



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 17.1.1 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

The Old Testament Is God's Word

The Bible, as we know it today, is made up of two parts: the Old Testament, written in the Hebrew language in the years before Jesus was born (with a few passages in Aramaic); and the New Testament, written in the Greek language after Jesus was born.

For many years of world history there was no written Word of God; there was no Bible. God spoke either directly or through prophets, and this Word was passed down orally from generation to generation. The first one to put God's Word into written words was Moses, the prophet God chose to lead the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. God guided Moses in the writing of the first five books of the Old Testament. These books are known as the Pentateuch. As the years passed, God sent other prophets to reveal His Word in writing to His people. The last prophet God sent was Malachi, and after him there was no written revelation from God until after Jesus was born.

Jesus Himself testified that Moses was the man God chose to begin the writing of Holy Scripture. He said to His enemies: **"There is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"** (John 5:45-47).

The Bible that Jesus knew was this Hebrew Old Testament (and a Greek translation) with its three divisions. After His resurrection Jesus said to His followers: **"These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me"** (Luke 24:44). The three divisions were the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. The Bible that Jesus accepted and approved of was this book of three divisions, which is our present Old Testament. In this book God made many promises. Jesus said that all the things foretold about Him in the Old Testament will be fulfilled. He mentioned two things in particular: **"Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day"** (Luke 24:46). Jesus' death and resurrection were already foretold in the Old Testament.

The Gospels of the New Testament, written by Jesus' apostles and their associates, point out in numerous places that what Jesus was saying and doing was fulfilling the Old Testament Scriptures. The first such mention is typical of the many others. We read in the Gospel of Matthew, in connection with the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary: **"All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel'"** (Matthew 1:22-23). Notice the claim that is made here, that it was the Lord Himself who spoke the prophecy of Jesus' virgin birth; the Lord spoke these words through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14).

In His teaching Jesus often referred to the Old Testament as the Word of God and as the final authority in all matters of which it spoke. For example, when the Pharisees asked Him a question about marriage and divorce, Jesus responded by saying: **"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female?"** (Matthew 19:4). Jesus was referring to the first book of the five books of Moses, the book of Genesis. It is of interest that in His teaching Jesus referred to many miraculous incidents that many Bible readers today dismiss as untrustworthy. Jesus accepted the accounts of

creation, the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the bronze serpent on a pole, the healing of the leper Naaman, and the account of Jonah in the belly of a great fish. Jesus accepted all the Old Testament accounts as factual and true, and we should accept them as true also. In fact, in His parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus pointed out that there is no testimony more powerful than God's Word in its ability to bring people to faith in God's plan of salvation. He said: **"They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them"** (Luke 16:29), and then added: **"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead"** (Luke 16:31).

In His arguments with the Jewish leaders Jesus often appealed to the Old Testament. For example, in one such argument Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6 and then said: **"And the Scripture cannot be broken"** (John 10:35). What God says in His Word stands impregnable, and it cannot be altered in any way. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He withstood Satan's attacks by saying over and over again: **"It is written ..."** (Luke 4:4). There can be no doubt that Jesus considered the Old Testament to be the Word of God.

Jesus' apostles followed their Master in accepting the Old Testament as the Word of God. In the early days of the church in Jerusalem, the believers prayed: **"Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said"** a verse from Psalm 2 (Acts 4:24-25). Notice that they regarded a psalm written by David as an utterance of their Lord and God. The apostle Paul quoted a passage from the book of Isaiah when he was in Rome and told his listeners: **"The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers"** (Acts 28:25).

In his letter to the Romans Paul said: **"God ... promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 1:2-3). The prophets spoke and wrote the words, but it was God Himself speaking through them. Paul pointed out the special advantage given to the Jewish people, saying: **"What advantage then has the Jew? ... Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God"** (Romans 3:1-2). The letter to the Hebrews begins with this assertion: **"God, who at various times and in various way spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son"** (Hebrews 1:1-2). Later the same writer attributes Psalm 95 to the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 3:7: **"The Holy Spirit says"**).

There are two New Testament passages in particular that ascribe not only individual sayings to the Holy Spirit, but the entire Old Testament Scriptures. The apostle Peter wrote: **"Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"** (2 Peter 1:21). The prophetic Word is sure because it is the Word of God Himself. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"** (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The word translated "given by inspiration" could more literally be translated "God-breathed". The thought is that the words of Scripture came out from God; He is their true Author. The prophets were the Lord's mouthpieces. Notice that he says **"all Scripture"**, not just certain parts of it.

Questions

1. What are the two main divisions of the Bible?
2. In what languages were they originally written?
3. How did God speak to His people before the first Bible book was written?
4. Who was the first prophet to write down the words God gave him?
5. What are the three divisions of the Old Testament listed by Jesus?
6. How did Jesus show He accepted the Old Testament as God's Word?
7. How did Jesus' apostles show they accepted the Old Testament as God's Word?
8. What special advantage did the Jewish people have over other peoples?
9. What do we mean when we speak of the inspiration of the Old Testament?