He made preparations for this kingdom and then the New Testament is the story of how the Lord Jesus Christ, the master builder of the kingdom, came to earth and began the work of building that kingdom.

The New Testament tells us that the Lord Jesus began this work and then sent the Holy Spirit who came to continue that work. Through the Holy Spirit Christ is still at work building God's kingdom here on earth.

3. There are different kinds of books in the Bible.

It is most important for us to understand that the Bible is like a bookshop or a library.

When you walk into a bookshop or a library you see different types of books: there are works of fiction, books on history, books of poems and proverbs, etc. The Bible is like that. We find that the 66 books in it are not all of the same kind. We find in the Bible books of history, poetry and prophecy, letters which give very detailed teaching on a certain doctrine and letters which were written to deal with problems in a local church. These are just some of the things we find in the Bible. Specifically, we can group the books of the Bible in this way:

Old Testament

The writings of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy)

Old Testament History (Joshua to Esther)

Poetic books (Job to Song of Solomon)

Major (or Longer) Prophets (Isaiah to Daniel)

Minor (or Shorter) Prophets (Hosea to Malachi)

New Testament

The Gospels (Matthew to John)

History (Acts)

Paul's Letters (Romans to Philemon)

General Letters (Hebrews to Jude)

The Revelation (The book of Revelation)

Why is it important for us to understand that the Bible contains different types of books? For the simple reason that when we come to interpret the Bible we use different methods for these different books. Imagine that you go to a bookshop and pick up a story book that has stories about ghosts and spirits and dragons. You notice that the writer wants to write about the problem of alcohol and he uses ghosts and dragons to show how dangerous and harmful alcohol is. Then you pick up another book which has the history of Kenya since independence. Then you pick up a third book and you notice this one contains poems, traditional short stories and proverbs commonly found in different parts of Kenya. Now you know that these are three very different types of books. In the first book, the writer is not writing about real ghosts and real dragons, he is using these things to show how dangerous alcohol is. So when we read a paragraph in a book of this kind, we keep in mind the kind of book it is and interpret it accordingly. Similarly, when you read a poem or a proverb or a short story, you keep in mind the kind of literature it is when you seek to

understand it.

The same is true of the Bible. In the Bible we find some books contain history, some contain poems and proverbs, some are letters written to a specific church or person. These are different types of literature and we need to keep this in mind when we come to interpret the Bible.

Summary of Lesson Two – What is in the Bible?

In this lesson we looked at the question, “What is in the Bible?” and we have looked at three things:

1. There are 66 books in the Bible.
2. There are two testaments in the Bible: the Old Testament and the New Testament.
3. There are different types of books in the Bible.

Lesson Three: What is the central message of the Bible?

In the last lesson we began to look at the contents of the Bible. We saw that it is a book that contains a lot of variety: there are 66 books, there are two testaments and there are books of many different kinds. Now we need to keep in mind that while there is a lot of variety in the Bible, it is actually one book with one central message. In this sense, then, the Bible is not like a book shop. In a bookshop we find many different kinds of books, and each book has its own particular message. We would not expect all the books in a bookshop to have one message. But the Bible has one message.

In this lesson we are going to look at the central message of the Bible by studying **Luke 24:25-27**. Before proceeding with this lesson please read Luke 24:13-35. In this passage we find the account of the two disciples who met the risen Lord Jesus Christ as they walked to Emmaus. We are told that they were kept from recognising Jesus. At one point in the conversation, Jesus says, “How foolish you are!” Why were they foolish? For the simple reason that they did not understand the central message of the Bible. Perhaps they had read the Bible many times, but like many people today they had not seen the one central message in the book. This actually is not so surprising. After all, the Bible is a big book written by a lot of people and it has different styles of writing in it. It is not always easy to appreciate that it has one message in it.

In Kenya today, perhaps the most common teaching is this: when God created Adam and Eve, He thought that they would live a life of perfect obedience to Him. Then, one day, to God's great shock Adam actually disobeyed Him and fell into sin. Then, after the fall of Adam, God started making plans for his salvation. He did not want the entire human race to be sent into hell, He wanted to save them. And so there in the garden, after the fall, God began to make plans for how to save people. He first gave them the law, but the people were not able to keep the law, and so finally, as a last resort, He sent His Son Jesus into the world to die for everyone and then He asks everyone to come to Christ and be saved. This is how many people (perhaps most people) in Kenya think of the Bible. This is why people do not read and study the Old Testament in detail. To them, the Old Testament is the story of a failed plan. They accept that it contains many nice stories, but they do not see anything of Christ or God's plan of salvation in it.

Now, it is important for us to understand that this view is completely false. The Bible makes it clear to us that God planned our salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world. It tells us that God elected those who are to be saved before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-4).

Now when we look at Lk. 24:25-27, we see three important things there.

1. The Bible is one story.

When we first read the Bible, we get the impression that it is a collection of stories that

have very little to do with each other. We may think, for example, that the Old Testament contains a collection of nice stories about Noah and Joseph and Moses and King David, but that these stories do not have any relationship to each other. This, however, is wrong. On the road to Emmaus, the Lord Jesus began with Moses and the prophets and used all these to explain the one great story of the Bible. The Bible is one story with a beginning and an end. We can see this clearly when we look at the first few chapters of Genesis and the last few chapters of Revelation. The Bible begins with God creating the heavens and the earth, and it ends with a new heaven and a new earth. In Genesis there is paradise where man walks with God and in Revelation man is in full fellowship with God again. The story of the Bible can be summarised simply like this: God created all things good, sin came in and spoiled God's creation, God put into action the plan that He had formulated before the foundation of the world to redeem creation and His elect people, the plan culminates in the coming of Christ because it is God's will "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10). Christ by His Spirit is now at work in redeeming creation, a work He will complete at His return.

2. The Bible speaks about Christ everywhere.

He is the central message of this book. We are told how the Lord Jesus spoke to these two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (v. 27). Notice that He begins with Moses and shows them that in all the Scriptures there is teaching concerning himself. When we read the Old Testament, we need to keep in mind at all times that its great message is Christ. In Gen. 3:15, soon after the fall of man, God said to the devil, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." This is an announcement by God that He will one day send His Son into the world to utterly defeat Satan and restore creation to its former glory. In Gen. 12:3 God said to Abraham, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Here again is an announcement that when Christ comes He will set up a kingdom that will stretch to every part of the earth. The whole of the Old Testament is the story of how God prepared the way for the coming of Christ.

When we read the Old Testament, therefore, we need to remember always that it was written specifically to point us to Christ.

3. The Bible is all about the work of Christ.

Jesus said to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? (Lk. 24:25-26). In other words, if these two disciples had understood the Old Testament they would not have been surprised that their Lord had suffered and died. Indeed they would have expected the resurrection because the Old Testament says He was to "enter His glory." There are four ways in which the Old Testament prepares us for the atoning work of Christ.

(i) In the first place, the Old Testament shows us the utter sinfulness of the human race.

The Old Testament is basically the story of a nation that had all the finest privileges from God and yet persistently sinned against Him. God had entered into a covenant with Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, God delivered the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand, God gave them His law, God made His dwelling in their midst, God raised up leaders for them, many of whom were devoted to Him, God provided a land for them that was flowing with all good things, God promised to protect them and provide for them and God raised up prophets to bring to them His word and to live exemplary lives before them. These are privileges that no nation on earth had ever enjoyed. Yet, despite all these privileges the nation of Israel was chronically sinful for centuries, and even after they were punished by God, they returned to their sin. This is designed to show us that the problem of sin is a very deep and serious problem: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). The Old Testament shows us that even if a nation has great privileges and is given centuries to try and live a godly life they will fail utterly. It shows us that man's sinfulness is such that he needs a Saviour sent from God.

(ii) In the second place, the Old Testament shows us that God demands a perfect sacrifice for sins. In the book of Leviticus, we read of the sacrifices that the people of God were to bring for their sins. The animal sacrifices had to be perfect without any defect of any kind. This was designed to show us that our own works cannot possibly save us since they are never free from sin, whatever offering we bring will always be unacceptable because we are sinners by nature. If we are to be saved then it must be "with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:19)

(iii) In the third place the Old Testament tells us that God Himself is the one who would provide the sacrifice. The Old Testament priest had to enter the Holy of Holies year after year with animal blood, showing that his work would never end until a better, eternal sacrifice was provided. The prophets of the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah, spoke very clearly about the one who would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, the one upon whom was the punishment that brought us peace and the one on whom the Lord has laid the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6)

(iv) Finally, the Old Testament tells us of the Messiah of God who will triumph over all and usher in His kingdom of peace. It speaks of the one who will "Take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations, His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9:10). None of the kings of Judah or Israel was able to bring peace upon earth or to rule over a kingdom that extended from sea to sea.. The Old Testament account is full of wars which makes us yearn for the Saviour sent from God who will bring eternal peace to the whole of creation.

Jesus called the disciples on the road to Emmaus foolish because they had not read the Old Testament scriptures correctly. How many millions are there in the world who likewise do not see the one great overall theme of the Bible: the Person and work of Christ.

How this applies to us.

Since the Bible is one book with one message, we have to be very careful how we read it. We need to see that every part of the Bible is part of one story, and so every time we read a passage from the Bible, we need to ask ourselves, “How does this fit into the story of the Bible?” Moreover, the Bible is an unfolding revelation which means that throughout the Old Testament, little by little God reveals His great plan to us of what His purposes are. Those who are in the preaching and teaching ministry need to keep this before them at all times when they seek to preach the Scriptures to their people. When we study a passage in order to preach from it, the question we need to ask is not, “What message can I bring to the church from this passage,” but, “How does this fit into the overall story of the Bible?” Once we have understood that we can begin to see how it speaks to us and applies to us.

Summary of Lesson Three – What is the central message of the Bible?

In this lesson we have been looking at the question, “What is the central message of the Bible?” We have looked at Luke 24:25-27 and we have seen three things from it.

1. The Bible is one story.
2. The Bible is all about Christ.
3. The Bible is all about the work of Christ.

Lesson Four: Who wrote the Bible and why did they write it?

We have seen in Lesson One that the Bible is the word of God and that it is God Himself who wrote it. We also saw in that first lesson that the Bible is also the work of men; that when God wrote the Bible He used human beings to write it.

In this lesson, we are going to be looking at the human authors of the Bible. It is important for us to know something about these human beings who wrote the Bible because, as we shall see later, it will help us to understand and interpret the Bible. We will study the material in this lesson by asking a series of questions and seeking answers for them.

1. How many people did God use to write the Bible?

Because we do not know the authors of all the books of the Bible, we cannot give a definite answer to this question. We do know, however, that there were about 40 people whom God used.

2. When did these people live?

The people who wrote the Bible lived many hundreds of years ago. Moses, who wrote the first five books, lived about 3,500 years ago. The apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation, lived until about 1,900 years ago. We can see two things from this:

(i) In the first place we see that the Bible is a very old book. It is not a book that was written just a few years ago; some of its books were written thousands of years ago. This should make us very cautious when we interpret the Bible. The people who wrote the Bible lived in a world that was in many ways very different to our own. Their cultural practices were very different and the way they lived their daily lives was very different. We cannot, therefore, be careless when we are interpreting a passage; we have to think very carefully and do our best to understand the time during which a certain book was written.

(ii) In the second place we see that it took many hundreds of years for the Bible to be written. The time between Moses, who wrote Genesis, and John, who wrote Revelation, was about 1,600 years. This means that the Bible contains a lot of history in its pages. It is not a book that is looking at just a few years of history, it is a book that covers hundreds of years of history when so much happened to the people of God.

3. Who were these people who wrote the Bible?

One of the most wonderful things about the Bible is the variety of people who wrote it. Most books we come across are written by one man. Sometimes we come across a book that was written by five or six people, most of whom are teachers in a college or a univer-

sity. But it is very rare to come across a book written by about 40 people who lived over a period of 1,600 years and who were so completely different from each other. Just think about the men who were involved in writing the Bible and you will see this clearly. Moses, who wrote the first five books was brought up in the palace of one of the most powerful countries of his day and then spent forty years in the wilderness looking after sheep and then led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Paul, who wrote 13 letters in the New Testament came from the city of Tarsus which was not in Israel, was educated in Jerusalem, and was a strict observer of Jewish regulations before he was converted dramatically on the road to Damascus. Peter, on the other hand, was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee who walked with the Lord Jesus during the Lord's three year ministry here on earth. He then denied Christ, was forgiven and restored, and preached a sermon on the Day of Pentecost through which 3,000 were converted to Christ. David, who wrote many of the Psalms was a simple shepherd boy who became the king of Israel. He fought many great battles for the Lord and he fell into great personal sin when he committed adultery and murder before he was restored to the Lord. Amos who wrote one of the prophetic books was a shepherd and Matthew was a tax collector who fellowshiped with "sinners and tax-collectors." These are just some of the 40 or so people who wrote the Bible. There are two important things to learn from this:

(i) We learn that some of God's greatest servants were very ordinary people. Humanly speaking there is nothing great or important about men like Peter and James and Matthew. They were ordinary people living in Israel who were chosen by God for a great work. Even David was an ordinary shepherd and may never have been anything else but a shepherd if God did not appoint him to be king of Israel. We often think that if a man wants to be a great servant of God then he has to be a man of importance and significance in this world and must be highly educated. But that is not true. God takes hold of the most ordinary of people and uses them mightily for His work.

(ii) We learn that the Bible is a book of great variety because it has been written by such a variety of people. Whoever reads the Bible will find something there for him. If an intelligent and well educated person reads the Bible, he will find in the writings of Paul great and deep theology which will challenge him. If a person who has fallen into very serious sin reads the Bible, he will find in the Psalms of David great encouragement on how such a man can be forgiven and restored to the Lord. If a person needs very practical instructions on how to live the Christian life in the world he can find much that is good in the writings of Peter who lived a very ordinary life in the world until he was converted.

4. Why did these people write the books of the Bible?

This is actually a very important question since it helps us to interpret the Bible. We know that Moses wrote Genesis, that Luke wrote Acts, that Paul wrote 2 Timothy and John wrote Revelation. The question is why? Why did Paul decide to get some writing materials and write a letter to Timothy? Why did Moses write Genesis while the people of Israel were still in the wilderness? There are five main reasons why the books of the Bible were written.

(i) Some books were written to give teaching to the people of God. Genesis was written by Moses to explain to the people of Israel that the God who rescued them from slavery in Egypt was not like some idol with limited powers, like the ones they had seen in Egypt; He was the creator of the heavens and the earth. Also He was not some distant and remote deity - He had entered into a covenant with their forefathers and this was the reason why He had rescued them from Egypt. Moses wrote the book to show people that there was a grand plan of salvation that God was working out and that was why He had made a covenant with Abraham and it was the reason why He had rescued Israel. Similarly, Romans was written to explain how sinful man can be made right with a holy God and Hebrews was written to show that the New Covenant was vastly superior to the Old Covenant because Christ was at the centre of the New Covenant.

(ii) There are some books in the Bible which were written to help Christians when they had problems. The church at Corinth had a lot of problems in their daily church life and also several issues that they were confused about. When Paul heard about these problems, he wrote the first letter to the Corinthians specifically to address these problems and difficulties they were having. This is also true of letters like Galatians and Colossians.

(iii) There are some books of the Bible where the experiences of a believer have been written for the help and encouragement of other believers. King Solomon lived a very full life and had a lot of experiences. He was therefore led by the Spirit of God to write books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. These books are full of instruction for us on how to live life here on earth and how to handle difficult situations. Similarly many of the Psalms were written by men in distress who had called upon the Lord and had found help.

(iv) There are books where God gives very specific instructions to His people. This is true, for example, of Leviticus where the people of Israel were told how they were to bring worship to God. It is also true of most of the prophetic books. The prophets were sent to the people of God with very specific instructions: that they were to repent of their sins and come back to the Lord.

(v) There are some books where history is recorded so that the people of God may know of the great works of God in the past and may draw instruction, encouragement and warnings from them. Most of the historical books of the Old Testament and the book of Acts would fall into this category. The four gospels, similarly, record the works and teaching of Christ for the encouragement and instruction of Christians.

These are the five main reasons why the writers of the Bible wrote their books. When we come to interpret a passage in the Bible, one of the first questions we need to ask is, "Why did the writer write this book?" This is because the purpose of the writer must determine the interpretation of the reader. The reader cannot place an interpretation on a passage that the writer never intended. This is quite obvious from everyday life. If you receive a letter and you read it and try to understand what it means, you have to ask yourself why did the sender send this? If you place an interpretation on a sentence that the writer never intended then you have gone wrong. In the same way we must ask ourselves first, "What

did the original writer say and what did he mean?"

5. What languages was the Bible written in?

The Bible was written in three languages. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. There are three passages in the Old Testament which were not written in Hebrew but in a language called Aramaic: Ezra 4:8-6:18; Ezra 7:11-26 and Daniel 2:4-7:28. The New Testament is written in Greek. None of these languages is in common use today. The Jewish people in Israel today use a language called Yiddish which is very different from Old Testament Hebrew. People in Greece today speak Greek but again it is very different from the Greek of the New Testament.

Summary of Lesson Four – Who wrote the Bible and why did they write it?

In this lesson we looked at five questions which were designed to help us understand who wrote the Bible and why. The questions we looked at are:

1. How many people did God use to write the Bible?
2. When did these people live?
3. Who were these people who wrote the Bible?
4. Why did these people write the Bible?
5. What languages was the Bible written in?

Lesson Five: How do we read and study the Bible?

These two questions are perhaps the most important questions of a practical nature that a person can ask. As you have worked your way through this course you have learnt much about the Bible. There are now many facts about the Bible that you know. But all this knowledge is useless unless you actually read and study the Bible yourself. There are many people in our country today who say they are Christians but they never read and study the Bible. In this lesson we will see how we should do these things.

1. Personal Bible Reading.

There are certain things you need to do in order to profit from your own personal Bible reading.

1. Read the Bible prayerfully. Remember that it is the word of God and that we can only understand it with the help of God Himself. Before you start to read, pray that God would teach you from His word and that He would give you the ability to obey what you have read.
2. Read the Bible regularly. Do not be a person who reads a passage from the Bible one day and then leaves it for a few days and then reads another passage. Make sure you read the Bible every day. The best way to do this is to put aside a certain time everyday, perhaps early in the morning or lunch time or in the evening. Do not leave it until it is very late at night as you will be tired by then. Also if you do not have electricity then read the Bible during the day. Once you do this a few times it will become a habit.
3. Read the Bible systematically. Some people will read a chapter from John's gospel one day, and then a chapter from Joshua the next day and so on. Do not do this as it will not really profit you. The best thing is to read through a book of the Bible chapter by chapter. Have a notebook and pen nearby and make sure that you write notes as you read. If you read something that you do not understand then make a note of it and ask a pastor who is likely to know. If you read something that has been of great profit to you personally make a note of that also. You will find as you read the Bible year by year that your knowledge of it grows.
4. Read the Bible wisely. There are people who are fascinated by the books of Daniel and Revelation, and so when they read the Bible they try to read those books and to understand them. This is not wise. The books of Daniel and Revelation are among the hardest in the Bible to understand. There are books in the Bible which are much easier to understand. Start with one of the gospels like Mark. Also it is not always wise to read the books of the Bible in the order they are found in the Bible. Do not start at Genesis then read Exodus then Leviticus then Numbers then Deuteronomy and so on. The best way is to vary the type of literature you are reading. If you have just read Genesis then it might be a good idea to read a New Testament letter like Philippians, then something like 1 Samuel then something like Haggai, and so on.
5. Read the Bible with a humble, teachable heart. One of the biggest problems we have in

our country today is how people read the Bible. There are thousands of people who read the Bible every day, but they read it in the wrong way. They do not come to God's word with a humble and teachable heart. They come to the Bible having already decided what they believe. They do not come seeking to be taught from the Bible. They have already decided what they believe on a number of issues and if the Bible disagrees with them then they simply ignore the Bible. This, of course, is completely the wrong way to read the word of God. The Bible was given to teach us and so we need to come to the Bible to learn. If the Bible disagrees with something we hold dearly with all our heart, then we should be willing to let go of our belief and follow the Bible.

6. Remember as you read the Bible that it is one book with one message, it is revealing to you God's great plan of salvation which is being worked out throughout the whole book.

2. Family Bible Reading.

If you have a family, then apart from reading the Bible for yourself personally, you should also have a time when you gather with your family and read the Bible together. This is a duty that is laid especially upon fathers: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Here are some guidelines on how you can conduct daily Bible reading in the home with your family.

1. Have Bible reading daily. Do not read the Bible as a family one day and then leave it for a few days and then have family Bible reading again. This will not really benefit your family. Make sure that you read the Bible each day.

2. Read the Bible as a family prayerfully. Start with a time of prayer asking God's help to understand His word and then close with a time of prayer.

3. Choose a good time of day for your Bible reading. Do not leave it until it is very late at night as your children will be too tired and will fall asleep. Remember the duty to teach your children is a command from God and so it must take priority over other things. It is not right to say always, "I have a very busy life so I cannot do this." If God has commanded us to do something then other things in our life need to be changed so that we make sure we are obeying the commands of God.

4. Read the Bible systematically. Do not read a passage from a certain book one day and then a passage from a completely different book the next day. Your children need to understand that each book of the Bible was written for a purpose and has a message. Start with a fairly simple book like the gospel of Mark and read a passage from it each day. Make sure that each member of your family has a Bible and that they are following the reading. If your children are old enough to read then ask them to do some of the reading.

5. Be wise in teaching your family. Do not feel that after reading a passage you must give a long sermon on it. It may be necessary to discuss a point that has come up in the reading or you may decide that something difficult in the passage needs to be explained, but you do not need to preach a long sermon to your family each day. If you do this your children may get bored and find daily family Bible reading a chore rather than a pleasure.

3. Studying the Bible.

Studying the Bible is different from daily Bible reading. In daily Bible reading you read a chapter a day and so read through a book. When you are studying the Bible, you may spend many days on one passage seeking to understand fully its meaning and teaching. Here are some guidelines for how to study the Bible.

1. Choose a book of the Bible that you are going to study for the next few weeks or months. If this is the first time you are doing this, make sure it is a short and simple book. Paul's letter to the Philippians or 1 Thessalonians is a good choice as both books are fairly simple and short.

2. First read through the whole book in one sitting making brief notes as you do. This will help you to get an idea of what the book is about and what are some of the main themes in it.

3. If you are able, find out something about the book by reading other literature. You may find a good Bible dictionary or a good Study Bible that gives you some background information about the book you are studying.

4. Begin to study the book passage by passage. You may be able to divide up the book as you go along, so that in your notes you have something like this: Philippians ch. 1 vs. 1-2 Opening greetings; vs. 3-11 Paul's prayer for the church at Philippi, and so on. In this way you can write out how the book is divided into passages which have a common theme. Look through the passage carefully and prayerfully, seeking to understand what the writer is saying and how it applies to you.

You will find that the first time you study a book there is much that you still do not understand. Do not let this discourage you. Remember that it is only when you study the same book several times that you begin to understand some of its depth.

4. Some additional points on reading and studying the Bible.

1. Find your level as to how much you can read each day. There are people who read three or four chapters each day and so in this way they can read through the Bible each year. If you are able to do that then it is fine. However, do not read a large portion if you are not able to profit from it. If you find that one chapter a day is all you can manage then do that. Remember you are reading the Bible for spiritual profit. In the same way when you read the Bible with your family do not feel you have to read a whole chapter each day. You may find that there is a lot of content in just a few verses and it is better for them to think about those few verses.

2. Find a suitable time and keep to it. Daily Bible reading is a habit that needs to be formed. If you never form the habit you will not read the Bible everyday. The best way to form a habit is to do something at the same time each day. Then after a few days you will find yourself doing that thing without even thinking about it. In the same way, make sure that your family Bible reading becomes a habit. Choose a time when the children are not distracted and not too tired and keep to that time each day without fail. Find a time

when you are not going to be disturbed by neighbours or friends and when you are least tired. If you do not have electricity then make sure you read the Bible during the day.

3. Find a good version of the Bible to read and study. If you visit a good Christian bookshop you will see that there are several different versions of the English Bible available. Find one that is a faithful translation and suits you best. There is a feeling in our country that the King James Version is the best translation available and that if we are using a translation other than the King James then we are using an inferior Bible, one that is not quite good enough. This feeling is simply not true. The King James is a good translation but it is not necessarily the best translation and it is not always easy to understand because the most recent version of it was made in England in the 18th century. For a person whose first language is not English this translation is actually not the best one. There are modern versions of the Bible which are very good translations and easy to understand. The best modern translations available are the English Standard Version (ESV), The New King James Version (NKJV) and the New International Version (NIV). Each of these is fairly easy to understand.

4. Find help in other books. We as Christians are blessed because there are so many good books to help us understand and interpret the Bible. There are books which will give you a general introduction to the Bible and there are commentaries for every book of the Bible. There are also Study Bibles which will help you to study a passage or a book. Use as much material as you are able; it will enrich your Bible reading. However, you need to be careful when using other books as not all books are helpful. Some books contain a lot of wrong teaching so you need to be careful in deciding which materials to use.

5. Find other Christians to study with. It is always a good idea to study the Bible with others. So if you have friends and neighbours who are saved and are hungry for the Scriptures, why not meet with them on a regular basis to study a book of the Bible?

6. As you read each book of the Bible, look for how it fits into God's great plan of salvation which He put into action from before the foundation of the world. Remember each book is designed to teach us about Christ and to lead us to Him.

Summary of Lesson Five – How do we read and study the Bible?

In this lesson, we looked at the questions of how do we read and study the Bible. We looked at four things:

1. Personal Bible Reading
2. Family Bible Reading
3. Studying the Bible
4. Some additional points on reading and studying the Bible

Lesson Six: How do we Interpret the Bible?

We have seen that the Bible is the word of God. This means that we have to be extremely careful in how we interpret it. It is God's word to man, and it is therefore important that we understand it correctly. If we are careless in our interpretation of the Bible, then all sorts of very serious errors will arise. People will be confused with regard to the way of salvation, with regard to how to live a life that pleases God and with regard to how to deal with sin.

Now when we come to interpret the Bible, there are five questions we need to ask. These questions will help us enormously in arriving at a correct interpretation of the passage we are studying.

Qtn. 1 - What did the writer intend to say when he wrote this passage?

Remember that in Lesson One when we were looking at the question, "What is the Bible?" we saw that the Bible is a work involving both God and human writers. In other words human writers were fully involved in writing the Bible. Now when we are interpreting any document the golden rule is that the passage must mean what the original writer wanted it to mean. It cannot possibly mean anything else. Therefore, the first question we have to ask is, "What did the original writer intend to say when he wrote this passage?" This is why it is so important for us to know why each book of the Bible was written. If we know why a particular book was written, then we can work out why a certain passage in the book was written.

Qtn. 2 - How does the writer organise his book?

This is the next question that follows quite logically from the first question. In order to interpret a passage correctly, we need to know why the writer wrote that passage. In order to find out why the writer wrote a particular passage, we need to know why he wrote the book and how he organised his book. Perhaps an illustration will help us to understand this. Let us look at Romans 4:1-5. When we read this passage, we see that Paul here is speaking about Abraham. What was Paul trying to tell the Romans in this passage? In order to answer this question we need to ask two more questions: why did Paul write the letter to the Romans, and how does he organise this letter? When we study the letter itself, we see that it was written to explain to the Christians in Rome exactly what the gospel of Christ really is. Paul wrote the letter to explain to the Christians in Rome that we are made right with God not by our own works and efforts but by faith alone in Christ alone and how we should then live.

Having answered that first question, we can now answer the second one, how does Paul organise this letter. When we look at the letter we can see that after an introduction in the first 17 verses, Paul shows how the whole human race is steeped in sin in the sight of God (1:18-3:20). We see that he then shows that God's answer to man's sin is the great doctrine of justification by faith alone (3:21-31). Then in chapter 4 he begins to talk about Abraham and David. Why? The answer must be that he wants to show that the people of

God in the Old Testament were not saved by their own works, but were also justified by faith. This is why he quotes Gen. 15:6 in Rom. 4:3.

We can see in this that these two questions go together: what did the original writer intend to say and how does he organise his book? When we have seen the purpose for which the book was written and how the book is laid out we can see what the writer intends to say in each passage.

Qtn. 3 - What is the writer actually saying in this passage?

Once we have decided on what the writer intends to say in a passage, we need to then examine the passage to see what he actually says in it. There are three things we need to do in order to find out what the writer is actually saying.

(i) Examine carefully the words used. Words, as we all know, carry meaning and so it is important to find out exactly what each word means in the passage. Without doing this we will never find out what the passage says.

(ii) Take great care with things like symbols and figures of speech. For example, in 2 Tim. 2:4 Paul says, “No-one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer.” Now we know that when Paul wrote this letter he was not writing a manual for soldiers in an army, he was writing to Christians. In this verse he uses three symbols: the soldier is the Christian, the commanding officer is Christ and civilian affairs means worldly matters. The Bible is full of symbols like this and we have to take great care when interpreting them.

(iii) Take great care with the historical and cultural background. Remember that the Bible was written many hundreds of years ago in a part of the world whose culture is not familiar to us. Take, for example, Matt. 18:17 where we are told to treat those who fall into public sin and then refuse to repent as “a tax-collector.” What does this mean? We have to understand that in the days of Jesus tax collectors were the outcasts of society and were shunned by everyone in society. So when Jesus says we are to treat people in this way He means we are not to have close Christian fellowship with them. This is why we sometimes need to consult other books to make sure that we are aware of the culture of the day.

Qtn. 4 - What bearing do other passages of the Bible have on this passage?

The Bible is a big book and it is full of teaching. When we come to interpret any passage, therefore, we have to keep in mind the teaching of the Bible as a whole, otherwise we will go badly wrong. Take, for example, the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matt. 25:31-46. At first reading this parable seems to teach that salvation is by good works. It seems to say that those who did good works like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting the sick will earn a place for themselves in heaven. But we have to remember that the Bible teaches very clearly that this is not the case. It makes it very clear that it is by faith alone in Christ alone that we are saved, and that once we are truly saved we will give

proof of this by doing good works. And so the interpretation of this parable is not that our good works will earn us a place in heaven but that those who have genuine saving faith in Christ will do good works as proof that their faith is a living faith and not dead.

Because we have to keep in mind the whole Bible when we interpret a certain passage, we have to know the Bible well. We need to keep in mind constantly its central message. The person who is given the task of preaching and teaching the Bible needs to know the teaching of the Bible thoroughly, otherwise he will go badly wrong.

Qtn. 5 – What is this passage saying to us today and how does it apply to us today?

Notice that these questions do not come first but last. It is the habit of many people, when they read a passage from the Bible, to ask themselves first, “What is God saying to me here? How does this passage apply to me?” These are important questions but they are not the questions we ask first. We must first interpret the passage correctly and then ask ourselves what it means for us today and how we are to live in the light of its teaching. Take, for example, the well known parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37). Now we know what this parable is saying to us because Jesus says, “Go and do likewise” (v. 37). But what exactly are we to do in obedience to this command? In the parable we are told of a man who had been beaten by robbers and was lying on the road. Two men, a priest and Levite both passed by without helping him. The priest probably thought he would become ceremonially unclean if he touched the man and the man happened to be dead. The Levite may have made the excuse that he was needed in the temple for duty. A Samaritan came and found the man and helped him. Now when we look at why Jesus told this parable, we find that it was in answer to the question, “Who is my neighbour?” The Bible tells us to love our neighbour, but who is my neighbour? This parable tells us that it is anyone who is in need. We are not to make excuses arising out of our religion or out of tribe or clan or nationality or anything like that. Imagine that a pastor of a church who belongs to a certain tribe is on his way to church on a Sunday when he sees a man from a rival tribe who also happens to be a Muslim in great need. What is the pastor to do? Is he to say, “I can't help, I am on my way to church to take the service”? Is he to think to himself, “This man belongs to a rival tribe and also he is a Muslim. Why should I help him?” The answer, of course, is no. He is to help the man regardless of his tribe or religion or anything like that. That is the application of this parable for us today.

Summary of Lesson Six – How do we interpret the Bible?

In this lesson we have been learning how to interpret the Bible. We have seen that in order to interpret it correctly, we must ask five questions:

Qtn. 1 – What did the writer intend to say when he wrote this passage?

Qtn. 2 – How does the writer organise his book?

Qtn. 3 – What is the writer actually saying in the passage?

Qtn. 4 – What bearing do other passages of the Bible have on this passage?

Qtn. 5 – What is the passage saying to us today, and how does it apply to us today?

Lesson Seven – How do we Preach the Bible?

In this lesson we are going to look at how we preach the Bible. Preaching the Bible is a most important duty that God has laid upon His servants. The preacher has the task of telling people what God says in His word and how it applies to them. He is not at liberty to make up his own message and tell people his own ideas and thoughts. The preacher is a messenger and a messenger has to take a message from his master to the people.

The first thing to remember is that normally the best way to preach is to preach through a book from beginning to end. Many times a preacher is tempted to preach from a text in one book on a certain Sunday and then to preach from a completely different book the next Sunday, and so on. This will not help the congregation. It is best if the preacher takes one book of the Bible and preaches through it week by week until he has completed it, and then preaches through another book, and so on. This is a good general rule to follow, although, of course, there are times when a topical sermon is appropriate, like at a funeral or a wedding.

There are four things that preachers must do in order to bring the word of God to the people of God.

1. We must interpret carefully the passage we are going to preach from.

As we saw in the last lesson, this is a most important thing because the preacher must first find out what the word of God is saying. Until he knows what the word of God is saying, he cannot preach it. Imagine that a businessman sends one of his employees to another businessman with a message. The messenger must first understand fully what the message is that he is to take. If for any reason he has not understood the message his master has given him then he cannot take the message. He has to ask his master to clarify the message so that he can take it correctly. In the same way preachers are messengers of God's word. We cannot make up our own message and then take it to the people. We cannot make up our own interpretation of a passage and then preach that. To do that is wrong because we are not then preaching what God is saying, we are preaching our own thoughts and ideas.

2. We must organise the teaching of the passage into a sermon.

The people of God must be taught in such a way that they remember what they have heard. We must be very careful to teach in such a way that the teaching is well organised so that if a person is asked later what they were taught they can remember it. Now human beings generally remember things when they are in well ordered points. If a preacher just talks for 40 minutes about a subject, it is very difficult to remember what he has said. But if he presents his sermon in well ordered points then it will be much easier for the people to understand and remember. A good sermon, therefore, will not be too long, will have a clear theme and clearly laid out points which people can follow and remember.

Let us take Col. 1:13-14 as an example. The text says, "For he rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." The person preaching from this text first interprets the text and decides that the text is talking about what God did when He saved us. He would therefore arrange his sermon in this form:

Theme: What God did when He saved us

First Point: He rescued us from the power of darkness.

Second Point: He brought us into the kingdom of His Son.

Third Point: He redeemed us from sin through Christ.

Fourth Point: He forgave us our sins through Christ.

There would then be application of this at the end of the sermon.

3. We must preach Christ.

Remember, He is the central message in the Bible and no one will ever get saved until they come to Him for the forgiveness of their sins. So our sermons must always point to Christ as the only Saviour sent from God.

4. We must preach the sermon clearly and carefully.

Once the preacher has interpreted the passage and has arranged his points for a sermon, there remains the important task of preaching it. Standing before a congregation and bringing to them God's word is a very important task and it is not something we should take lightly or something we should do without even thinking about it. A preacher needs to think carefully about the clothes he wears and about how he speaks. He must not behave in such a way that the word of God is obscured; he must do all he can to make sure that the word of God has been brought faithfully and accurately to the people of God.

Remember that at every stage we must pray to God and seek His assistance to be clear, concise and bold. It is His word we are preaching and not ours.

Summary of Lesson Seven – How do we preach the Bible?

In this lesson we have seen that the best way to preach the Bible is to preach it book by book rather than by random or isolated texts. There are four steps to preaching the Bible.

1. We have to interpret correctly the passage we are preaching.
2. We have to organise the teaching of the passage in a form such that people can understand it and remember it.
3. We must preach Christ as the central theme of the Bible.
4. Having done these three things, we then stand before the people of God and deliver His message to them.