



# Scripture Study Course

edited by Don Schwager

---

## Daily Study – Readings and Meditations

### Week 2

#### **The Unity of Scripture – One Word and One Spirit**

- Morning Meditations (30 minutes): prepared by Don Schwager
  - Reaping Great Fruit from God’s Word – Isaiah 55:6-12 and Luke 8:8-15
  - “In the beginning” – Genesis 1 and John 1
  - “You have crowned him with glory and honor” – Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2
  - “I have put my words in your mouth” – Jeremiah 1 and Hebrews 1
  - “When you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” – Numbers 12:3-8 and Hebrews 3
- Readings for study (15-20 minutes):
  - *The Unity of the Old and New Testaments*, by Don Schwager
  - *The Scriptures Are One Book in Christ*: quotes from early church fathers
  - *What is the Bible*, by Peter Kreeft
  - *God Speaks to Us in the Bible*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1936
  - *How to Read the Bible*, by Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware, 2003
  - *The Bible’s Intrinsic Unity*, by Benedict XVI (2010)

## Reaping Fruit from God's Word

Isaiah 55:6-12 (NIV)

### Seeking and knowing God

<sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.<sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

<sup>8</sup> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.<sup>9</sup> "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

<sup>10</sup> As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,<sup>11</sup> so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

<sup>12</sup> You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

### Some questions for reflection

1. Why does God tell us that we must seek him now and not wait (verse 6)?
2. Why would he tell us to forsake thoughts and ways that might be opposed to his (verse 7)? Are there any particular thought patterns, negative attitudes, or way of relating towards others that the Lord might want me to change today?
3. Why are God's thoughts and ways so much higher than my own way of thinking and acting (verses 8-9)? Is there a particular thought (or way of thinking) that the Lord might want me to embrace today so I can be more conformed to his way of thinking and acting?
4. How is God's word like a seed that must be sown in the ground (verses 10-11)? And how does God plant his word in the earth – in the hearts and minds of people? How can we tell if his word is taking root, sprouting, making growth, and yielding mature fruit in me?
5. What kind of reward does the Lord offer to those who allow his word to be planted in their heart and mind (verses 12)? What kind of fruit might I expect to grow in me as I seek to live out God's word in my daily life?

Read Jesus' parable of the sower in Luke 8:8-15 (see next page). How is it similar in thought to the passage from Isaiah 55:6-12? Do you think Jesus might have had the passage from Isaiah in mind when he taught the parable of the sower?

## The Parable of the Sower

Luke 8:8-15(RSV)

### Scattering seeds among thorns and rocky ground

<sup>4</sup> While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:

<sup>5</sup> “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up.

<sup>6</sup> Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.

<sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.

<sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”

When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

### Questions for reflection

What is the literal meaning of the story of the sower planting seeds in a field? What kind of seed did the farmer likely sow? Perhaps corn or wheat which were common sources of food? Did the farmer plow the field first to prepare the soil so he could bury the seeds? Did he successfully remove rocks, weeds, and bushes that might impede the growth of seeds?

Why did the sower scatter some seed on the path where people walked daily? Why did he scatter some seed on rocky ground? Didn't he know the seed would have little chance of surviving on hard ground? And why did he scatter some seed near thorn bushes? Didn't he know that the thorn bushes would likely grow quicker and overtake the thin and more vulnerable stalks of wheat or corn?

Was Jesus, perhaps, punning with his audience when he compared “ears of corn” with human “ears that can hear?” What is the meaning of the comparison between the sowing and reaping of seed that produces wheat or corn with human ears that hear and respond to fruitful words? Perhaps Jesus is warning his listeners to examine how they are hearing his word – a word that can produce the fruits of God's kingdom in their lives.

Jesus normally does not explain the meaning of his parables to his audience. He wants his listeners to think for themselves and to discover the deeper spiritual meaning which can be found hidden underneath the literal meaning of the story.

### Jesus' interpretation of the parable

Luke tells us that when the twelve disciples were alone with Jesus, after the crowd had left, the disciples then asked Jesus to give them the correct understand of the parable. This is what we, too, must do each time we listen to one of Jesus' parables. We must ask the Lord to show us the meaning of his stories and teaching and how we might apply the meaning to our own individual lives and the daily circumstances and opportunities we encounter.

**Luke 8:11** “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup> Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. <sup>14</sup> The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. <sup>15</sup> But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

**The Word of God Is Living and Active – Hebrews 4:12**



**You Can Understand the Bible**

by Peter Kreeft

Reading the Bible should be a form of prayer. The Bible should be read in God's presence and as the unfolding of His mind. It is not just a book, but God's love letter to you. It is God's revelation, God's mind, operating through your mind and your reading, so your reading is your response to His mind and will. Reading it is aligning your mind and will with God's; therefore it is a fulfillment of the prayer "Thy will be done", which is the most basic and essential key to achieving our whole purpose on earth: holiness and happiness. I challenge each reader to give a good excuse (to God, not to me, or even just to yourself) for not putting aside fifteen minutes a day to use this fundamental aid to fulfilling the meaning of your life.

Both prayer and Bible reading are ways of listening to God. They should blend: our prayer should be biblical and our Bible reading prayerful...

Its power comes from two wills, God's and ours. It is the Spirit's sword (Ephesians 6:17) that cuts our very being apart (Hebrews 4:12), though we must give it an opening by exposing our minds and hearts and wills to its cutting edge. When we do that, God's Kingdom comes to earth. For it first comes to that tiny but crucially important bit of earth that is your mind and will. Then it transforms your life, which your mind and will control. Then, through your life, your world.

**What strange kind of a book is this, anyway?**

The word *Bible* means "book," (singular). But the Bible is in fact seventy-two different books (sixty-six in the Protestant canon) from many different authors and times and in many different literary styles and forms: history, poetry, prophecy, drama, philosophy, letters, visions, practical advice, songs, laws, and much more. This is not a book, this is a world.

Yet there is a unity in this diversity. Most essentially the Bible is a story. Unlike the holy books of other religions, the Bible's basic line is a story line. It narrates real events that really happened to real people in real history. G. K. Chesterton said, "There are only two things that never get boring: stories and persons." The persons involved here include the three most important Persons of all: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible is "stories of God". But it is also stories about us, about our relationships with God and each other. (The word *religion*, from the Latin *religare*, means essentially "binding relationship".) The horizontal (man-to-man) and vertical (man-to-God) relationships meet here and form a cross.

But there are many kinds of stories: war stories, love stories, detective stories, and many more. What kind of story is this? It tells us what kind of story we are in; that is how it tells us the meaning of our lives.

It is a love story, because it is history, and history is "His story", and He is love. Love is God's plan and purpose in all that He does.

The story unfolds in three acts, which theologians call creation, fall, and redemption. Every story ever told fits this pattern, because this is the basic pattern of all human history.

We could call the three stages setup, upset, and reset. First a situation is set up; then it is somehow upset by a problem or conflict or challenge; and then it is reset, when the challenge is confronted, either successfully or unsuccessfully. Paradise, Paradise Lost, and Paradise Regained are the three acts of the cosmic human drama, and we are now in the third act, which began as early as the third chapter of Genesis, when God began to "redeem", or buy back, fallen mankind.

This third act, in turn, has three scenes. First, God reveals Himself as Father, in the Old Testament; then as Jesus the Son in the Gospels; finally, He sends the Holy Spirit to be the soul of His Church for the rest of time.

### **History, Wisdom, and Prophecy**

The books of both Old and New Testaments are divided into three main categories: history, wisdom, and prophecy. Thus the Bible encompasses past, present, and future. But its history books are more than records of the past; they tell us truths that are just as true and operative for the present. And its wisdom books tell timeless truths that are not just for the present time but for all times. Finally, its prophets do not merely foretell the future, but "forth-tell" God's truth for all times. The whole Bible is God's permanent prophet continually telling forth the truths we need to know to guide our road on earth to a happy eternity.

There are two fundamentally different ways of reading the Bible: as God's Word to man or as man's word about God; as divine revelation or as human speculation; as God's certain "way down" to us or as our groping and uncertain "way up" to Him. It claims to be the first of those two things: divine revelation, "the Word of God". But it is the Word of God in the words of men. For God is a good teacher and therefore gives us not only everything that we need but also only what we can take. He reveals Himself more and more, progressively, as we progress through our story. Stories are not static. At first, it is simple, even simplistic and crude—"baby talk", if you will. But it is true, even perfect, baby talk. We should expect the Old Testament to be more primitive than the New, but no less true. For instance, good and evil are revealed first primarily as justice and injustice, right and wrong; then, gradually, the primacy of charity is revealed. For a charity that has not first learned Justice is only sentiment.

### **Truth, power, life, and joy**

The Bible claims to give us four things that we need and want most, four things God has to give us: truth, power, life, and joy.

First, the Bible claims to give us *truth*—truth about God that we could not have discovered by ourselves (and also truth about ourselves that we could not have discovered by ourselves).

But what kind of truth? Not just abstract correctness but something more solid, the kind of truth that we say is "tried and true" (see Ps 12:6), the kind that is "*made* true" or performed (see Ezekiel 12:25), the kind that "comes true" as the fulfillment of promises (see Matthew 5:17-18). This is the kind of truth we find in a person, not just in an idea—in a person who is totally faithful to his word. God is that Person, and the Hebrew word for that kind of truth is *emeth*. If you let this Book speak to you, you will find that it shows you the true character of God and of yourself. It is a mirror.

Second, the Bible claims to have *power*. It uses images like a hammer and fire (Jeremiah 23:29) for itself. It calls itself "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6: 17).

But what kind of power is this? It is not physical power but spiritual power, which is infinitely greater, for it is the power to change spirit, not just matter, power over free hearts and minds, which the Chinese call *te*. It is the power of goodness, and of love, and even of physical weakness and suffering and sacrifice.

Third, the Bible claims to give *life*. Jesus calls it a seed (Luke 8): a living, growing thing. Hebrews 4: 12 says that "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit ... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Physical swords only give death; this gives life. Physical swords only cut bodies; this cuts open souls and heals them. For a sword, though in itself a dead thing, can come alive in the hands of a swordsman; and this is "the sword of the Spirit". What happened in Ezekiel 37, when the dry bones came to life, can also happen to you as you read this Book, if you let it—that is, if you read it prayerfully, in the presence of God, talking to Him as you read it. For this is no trick or gimmick of human imagination; He is really there! And "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22:32).

But what kind of life is this? It is spiritual life, eternal life, supernatural life, a sharing, by grace, in the very life of God (see I Pet 1:4). The Greek word for this in the New Testament is *zoe*. When you read the Bible, beware: it will do things to you. For when you read it, it is reading you. Its Author is reading you, from within. It is like looking into a mirror and seeing another face there looking at you. Or like sitting on a rock that suddenly moves and turns out to be a large and alarming animal. "Look out! It's alive!" Bibles should come with warning labels.

Fourth, the Bible claims to give *joy*. The Psalms are chockfull of expressions of joy in God's Word (e.g., 1:2, 19:8, 119: 97, 119:103). Jeremiah says to God, "Thy words became to me a joy" (15:16).

But what kind of Joy is this? It is the joy that does not depend on anything earthly, anything in this world; the joy that is apparently without a cause, because its cause is bigger than the universe: it is God's love. This Book is a love letter from God with your name on it. God doesn't send junk mail or spam. He says, "I have called you by name, you are Mine" (Isaiah 43: 1). The words I love you are magic words: they change us, they bring wonder and inner surprise, they bring us the greatest joy our lives can contain on earth. How much more when we hear them from our Creator!

The Bible calls itself "the Word of God". But it points beyond itself to the "Word of God", Jesus Christ. Every word in this book is part of His portrait. The words man can utter are not alive, but the Word God utters eternally is not only alive but divine. He calls Himself "the Son of God". Meeting Him is the point of the whole Bible (see John 5:3 9) and the whole point of our lives.

This article is excerpted from the book, [You Can Understand the Bible](#), by Peter Kreeft, revised edition published by [Ignatius Press](#) (c) 2005. Used with permission.

## Here are ten tips for reading the Bible profitably

by Peter Kreeft

1. At first, forget commentaries and books that try to tell you what the Bible means. Read the Bible itself. Get it "straight from the horse's mouth". Data first. The Bible is the most interesting book ever written, but some of the books about it are among the dullest.
2. Read repeatedly. You can never exhaust the riches in this deep mine. The greatest saints, sages, theologians, and philosophers have not exhausted its gold; you won't either.
3. First read through a book quickly, to get an overall idea; then go back and reread more slowly and carefully. Don't rush. Forget time. Relish. Ponder. Meditate. Think. Question. Sink slowly into the spiritual sea and swim in it. Soul-surf its waves.
4. Try to read without prejudice. Let the author speak to you. Don't impose your ideas on the book. Listen first before you talk back.
5. Once you have listened, do talk back. Dialogue with the Author as if He were standing right in front of you—because He is! Ask Him questions and go to His Book to see how He answers. God is a good teacher, and a good teacher wants his students to ask questions.
6. Don't confuse *understanding* with *evaluating*. That is, don't confuse interpretation with critique. First understand, then evaluate. This sounds simple, but it is harder to do than you probably think. For instance, many readers *interpret* the Bible's miracle stories as myths because they don't believe in miracles. But that is simply bad interpretation. Whether or not miracles really happened, the first question is what was the author trying to say. Was he telling a parable, fable, or myth? Or was he telling a story that he claimed really happened? Whether you agree with him or not is the second question, not the first. Keep first things first. Don't say "I don't believe Jesus literally rose from the dead, therefore I interpret the Resurrection as a myth." The Gospel writers did not mean to write myth but fact. If the Resurrection didn't happen, it is not a myth. It is a lie. And if it did happen, it is not a myth. It is a fact.
7. Keep in mind these four questions, then, and ask them in this order: First, what does the passage say? That is the data. Second, what does it mean? What did the author mean? That is the *interpretation*. Third, is it true? That is the question of *belief*. Fourth, so what? What difference does it make to me, to my life now? That is the question of *application*.
8. Look for "the big picture", the main point. Don't lose the forest for the trees. Don't get hung up on a few specific points or passages. Interpret each passage in its context, including the context of the whole Bible.
9. After you have read a passage, go back and analyze it. Outline it. Define it. Get it clear. *Don't be satisfied with a nice, vague feeling*. Find the thought, and the structures of thought.
10. Be honest—in reading any book, but especially this one, because of its total claims on you. There is only one honest reason for believing the Bible: because it is true, not because it is helpful, or beautiful, or comforting, or challenging, or useful, or even good. If it's not true, no honest person should believe it, even if it were all those other things. And if it is, every honest person should, even if it weren't. Seek the truth and you will find it. That's a promise (see Matthew 7:7).

## “In the beginning”

Genesis 1 and John 1

*In the beginning, **God** created the heavens and the earth... And the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1,3).*

*Then God **said**, “Let us make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness (Genesis 1:26).*

*In the beginning was the **Word**, and the Word was **with God**, and the Word was **God**. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3).*

### Some questions for reflection

1. Compare the verses in Genesis 1:1-3 with the verses in John 1:1-3. What similarities do you see? And what differences do you see? Can you recognize the **Word** of God in Genesis 1? God’s word is a *spoken* word – when God speaks his word has creative and dynamic power to bring about a change and transformation. His word can even create something out of nothing.
2. Why does John begin his Gospel account with the same three words recorded in the book of Genesis, chapter 1 (Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1)? Is John comparing the beginning of creation with the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, who became a man of flesh and blood like us? Or is John saying something more – a continuity, development, or fulfillment of what began in the Old Testament?
3. How does Genesis 1 shed light on John 1 and how does John 1 bring to light what is hidden in Genesis 1?
4. In Genesis 1:26 God said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image.” How does the New Testament reveal what is hidden in Genesis 1:26? Can you recognize the Trinity of the one Godhead (three distinct persons in the one God) in Genesis 1?

Read the following meditation and commentary on John 1 (see below).

### Scripture: *John 1:1-18*

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God; 3 all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

9 The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. 11 He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.



15 (John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.'") 16 And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

### **Meditation and commentary on John 1:**

Why does John the Evangelist begin his gospel with a description of the Word of God? The "word of God" was a common expression among the Jews. God's word in the Old Testament is an active, creative, and dynamic word. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made" (Psalm 33:6). "He sends forth his commands to the earth; his word runs swiftly" (Psalm 147:15). "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces" (Jeremiah 23:29)? The writer of the Book of Wisdom addresses God as the one who "made all things by your word" (Wisdom 9:1). God's word is also equated with his wisdom. "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth" (Proverbs 3:19). The Book of Wisdom describes "wisdom" as God's eternal, creative, and illuminating power. Both "word" and "wisdom" are seen as one and the same. "For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, thy all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sharp sword of thy authentic command" (Book of Wisdom 18:14-16).

John describes Jesus as God's creative, life-giving and light-giving word that has come to earth in human form. Jesus is the wisdom and power of God which created the world and sustains it who assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. Jesus became truly man while remaining truly God. "What he was, he remained, and what he was not he assumed" (from an early church antiphon for morning prayer). Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother. From the time of the Apostles the Christian faith has insisted on the incarnation of God's Son "who has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2)

Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great early church fathers (330-395 AD) wrote:

*Sick, our nature demanded to be healed; fallen, to be raised up; dead, to rise again. We had lost the possession of the good; it was necessary for it to be given back to us. Closed in darkness, it was necessary to bring us the light; captives, we awaited a Savior; prisoners, help; slaves, a liberator. Are these things minor or insignificant? Did they not move God to descend to human nature and visit it, since humanity was in so miserable and unhappy a state?*

Christians never cease proclaiming anew the wonder of the Incarnation.

*The Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. The Son of God ...worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin (Gaudium et Spes).*

If we are going to behold the glory of God we will do it through Jesus Christ. Jesus became the partaker of our humanity so we could be partakers of his divinity (2 Peter 1:4). God's purpose for us, even from the beginning of his creation, is that we would be fully united with Him. When Jesus comes God is made known as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By our being united in Jesus, God becomes our Father and we become his sons and daughters. Do you thank the Father for sending his only begotten Son to redeem you and to share with you his glory?

"Almighty God and Father of light, your eternal Word leaped down from heaven in the silent watches of the night. Open our hearts to receive his life and increase our vision with the rising of dawn, that our lives may be filled with his glory and his peace."

Source: <http://www.rc.net/wcc/readings/john1v1.htm>

**The Word of God Is Living and Active – Hebrews 4:12**



**In the Bible It Is God Who Speaks to Us**

**by Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

How can I live a Christian life in the real world, and where are the final authorities for such a life, which alone is worth living?

First, I want to confess quite simply that I believe the Bible alone is the answer to all our questions, and that we only need to ask persistently and with some humility in order to receive the answer from it. One cannot simply read the Bible the way one reads other books. One must be prepared to really question it. Only then will it open itself up. Only when we await the final answer from the Bible will it be given to us. That is because in the Bible it is God who speaks to us. And we cannot simply reach our own conclusions about God; rather, we must ask him. He will only answer us if we are seeking after him. Naturally, one can also read the Bible like any other book – from the perspective of textual criticism, for instance. There is nothing to be said against that. But that will only reveal the surface of the Bible, not what is within it. When a dear friend speaks a word to us, do we subject it to analysis? No, we simply accept it, and then it resonates inside us for days. The word of someone we love opens itself up to us the more we “ponder it in our hearts,” as Mary did. In the same way, we should carry the Word of the Bible around with us. We will only be happy in our reading of the Bible when we dare to approach it as the means by which God really speaks to us, the God who loves us and will not leave us with our questions unanswered.

**Seeking what we know**

Now, we can only seek for what we already know. If I do not know what I am really looking for, then I am not really looking for anything. So, we must already know which God we seek before we can look for him. If I do not know that, I will just rummage around, and seeking will become my main purpose instead of finding anything at all. So I can only find if I know what I seek. Now, I either know about the God I seek from my own experience and insights, from the meanings which I assign to history or nature – that is, from within myself – or I know about him based on his revelation of his own Word. Either I determine the place in which I will find God, or I allow God to determine the place where he will be found.

If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature. But if it is God who says where he will be, then that will truly be a place that at first is not agreeable to me at all, that does not fit so well with me. That place is the cross of Christ. And whoever will find God there must draw near to the cross in the manner that the Sermon on the Mount requires. That does not correspond to our nature at all; it is, in fact, completely contrary to it. But this is the message of the Bible, not only the New Testament but also the Old (Is. 53!). In any case, Jesus and Paul understand it in this way – that the cross of Jesus fulfills the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The entire Bible, then, is the Word in which God allows himself to be found by us. Not a place that is agreeable to us or makes sense to us *a priori*, but instead a place that is strange to us and contrary to our nature. Yet, the very place in which God has decided to meet us.

### **Asking God to help us hear what he wants to say**

This is how I read the Bible now. I ask of each passage: What is God saying to us here? And I ask God that he would help us hear what he wants to say. So, we no longer look for general, eternal truths, which correspond with our own “eternal” nature and are, therefore, somehow self-evident to us. Instead, we seek the will of God, who is altogether strange to us, whose ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts, who hides himself from us under the sign of the cross, in which all our ways and thoughts have an end. God is completely other than the so-called eternal verities. Theirs is an eternity made up of our own thoughts and wishes. But God’s Word begins by showing us the cross. And it is to the cross, to death and judgment before God, that our ways and thoughts (even the “eternal” ones) all lead.

Does this perspective somehow make it understandable to you that I do not want to give up the Bible as this strange Word of God at any point, that I intend with all my powers to ask what God wants to say to us here? Any other place outside the Bible has become too uncertain for me. I fear that I will only encounter some divine double of myself there. Does this somehow help you understand why I am prepared for a *sacrificium intellectus* – just in these matters, and only in these matters, with respect to the one, true God! And who does not bring to some passages his sacrifice of the intellect, in the confession that he does not yet understand this or that passage in Scripture, but is certain that even they will be revealed one day as God’s own Word? I would rather make that confession than try to say according to my own opinion: this is divine, that is human.

And now let me tell you quite personally that since I learned to read the Bible in this way – and that is not so long ago – it has become daily more wonderful to me. I read it mornings and evenings, often also during the day. And each day I take up a text, which I have before me for the entire week, and I attempt to immerse myself in it completely, in order to really listen to it. I know that without this I could no longer rightly live, let alone believe. And every day more riddles are solved for me, even though I am still just moving on the surface.

As I was looking at medieval art again in Hildesheim, it occurred to me how much more they understood about the Bible in those times. I am also struck by the fact that our ancestors in their battles for the faith had nothing, and wanted nothing, but the Bible, and that by means of the Bible they became strong and free for a real life of faith. It would be simply superficial, I think, to say that everything has changed since then. Human beings and their needs have remained the same. And the Bible answers those needs today no less than then. It may be that this sounds very primitive. But you have no idea how happy one can be to find one’s way back from the false tracks of so much theology to these primitive things. And I believe that in matters of faith we are always equally primitive.

In a few days it will be Easter. That makes me very happy. But do you think that either of us by ourselves could believe or would want to believe these impossible things that are reported in the gospels, if the Bible did not support us in our belief? Simply the Word, as God’s truth, which he vouches for himself. Resurrection – that is not a self-evident idea, an eternal verity. I mean, of course, resurrection as the Bible means it – as a rising up from real death (not sleep) to real life, from life without God to new life with Christ in God. God has said (and we know this through the Bible): “Behold I make all things new.” He made that come true at Easter. Must not this message appear

much more impossible, distant, unreal than the whole story of King David, which, by comparison, is quite harmless?

### **The decision to trust the Bible or not**

There remains, then, only the decision whether we will trust the Bible or not, whether we will allow ourselves to be supported by it as by no other word, in life and death. And I believe that we can only be happy and at peace when we have made that decision.

Forgive me, this has become a very long epistle. I do not know if I should write in this way. Yet I believe I should, and I am very pleased that we have had one such exchange of letters. We must go on sharing what we believe we have discovered. Whether we have a right to speak as I have now spoken to you will be proved in our experience. For now we must lay it aside.

---

[This excerpt is from a letter which Bonhoeffer wrote to Dr. Rudiger Schleicher, Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, dated 8 April 1936. Original source is from the complete works of Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, 26-31, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich. The English translation of the complete letter is published in *Meditating on the Word*, edited and translated by David Mcl. Gracie, © 1986, Rowman and Littlefield Edition, UK and Cowley Publications, US.]

## “I have put my words in your mouth”

Jeremiah 1:4-12

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, <sup>5</sup> “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

<sup>6</sup> Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.”\*

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. <sup>8</sup> Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.”

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” <sup>11</sup> And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” And I said, “I see a rod of almond.” <sup>12</sup> Then the LORD said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.” (Jeremiah 1:4-12).

Hebrews 1:1-4

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the ages. <sup>3</sup> He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs. (Hebrews 1:1-4).

### Some questions for reflection

1. What was the role of the prophets in the Old Testament? How did they receive their calling to speak a prophetic word in God’s name? (See Jeremiah 1:4-5).
2. Why did God command his prophets to obey his commands and not be afraid to his word? (See Jeremiah 1:6-8).
3. Why did Jeremiah think he was unqualified to speak in God’s name? How did fear hold him back? And why did God command him to not be fearful? How does courage and trust in God help us overcome our fear in living and proclaiming God’s word? (See Jeremiah 1:9-12).
4. How does the New Testament compare the prophetic ministry of Jesus with the prophets of the Old Testament? How is Jesus’ role *similar* and also *superior* to the Old Testament prophets? (See Hebrews 1:1)

Read the following meditation and commentary on Hebrews 1 and 2 (see below).

## Meditation and commentary on Hebrews 1:1-4 and 2:1-4

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the ages. <sup>3</sup> He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs. (Hebrews 1:1-4)

2:1 Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will. (Hebrews 2:1-4)

### Reflection:

From age to age, the prophets, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, spoke the word of God. Now God has spoken to us through his only begotten Son. Jesus Christ alone brings to us the full revelation of God and he alone enables us to enter into the very presence of God.

The author to the Hebrews contrasts Jesus with the prophets who have preceded him. The prophets were given special counsel or revelation from God (see Amos 3:7). Their message, however, was fragmentary. Each had a part, but now the whole. In Jesus Christ we see the fullness of God's revelation and truth. In him we see not some part of God but all of him. The prophets spoke of God. Jesus reveals God in himself, not only in what he said and did, but in who he is. The prophets were the *friends* of God; Jesus is the only begotten *Son*. The prophets grasped part of the mind of God; Jesus is the mind of God. He is the *Word of God* made *flesh*.

In Jesus we see the glory of God, a glory that does not crush and is not severe. It is a glory which shines through Jesus' humble service and death on a cross for sinners. It is a glory of redemptive and suffering love.

The author to the Hebrews warns against two kinds of sins: *transgression* and *disobedience*. Transgression literally means *to step across a line*. God tells us through his word and by our conscience what is right and wrong and what he expects of us. To step across that line is to sin. Disobedience is related to hearing. It literally means *imperfect hearing*, or *careless hearing*. In the end it means the *unwillingness to hear the voice of God*. God has spoken to us through his own Son. It is both an awesome privilege to hear the word of God and to be changed by his life-giving word, and an awesome responsibility to believe what God says and to obey it. Are you attentive to God's word?

"Lord Jesus Christ, your word is life and truth. Nourish me by your life-changing word and help me to study it diligently and to conform my life according to it."

Source: <http://www.rc.net/wcc/readings/heb1.htm>

*The Word of God Is Living and Active – Hebrews 4:12*



Christ Pantocrator (Ruler of All), Byzantine icon by [Vladimir Grygorenko](#)

## How to Read the Bible

by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, writing in eighteenth-century Russia, has this to say about our Orthodox attitude towards the Holy Scriptures: “If an earthly king, our emperor, wrote you a letter, would you not read it with joy? Certainly, with great rejoicing and careful attention. You have been sent a letter, not by any earthly emperor, but by the King of Heaven. And yet you almost despise such a gift, so priceless a treasure.” He goes on to say: “Whenever you read the Gospel, Christ Himself is speaking to you. And while you read, you are praying and talking to Him.”

We are to see Scripture as a personal letter addressed specifically to each one of us by God. We are each of us to see Scripture reading as a direct, individual dialogue between Christ and ourselves.

Two centuries after Saint Tikhon, the 1976 Moscow Conference between the Orthodox and the Anglicans expressed in different but equally valid terms the true attitude towards Scripture. Signed also by the Anglican delegates, the Moscow statement provides an admirable summary of the Orthodox view of the Bible: “The Scriptures constitute a coherent whole. They are at once divinely inspired and humanly expressed. They bear authoritative witness to God’s revelation of Himself – in creation, in the Incarnation of the Word, and the whole history of salvation. And as such they express the word of God in human language. . . . We know, receive, and interpret Scripture through the Church and in the Church. Our approach to the Bible is one of obedience.”

Combining Saint Tikhon and the Moscow statement, we may distinguish four key qualities which mark an Orthodox reading of Scripture. First, our reading should be obedient. Second, it should be ecclesial, within the Church. Third, it should be Christ-centered. Fourth, it should be personal.

## Reading the Bible with Obedience

First of all, then, when reading Scripture, we are to listen in a spirit of obedience. Saint Tikhon and the 1976 Moscow Conference both alike emphasize the divine inspiration of the Bible. Scripture is a letter from God. Christ Himself is speaking. The Scriptures are God's authoritative witness of Himself. They express the Word of God in our human language. They are divinely inspired. Since God Himself is speaking to us in the Bible, our response is rightly one of obedience, of receptivity and listening. As we read, we wait on the Spirit.

But, while divinely inspired, the Bible is also humanly expressed. It is a whole library of different books written at varying times by distinct persons. Each book of the Bible reflects the outlook of the age in which it was written and the particular viewpoint of the author. For God does nothing in isolation; divine grace cooperates with human freedom. God does not abolish our personhood but enhances it. And so it is in the writing of inspired Scripture. The authors were not just a passive instrument, a dictation machine recording a message. Each writer of Scripture contributes his or her particular human gifts. Alongside the divine aspect, there is also a human element in Scripture. We are to value both.

Each of the four Gospels, for example, has its own particular approach. Matthew presents more particularly a Jewish understanding of Christ, with an emphasis on the Kingdom of heaven. Mark contains specific, picturesque details of Christ's ministry not given elsewhere. Luke expresses the universality of Christ's love, His all-embracing compassion that extends equally to Jew and to Gentile. In John there is a more inward and more mystical approach to Christ, with an emphasis on divine light and divine indwelling. We are to enjoy and explore to the full this life-giving variety within the Bible.

Because Scripture is in this way the word of God expressed in human language, there is room for honest and exacting critical enquiry when studying the Bible. Exploring the human aspect of the Bible, we are to use to the full our God-given human reason. The Orthodox Church does not exclude scholarly research into the origin, dates, and authorship of books of the Bible.

Alongside this human element, however, we see always the divine element. These are not simply books written by individual human writers. We hear in Scripture not just human words, marked by a greater or lesser skill and perceptiveness, but the eternal, uncreated Word of God Himself, the divine Word of salvation. When we come to the Bible, then, we come not simply out of curiosity, to gain information. We come to the Bible with a specific question, a personal question about ourselves: "How can I be saved?"

As God's divine word of salvation in human language, Scripture should evoke in us a sense of wonder. Do you ever feel, as you read or listen, that it has all become too familiar? Has the Bible grown rather boring? Continually we need to cleanse the doors of our perception and to look in amazement with new eyes at what the Lord sets before us.

Some time ago I had a dream which I remember vividly. I was back in the house where, for three years as a child, I lived in boarding school. At first in my dream I went through rooms that were already familiar to me. But then the companion who was showing me round took me into other rooms that I had never seen before – spacious, beautiful, full of light. Finally we entered a small chapel, with candles gleaming and dark golden mosaics.

In my dream I said to my companion, "How strange that I have lived here for three years, and yet I never knew about the existence of all these rooms." And he replied to me, "But it is always so."

I awoke; and behold, it was a dream.



We are to feel towards the Bible exactly the awe, the sense of wonder, of expectation and surprise, that I experienced in my dream. There are so many rooms in Scripture that we have never yet entered. There is so much depth and majesty for us to discover. This sense of *wonder* is an essential element in our responsive obedience.

If obedience means wonder, it also means *listening*. Such is the original meaning of the word in both Greek and Latin.

As a student I used to follow the *Goon Show* on the radio. In one particular incident that I recall, the telephone rings and a character reaches out his arm to pick up the receiver. “Hello,” he says, “hello, hello.” His volume rises. “Who is speaking – I can’t hear you. Hello, who is speaking?” The voice at the other end says, “You are speaking.” “Ah,” he replies. “I thought the voice sounded familiar.” And he puts the receiver down.

That unfortunately is a parable of what happens to us all too often. We are better at talking than listening. We hear the sound of our own voice, but we don’t pause to hear the voice of the other who is speaking to us. So the first requirement, as we read Scripture, is to stop talking and to *listen* – to listen with obedience.

When we enter an Orthodox Church, decorated in the traditional manner, and look up towards the sanctuary at the east end, we see there in the apse the Mother of God with her hands raised to heaven – the ancient scriptural manner of praying that many still use today. Such symbolically is to be our attitude also as we read Scripture – the attitude of receptivity, of hands invisibly raised to heaven. Reading the Bible, we are to model ourselves on the Blessed Virgin Mary, for she is supremely *the one who listens*. At the Annunciation she listens with obedience and responds to the angel, “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). She could not have borne the Word of God in her body if she had not first listened to the Word of God in her heart. After the shepherds have adored the newborn Christ, it is said of her: “Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Again, when Mary finds Jesus in the temple, we are told: “His mother kept all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51). The same need for listening is emphasized in the last words attributed to the Mother of God in Scripture, at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee: “Whatever He says to you, do it” (John 2:5), she says to the servants – and to all of us.

In all this the Blessed Virgin Mary serves as a mirror, as a living icon of the biblical Christian. We are to be like her as we hear the Word of God: pondering, keeping all these things in our hearts, doing whatever He tells us. We are to listen in obedience as God speaks.

## Understanding the Bible through the Church

In the second place, as the Moscow Conference says, “We know, receive, and interpret Scripture through the Church and in the Church.” Our approach to the Bible is not only obedient but *ecclesial*.

It is the Church that tells us what is Scripture. A book is not part of Scripture because of any particular theory about its dating and authorship. Even if it could be proved, for example, that the Fourth Gospel was not actually written by John, the beloved disciple of Christ, this would not alter the fact that we Orthodox accept the Fourth Gospel as Holy Scripture. Why? Because the Gospel of John, whoever the author may be – and for myself I continue to accept the Johannine authorship – is accepted by the Church and in the Church.

It is the Church that tells us what is Scripture, and it is equally the Church that tells us how Scripture is to be understood. Coming upon the Ethiopian as he read the Old Testament in his chariot, Philip the Apostle asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And the Ethiopian answered, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30, 31). We are all in the position of the Ethiopian. The words of Scripture are not always self-explanatory. God speaks directly to the heart of each one of us as we read our Bible – Scripture reading is, as Saint Tikhon says, a personal dialogue between each one and Christ – but we also need guidance. And our guide is the Church. We make full use of our own personal understanding, assisted by the Spirit, we make full use of the findings of modern

biblical research, but always we submit private opinion – whether our own or that of the scholars – to the total experience of the Church throughout the ages.

The Orthodox standpoint here is summed up in the question asked of a convert at the reception service used by the Russian Church: “Do you acknowledge that the Holy Scripture must be accepted and interpreted in accordance with the belief which has been handed down by the Holy Fathers, and which the Holy Orthodox Church, our Mother, has always held and still does hold?”

We read the Bible personally, but not as isolated individuals. We read as the members of a family, the family of the Orthodox Catholic Church. When reading Scripture, we say not “I” but “We.” We read in communion with all the other members of the Body of Christ, in all parts of the world and in all generations of time. The decisive test and criterion for our understanding of what the Scripture means is *the mind of the Church*. The Bible is the book of the Church.

To discover this “mind of the Church,” where do we begin? Our first step is to see how Scripture is used in worship. How, in particular, are biblical lessons chosen for reading at the different feasts? We should also consult the writings of the Church Fathers, and consider how they interpret the Bible. Our Orthodox manner of reading Scripture is in this way both *liturgical* and *patristic*. And this, as we all realize, is far from easy to do in practice, because we have at our disposal so few Orthodox commentaries on Scripture available in English, and most of the Western commentaries do not employ this liturgical and patristic approach.

As an example of what it means to interpret Scripture in a liturgical way, guided by the use made of it at Church feasts, let us look at the Old Testament lessons appointed for Vespers on the Feast of the Annunciation, on March 25. They are three in number: (1) Genesis 28:10-17: Jacob’s dream of a ladder set up from earth to heaven; (2) Ezekiel 43:27-44:4: the prophet’s vision of the Jerusalem sanctuary, with the closed gate through which none but the Prince may pass; (3) Proverbs 9:1-11: one of the great sophianic passages in the Old Testament, beginning “Wisdom has built her house.”

These texts in the Old Testament, then, as their selection for the 25th of March and other feasts of the Theotokos indicates, are all to be understood as prophecies concerning the Incarnation from the Virgin. Mary is Jacob’s ladder, supplying the flesh that God incarnate takes upon entering our human world. Mary is the closed gate who alone among women bore a child while still remaining inviolate. Mary provides the house which Christ the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24) takes as his dwelling (in another interpretation, the title Wisdom or Sophia refers to the Mother of God herself). Exploring in this manner the choice of lessons for the various feasts, we discover layers of biblical interpretation that are by no means obvious on a first reading.

Take as another example Vespers on Holy Saturday, the first part of the ancient Paschal Vigil. Here we have no less than fifteen Old Testament lessons. Regrettably, in all too many churches most of these are omitted, and so God’s people are starved of their proper biblical nourishment. This sequence of fifteen lessons sets before us the whole scheme of sacred history, while at the same time underlining the deeper meaning of Christ’s Resurrection. First among the lessons is Genesis 1:1-13, the account of Creation: Christ’s Resurrection is a new Creation. The fourth lesson is the Book of Jonah in its entirety, with the prophet’s three days in the belly of the whale foreshadowing Christ’s Resurrection after three days in the tomb (*cf.* Matthew 12:40). The sixth lesson recounts the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites (Exodus 13:20-15:19), which anticipates the new Passover of Pascha whereby Christ passes over from death to life (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 5:7; 10:1-4). The final lesson is the story of the three Holy Children in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3), once more a “type” or prophecy of Christ’s rising from the tomb.

Such is the effect of reading Scripture ecclesially in the Church and with the Church. Studying the Old Testament in this liturgical way and using the Fathers to help us, everywhere we uncover signposts pointing forward to the mystery of Christ and of His Mother. Reading the Old Testament in the light of the New, and the New in the light of the Old – as the Church’s calendar encourages us to do – we discover the unity of Holy Scripture. One of the best ways of identifying correspondences

between the Old and New Testaments is to use a good biblical concordance. This can often tell us more about the meaning of Scripture than any commentary.

In Bible study circles within our parishes, it is helpful to give one person the special task of noting whenever a particular passage in the Old or New Testament is used for a festival or a saint's day. We can then discuss together the reasons why each specific passage has been so chosen. Others in the group can be assigned to do homework among the Fathers, using above all the biblical homilies of Saint John Chrysostom, which have all been translated into English. But remember, you'll have to dig to find what you are looking for. The Fathers were speaking to a different age from ours, and need to be read with imagination. We must not be as literal-minded as the nineteenth-century Russian village priest who was told by his bishop, "Take your sermons from the Fathers." So on the next great feast he decided to read at the Liturgy a sermon of Saint John Chrysostom without changing a single word. The church was packed, and his parishioners were disconcerted when he commenced in ringing tones, "What is this? What do I see? The church is empty. There is nobody here. Where have they all gone? Everyone is in the hippodrome."

Father Georges Florovsky used to say that Orthodox today need to acquire a patristic mind. But to gain that, we must penetrate beyond the bare words of the Fathers to the kernel of their inner meaning.

### **Christ, the Heart of the Bible**

The third element in our reading of Scripture is that it should be *Christ-centered*. When the 1976 Moscow Conference tells us, "The Scriptures constitute a coherent whole," where are we to locate this unity and coherence? In the person of Christ. He is the unifying thread that runs through the entirety of Holy Scripture, from the first sentence to the last. We have already mentioned the way in which Christ may be seen foreshadowed on the pages of the Old Testament. As my history teacher at school used to say, "It all ties up." That is an excellent principle to employ when reading Scripture. Only connect.

Much modern critical study of Scripture in the West has adopted an analytical approach, breaking up each book into different sources. The connecting links are unraveled, and the Bible is reduced to a series of bare primary units. There is certainly value in this. But we need to see the unity as well as the diversity of Scripture, the all-embracing end as well as the scattered beginnings. Orthodoxy prefers on the whole a synthetic rather than an analytical approach, seeing Scripture as an integrated whole, with Christ everywhere as the bond of union.

Always we seek for the point of convergence between the Old Testament and the New, and this we find in Jesus Christ. Orthodoxy assigns particular significance to the "typological" method of interpretation, whereby "types" of Christ, signs and symbols of His work, are discerned throughout the Old Testament. A notable example of this is Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem, who offered bread and wine to Abraham (Genesis 14:18), and who is seen as a type of Christ not only by the Fathers but even in the New Testament itself (Hebrews 5:6; 7:1). Another instance is the way in which, as we have seen, the Old Passover foreshadows the New; Israel's deliverance from Pharaoh at the Red Sea anticipates our deliverance from sin through the death and Resurrection of the Savior. Such is the method of interpretation that we are to apply throughout the Bible. Why, for instance, in the second half of Lent are the Old Testament readings from Genesis dominated by the figure of Joseph? Why in Holy Week do we read from the Book of Job? Because Joseph and Job are innocent sufferers, and as such they are types or foreshadowings of Jesus Christ, whose innocent suffering upon the Cross the Church is at the point of celebrating. It all ties up.

"A Christian," remarks Father Alexander Schmemmann, "is the one who wherever he looks finds everywhere Christ, and rejoices in Him." We can say this in particular of the biblical Christian. He is the one who, wherever he looks, finds everywhere Christ, on every page of Scripture.

### **The Bible as Personal**

In the words of an early ascetic writer in the Christian East, Saint Mark the Monk: “He who is humble in his thoughts and engaged in spiritual work, when he reads the Holy Scriptures, will apply everything to himself and not to his neighbor.” As Orthodox Christians we are to look everywhere in Scripture for a *personal* application. We are to ask not just, “What does it mean?” but, “What does it mean to *me*?” Scripture is a personal dialogue between the Savior and myself – Christ speaking to me, and me answering. That is the fourth criterion in our Bible reading.

I am to see all the stories in Scripture as part of my own personal story. Who is Adam? The name Adam means “man,” “human,” and so the Genesis account of Adam’s Fall is also a story about me. I am Adam. It is to me that God says, “Adam, where are you?” (Genesis 3:9). “Where is God?” we often ask. But the real question is what God asks the Adam in each of us: “Where are you?”

When, in the story of Cain and Abel, we read God’s words to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” (Genesis 4:9), that also is addressed to each one of us. Who is Cain? It is myself. And God asks the Cain in each of us, “Where is your brother?” The way to God lies through love of other people, and there is no other way. Disowning my brother, I replace the image of God with the mark of Cain, and deny my own essential humanity.

In reading Scripture, we may take three steps. First, what we have in Scripture is sacred history: the history of the world from the Creation, the history of the chosen people, the history of God Incarnate in Palestine, the “mighty works” after Pentecost. The Christianity that we find in the Bible is not an ideology, not a philosophical theory, but a historical faith.

Then we are to take a second step. The history presented in the Bible is a personal history. We see God intervening at specific times and in specific places, as He enters into dialogue with individual persons. He addresses each one by name. We see set before us the specific calls issued by God to Abraham, Moses and David, to Rebekah and Ruth, to Isaiah and the prophets, and then to Mary and the Apostles. We see *the particularity* of the divine action in history, not as a scandal but as a blessing. God’s love is universal in scope, but He chooses to become incarnate in a particular corner of the earth, at a particular time and from a particular Mother.

We are in this manner to savor all the specificity of God’s action as recorded in Scripture. The person who loves the Bible loves details of dating and geography. Orthodoxy has an intense devotion to the Holy Land, to the exact places where Christ lived and taught, died and rose again. An excellent way to enter more deeply into our Scripture reading is to undertake a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Galilee. Walk where Christ walked. Go down to the Dead Sea, sit alone on the rocks, feel how Christ felt during the forty days of His temptation in the wilderness. Drink from the well where He spoke with the Samaritan woman. Go at night to the Garden of Gethsemane, sit in the dark under the ancient olives and look across the valley to the lights of the city. Experience to the full the distinctive “isness” of the historical setting, and take that experience back with you to your daily Scripture reading.

Then we are to take a third step. Reliving biblical history in all its particularity, we are to apply it directly to ourselves. We are to say to ourselves, “All these places and events are not just far away and long ago, but are also part of my own personal encounter with Christ. The stories include me.”

Betrayal, for example, is part of the personal story of everyone. Have we not all at some time in our life betrayed others, and have we not all known what it is to be betrayed, and does not the memory of these moments leave continuing scars on our psyche? Reading, then, the account of Saint Peter’s betrayal of Christ and of his restoration after the Resurrection, we can see ourselves as each an actor in the story. Imagining what both Peter and Jesus must have experienced at the moment immediately after the betrayal, we enter into their feelings and make them our own. I am Peter; in this situation can I also be Christ? Reflecting likewise on the process of reconciliation – seeing how the risen Christ with a love utterly devoid of sentimentality restored the fallen Peter to fellowship, seeing how Peter on his side had the courage to accept this restoration – we ask ourselves: How Christ-like am I to those who have betrayed me? And, after my own acts of betrayal, am I able to accept the forgiveness of others – am I able to forgive myself?

Or take, as another example, Saint Mary Magdalene. Can I see myself mirrored in her? Do I share in the generosity, the spontaneity and loving impulsiveness, that she showed when she poured out the alabaster box of ointment on the feet of Christ? “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.” (Here I follow the normal Western opinion, which identifies the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50 with Mary Magdalene; in the Christian East this identification is not usually made.) Or am I timid, mean, holding myself back, never ready to give myself fully to anything either good or bad? As the Desert Fathers say, “Better someone who has sinned, if he knows he has sinned and repents, than a person who has not sinned and thinks of himself as righteous.”

Have I gained the boldness of Saint Mary Magdalene, her constancy and loyalty, when she went out to anoint the body of Christ in the tomb (John 20:1)? Do I hear the risen Savior call me by name, as He called her, and do I respond “Rabboni” with her simplicity and completeness (John 20:16)?

Reading Scripture in this way – in obedience, as a member of the Church, finding Christ everywhere, seeing everything as a part of my own personal story – we shall sense something of the variety and depth to be found in the Bible. Yet always we shall feel that in our biblical exploration we are only at the very beginning. We are like someone launching out in a tiny boat across a limitless ocean.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 118[119]:105).

---

Timothy Ware, His Excellency the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia, was Spalding Lecturer of Eastern Orthodox Studies at Oxford University until his retirement in 2001. “How to Read the Bible” by Bishop Kallistos Ware, is excerpted from *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 2008, Thomas Nelson publishers, Nashville, Tennessee. Reprinted with permission.

## “You have crowned him with glory and honor”

### Psalm 8:3-6

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established; 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? 5 Yet you have made him little less than God, and crown him with glory and honor. 6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, (Psalm 8:3-6).

### Hebrews 2:5-18

5 For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. 6 It has been testified somewhere, "What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? 7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels, you have crowned him with glory and honor, 8 putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 9 But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.

10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the *pioneer of their salvation* perfect through suffering. 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." 13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. 16 For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:5-18).

### Some questions for reflection

1. The original crown of God's creation was Adam whom God made in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:27-28). The word *Adam* literally means *man* (the son whom God formed from the dust of the earth) or *humanity* (Adam and all his descendants). Adam is the head of the human race and Eve is the mother of all humanity. Psalm 8 tells us that God gave *man* (*humanity*) the power to reflect his own glory. How did Adam originally reflect God's glory? And what were the consequences of Adam's disobedience and fall from God's glory?
2. The expression "son of man" (verse 4 of Psalm 8) is an important title in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Book of Daniel describes the "Son of Man" as the One whom God sends to establish his universal reign on the earth (Daniel 7:13-14) The most frequent title which Jesus used to describe himself is "Son of Man." This is a prophetic title which refers to Jesus' unique position as both the unbegotten Son of the eternal Father and the "son of man" who was born of a woman – the "Word who became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). How does Jesus reflect the glory of God? And how does he restore God's glory to us?
3. How does the New Testament author of the Letter to the Hebrews explain how Jesus fulfilled the role and mission of the "son of man" in Psalm 8 (Hebrews 2:5-18)?

Read the following meditation and commentary on Hebrews 2 (see below).

### **Meditation and commentary on Hebrews 2:5-18**

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of God's plan of redemption. In God's original plan (which the author quotes from Psalm 8), humankind was created a little less (lower) than God himself, and given power to be master over all things. But through sin, humankind experienced defeat and frustration instead of mastery, and failure in place of glory. And into this state of defeat God sent his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that by his sufferings and his glory humankind might become what God intended him to be. In Christ we not only recover our lost identity, but God makes us what we could never be without him--sons and daughters of God who share in his glory.

Jesus is called the *pioneer of our salvation*. (Hebrews 2:11). A pioneer is one who begins something so that others may enter into it, someone who blazes a trail for others to follow. Jesus blazed the trail for us to the path of glory with the Father. Like any true pioneer he had to be tested and *be made perfect through suffering*. Perfection here connotes completeness and the capacity to fully carry out the purpose for which the person or thing was designed to do.

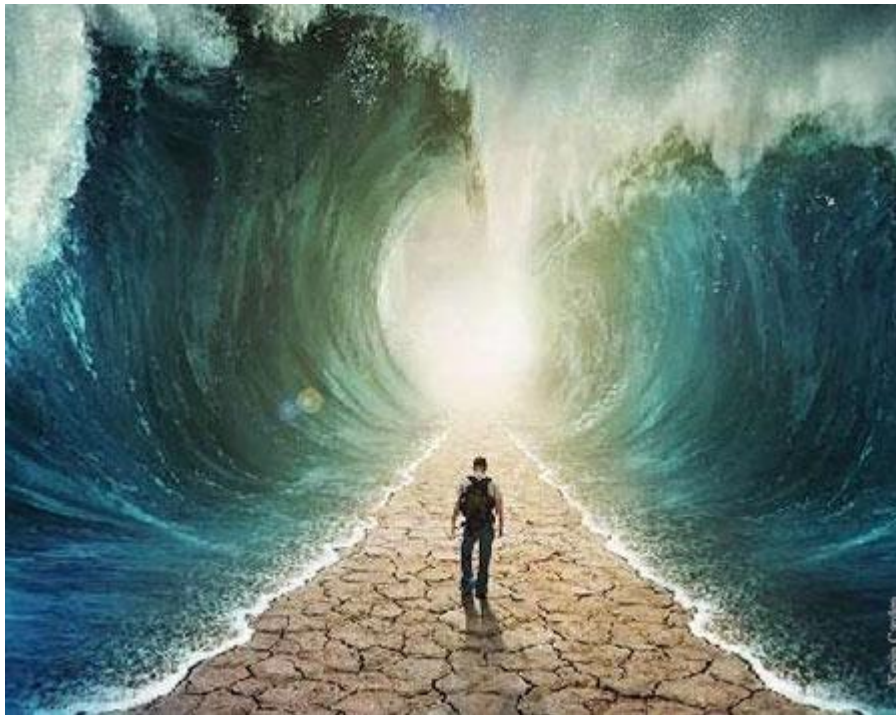
Through suffering Jesus was fitted for the task given him by his Father as the pioneer of our salvation. Through his suffering Jesus fully identified with our human condition (see Psalm 22:22, Isaiah 8:17-18). He was not detached, but he fully entered into our human existence and shared in our lot. He also sympathized with us, by sharing in our sorrows and sufferings, and by being tempted he experienced the trials of being put to the test. He has met our sorrows and he has faced our temptations. We cannot find a pioneer more fit to show us the way to the Father.

Since he shared our lot and suffered on our behalf, he became *a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people*.

"Lord Jesus Christ, you are the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith. Increase my faith and give me strength to endure hardship and trials so that I may be faithful to the end."

Source: <http://www.rc.net/wcc/readings/heb2.htm>

**The Word of God Is Living and Active – Hebrews 4:12**



## The Bible's Intrinsic Unity

by Benedict XVI

***“The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6)***

39. In the passage from letter to spirit, we also learn, within the Church’s great tradition, to see the unity of all Scripture, grounded in the unity of God’s word, which challenges our life and constantly calls us to conversion.<sup>[128]</sup> Here the words of Hugh of Saint Victor remain a sure guide: “All divine Scripture is one book, and this one book is Christ, speaks of Christ and finds its fulfilment in Christ”.<sup>[129]</sup> Viewed in purely historical or literary terms, of course, the Bible is not a single book, but a collection of literary texts composed over the course of a thousand years or more, and its individual books are not easily seen to possess an interior unity; instead, we see clear inconsistencies between them. This was already the case with the Bible of Israel, which we Christians call the Old Testament. It is all the more so when, as Christians, we relate the New Testament and its writings as a kind of hermeneutical key to Israel’s Bible, thus interpreting the latter as a path to Christ. The New Testament generally does not employ the term “Scripture” (cf. *Rom* 4:3; *1 Pet* 2:6), but rather “the Scriptures” (cf. *Mt* 21:43; *Jn* 5:39; *Rom* 1:2; *2 Pet* 3:16), which nonetheless are seen in their entirety as the one word of God addressed to us.<sup>[130]</sup> This makes it clear that the person of Christ gives unity to all the “Scriptures” in relation to the one “Word”. In this way we can understand the words of Number 12 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, which point to the internal unity of the entire Bible as a decisive criterion for a correct hermeneutic of faith.

### ***The relationship between the Old and the New Testaments***

40. Against this backdrop of the unity of the Scriptures in Christ, theologians and pastors alike need to be conscious of the relationship between Old and the New Testaments. First of all, it is evident that *the New Testament itself acknowledges the Old Testament as the word of God* and thus accepts the authority of the sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people.<sup>[131]</sup> It implicitly acknowledges them by using the same language and by frequently referring to passages from these Scriptures. It explicitly



acknowledges them by citing many parts of them as a basis for argument. In the New Testament, an argument based on texts from the Old Testament thus has a definitive quality, superior to that of mere human argumentation. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus states that “Scripture cannot be rejected” (*Jn* 10:35) and Saint Paul specifically makes clear that the Old Testament revelation remains valid for us Christians (cf. *Rom* 15:4; *1 Cor* 10:11).<sup>[132]</sup> We also affirm that “Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and the Holy Land is the motherland of the Church”:<sup>[133]</sup> the roots of Christianity are found in the Old Testament, and Christianity continually draws nourishment from these roots. Consequently, sound Christian doctrine has always resisted all new forms of Marcionism, which tend, in different ways, to set the Old Testament in opposition to the New.<sup>[134]</sup>

Moreover, the New Testament itself claims to be consistent with the Old and proclaims that in the mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Christ the sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people have found their perfect fulfilment. It must be observed, however, that the concept of the fulfilment of the Scriptures is a complex one, since it has three dimensions: a basic aspect of *continuity* with the Old Testament revelation, an aspect of *discontinuity* and an aspect of *fulfilment and transcendence*. The mystery of Christ stands in continuity of intent with the sacrificial cult of the Old Testament, but it came to pass in a very different way, corresponding to a number of prophetic statements and thus reaching a perfection never previously obtained. The Old Testament is itself replete with tensions between its institutional and its prophetic aspects. The paschal mystery of Christ is in complete conformity – albeit in a way that could not have been anticipated – with the prophecies and the foreshadowings of the Scriptures; yet it presents clear aspects of discontinuity with regard to the institutions of the Old Testament.

41. These considerations show the unique importance of the Old Testament for Christians, while at the same time bringing out the *newness of Christological interpretation*. From apostolic times and in her living Tradition, the Church has stressed the unity of God’s plan in the two Testaments through the use of typology; this procedure is in no way arbitrary, but is intrinsic to the events related in the sacred text and thus involves the whole of Scripture. Typology “discerns in God’s works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son”.<sup>[135]</sup> Christians, then, read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen. While typological interpretation manifests the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament from the standpoint of the New, we must not forget that the Old Testament retains its own inherent value as revelation, as our Lord himself reaffirmed (cf. *Mk* 12:29-31). Consequently, “the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament (cf. *1 Cor* 5:6-8; *1 Cor* 10:1-11)”.<sup>[136]</sup> For this reason the Synod Fathers stated that “the Jewish understanding of the Bible can prove helpful to Christians for their own understanding and study of the Scriptures”.<sup>[137]</sup>

“The New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old is made manifest in the New”,<sup>[138]</sup> as Saint Augustine perceptively noted. It is important, therefore, that in both pastoral and academic settings the close relationship between the two Testaments be clearly brought out, in keeping with the dictum of Saint Gregory the Great that “what the Old Testament promised, the New Testament made visible; what the former announces in a hidden way, the latter openly proclaims as present. Therefore the Old Testament is a prophecy of the New Testament; and the best commentary on the Old Testament is the New Testament”.<sup>[139]</sup>

### ***The “dark” passages of the Bible***

42. In discussing the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, the Synod also considered those passages in the Bible which, due to the violence and immorality they occasionally contain, prove obscure and difficult. Here it must be remembered first and foremost that *biblical revelation is deeply rooted in history*. God’s plan is manifested *progressively* and it is accomplished slowly, *in successive stages* and despite human resistance. God chose a people and patiently worked to guide and educate them. Revelation is suited to the cultural and moral level of distant times and thus describes facts and customs, such as cheating and trickery, and acts of violence and massacre, without explicitly denouncing the immorality of such things. This can be explained by the historical context, yet it can cause the modern reader to be taken aback, especially if he or she fails to take

account of the many “dark” deeds carried out down the centuries, and also in our own day. In the Old Testament, the preaching of the prophets vigorously challenged every kind of injustice and violence, whether collective or individual, and thus became God’s way of training his people in preparation for the Gospel. So it would be a mistake to neglect those passages of Scripture that strike us as problematic. Rather, we should be aware that the correct interpretation of these passages requires a degree of expertise, acquired through a training that interprets the texts in their historical-literary context and within the Christian perspective which has as its ultimate hermeneutical key “the Gospel and the new commandment of Jesus Christ brought about in the paschal mystery”.<sup>[140]</sup> I encourage scholars and pastors to help all the faithful to approach these passages through an interpretation which enables their meaning to emerge in the light of the mystery of Christ.

### *Christians, Jews and the sacred Scriptures*

43. Having considered the close relationship between the New Testament and the Old, we now naturally turn to the special bond which that relationship has engendered between Christians and Jews, a bond that must never be overlooked. Pope John Paul II, speaking to Jews, called them “our ‘beloved brothers’ in the faith of Abraham, our Patriarch”.<sup>[141]</sup> To acknowledge this fact is in no way to disregard the instances of discontinuity which the New Testament asserts with regard to the institutions of the Old Testament, much less the fulfilment of the Scriptures in the mystery of Jesus Christ, acknowledged as Messiah and Son of God. All the same, this profound and radical difference by no means implies mutual hostility. The example of Saint Paul (cf. *Rom* 9-11) shows on the contrary that “an attitude of respect, esteem and love for the Jewish people is the only truly Christian attitude in the present situation, which is a mysterious part of God’s wholly positive plan”.<sup>[142]</sup> Indeed, Saint Paul says of the Jews that: “as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers, for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable!” (*Rom* 11:28-29).

Saint Paul also uses the lovely image of the olive tree to describe the very close relationship between Christians and Jews: the Church of the Gentiles is like a wild olive shoot, grafted onto the good olive tree that is the people of the Covenant (cf. *Rom* 11:17-24). In other words, we draw our nourishment from the same spiritual roots. We encounter one another as brothers and sisters who at certain moments in their history have had a tense relationship, but are now firmly committed to building bridges of lasting friendship.<sup>[143]</sup> As Pope John Paul II said on another occasion: “We have much in common. Together we can do much for peace, justice and for a more fraternal and more humane world”.<sup>[144]</sup>

I wish to state once more how much the Church values her *dialogue with the Jews*. Wherever it seems appropriate, it would be good to create opportunities for encounter and exchange in public as well as in private, and thus to promote growth in reciprocal knowledge, in mutual esteem and cooperation, also in the study of the sacred Scriptures.

---

[This excerpt is from [Verbum Domini](#) (The Word of the Lord), an Apostolic Exhortation written by Pope Benedict XVI, © Copyright 2010 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana. A full online copy is available on the [Vatican website](#).]

---

### Notes

<sup>[128]</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 29.

<sup>[129]</sup> *De Arca Noe*, 2, 8: PL 176, 642C-D.

<sup>[130]</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to Representatives of the World of Culture at the “Collège des Bernardins” in Paris* (12 September 2008): AAS 100 (2008), 725.

<sup>[131]</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 10; Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (24 May 2001): *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 20, Nos. 748-755.

<sup>[132]</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 121-122.

<sup>[133]</sup> *Propositio* 52.

<sup>[134]</sup> Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (24 May 2001), 19: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 20, Nos. 799-801; Origen, *Homily on Numbers* 9, 4: SC 415, 238-242.

<sup>[135]</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 128.

<sup>[136]</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

[137] *Propositio* 52.

[138] *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, 2, 73: PL 34, 623.

[139] *Homiliae in Ezechielem* I, VI, 15: PL 76, 836B.

[140] *Propositio* 29.

[141] John Paul II, *Message to the Chief Rabbi of Rome* (22 May 2004): *Insegnamenti* XXVII, 1 (2004), p. 655.

[142] Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (24 May 2001), 87: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 20, No. 1150.

[143] Cf. Benedict XVI, *Farewell Discourse at Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv* (15 May 2009): *Insegnamenti*, V, 1 (2009), 847-849.

[144] John Paul II, *Address to the Chief Rabbis of Israel* (23 March 2000): *Insegnamenti* XXIII, 1 (2000), 434.

“When you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts”

Numbers 12:3-8

3 Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth. 4 And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." And the three of them came out. 5 And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward. 6 And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. 7 Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. 8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Numbers 12:3-8)

Hebrews 3:1-19

1 Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. 2 He was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in God's house. 3 Yet Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more honor than the house. 4 (For every house is built by some one, but the builder of all things is God.) 5 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, 6 but Christ was faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope.

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, when you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. 10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their hearts; they have not known my ways.' 11 As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

12 Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end, 15 while it is said, "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

16 Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they should never enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:1-19).

**Some questions for reflection**

1. Why did God call Moses the meekest man on earth? The virtue of meekness is closely related to humility and docility (teachableness). The meek do not resist God but willingly submit to God's authority. The meek listen to God and willingly seek to understand the intention of what God wants for them. They are teachable and ready to obey rather than proud or stubborn in their own ways. Moses was both the servant and friend of God because he trusted in God and obeyed his word.
2. The New Testament author of the Letter to the Hebrews contrasts the meekness Moses with the rebellious spirit of the Israelites who resisted God's word through the instructions of Moses (Hebrews 3:7-11). What are the consequences of resisting or ignoring God's word?

Read the following meditation and commentary on Hebrews 3 (see below).

## **Meditation and commentary on Hebrews 3:1-19**

The author to the Hebrews contrasts Jesus with Moses. For the Jews Moses held a very special position. He spoke with God face to face as a man speaks with his friend. He was the direct recipient of the Ten Commandments, the law of God. The Book of Numbers says that Moses differed from all the prophets. *Moses was faithful in all God's house (Numbers 12:6-7)*. The Jews could not conceive of anyone being closer to God than Moses.

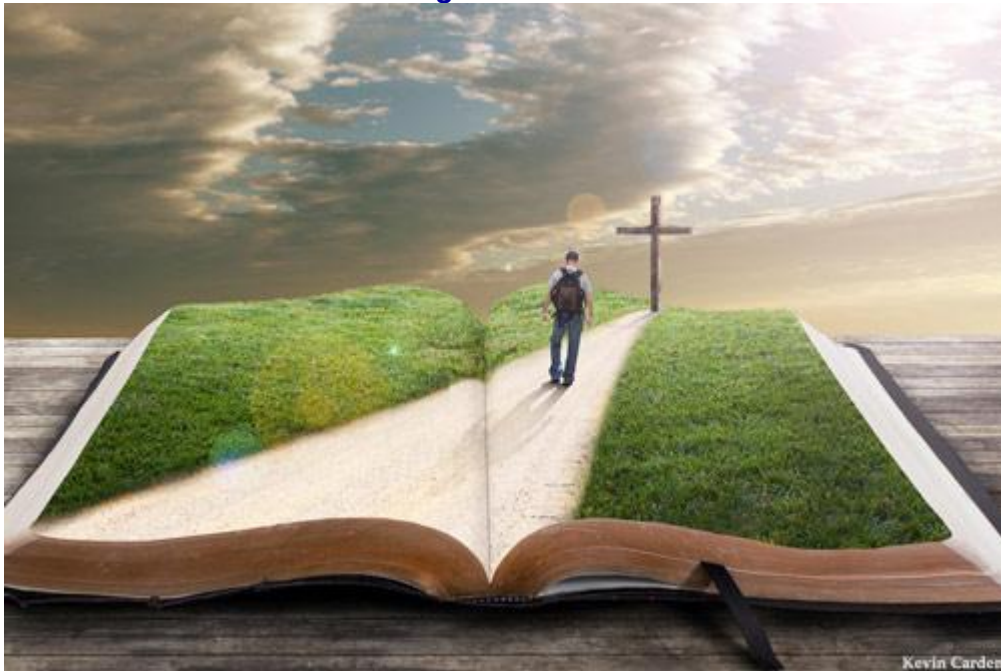
The author to the Hebrews calls Jesus the *apostle and high priest of our confession*. This is the only New Testament reference to Jesus as an apostle. The word literally means *one who is sent forth*. Jesus is the supreme ambassador of God. He came from God and all God's grace, mercy, and love were with him as the supreme ambassador. Jesus is also called the great *high priest*. The word high priest in Latin means *bridge-builder*. The priest is the mediator between man and God. He must speak to men for God and speak to God for men. Jesus is the perfect high priest since he is perfectly man and perfectly God. He alone can bridge the gulf between man and God and make it possible for us to have personal access to God.

Jesus is superior to Moses, since Moses served in God's house as a faithful servant. Jesus served in God's house as the faithful Son. The Greek term for house (*oikos*) has a double meaning. It can refer to the dwelling and to the family or household. Jesus is both creator of God's universe and the chief cornerstone of God's house, the Church. He is also the Son through whom we become the adopted children of God and members of the household of God.

"Lord Jesus Christ, protect me from complacency and from hardness of heart that my love for you and your ways may grow and never be cold."

Source: <http://www.rc.net/wcc/readings/heb3.htm>

**The Word of God Is Living and Active – Hebrews 4:12**



## The Unity of the Old and New Testament Scriptures

edited by Don Schwager

### Unity of the Old and New Testaments

Christians recognize the Old Testament (Jewish Scriptures) and the New Testament as one book, commonly called the Bible or Holy Scriptures. Both the Old and New Testaments are divinely inspired by one and the same Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16). Kallistos Ware, a biblical scholar and Orthodox bishop, states succinctly,

We believe that the Scriptures constitute a coherent whole. They are at once divinely inspired and humanly expressed. They bear authoritative Witness to God's revelation of Himself – in creation, in the Incarnation of the Word, and the whole history of salvation. And as such they express the word of God in human language. While divinely inspired, the Bible is also humanly expressed. It is a whole library of different books written at varying times by distinct persons. Each book of the Bible reflects the outlook of the age in which it was written and the particular viewpoint of the author. For God does nothing in isolation, divine grace cooperates with human freedom. God does not abolish our individuality but enhances it. And so it is in the writing of inspired Scripture. Alongside the divine aspect, there is also a human element in Scripture. We are to value both.

Alongside this human element, however, we see always the divine element. These are not simply books written by individual human writers. We hear in Scripture not just human words, marked by a greater or lesser skill and perceptiveness, but the eternal, uncreated Word of God Himself, the divine Word of salvation.

– from *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 2008

The New and Old Testaments are intimately linked together. Over one third of the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament. Jesus stated unequivocally, “Do not think I have come to abolish the

law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but fulfil them” (Matthew 5:17). The New Testament does not replace the Old – rather it unveils and brings into full light the hidden meaning and signs which foreshadow and point to God’s plan of redemption which he would accomplish through his Son, Jesus Christ.

### **New hidden in the Old – Old unveiled in the New**

A very common expression, dating back to the early beginnings of the Christian church, states that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New – the two shed light on each other. The Old Testament prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ who came not only to redeem the people of Israel but the whole world as well.

All Scripture describes the coming of the Lord. The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old Testament is brought to light in the New. Those who are unspiritual have always failed to see this hidden meaning. Yet even before Christ those who were spiritual could find the Words of God hidden in the words of the prophets, and so through this understanding could be set free.

– Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354-430 AD)

There are a number of symbols and events in the Old Testament that foreshadow and point to the coming of Christ and his saving mission. When interpreted correctly they can also shed light on the significance of what Christ has done for us. For example, when the people of Israel were saved from death by passing through the waters of the parted Red Sea, the early Christians saw in this Exodus event a symbol of the “new birth” and “regeneration” through the waters of baptism that cleansed us from sin, and delivered us from death to new life in Christ, thus making us a new creation in Christ and co-heirs with Christ in the promises of a restored Paradise and New Jerusalem – the city of heavenly glory where we will dwell with God in his everlasting kingdom of peace and righteousness.

Jesus, in a number of places recorded in the Gospels, refers to the Old Testament figures and signs, such as Jonah (Matthew 12:39), Solomon (Matthew 12:42), the Temple (John 2:19), the brazen serpent of Moses in the wilderness (John 3:14) that pointed to himself and to his work of redemption.

### **How to read the Scriptures**

From these examples, we can hopefully see two important truths for how Christians ought to read the Scriptures. The New Testament must be read in the light of the Old Testament, and the Old Testament must be read in the light of Christ’s saving death and resurrection.

### ***In the beginning***

Another example of how the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and how the Old is unveiled in the New Testament can be seen by reading both the first chapter of the Book of Genesis and the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Genesis 1 describes the work of creation involving the Spirit of God, the Word of God which was spoken, and the eternal Father who breathed the “breath of life” into Adam, making him a “living soul” and son after God’s likeness and image.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... And the ***Spirit of God*** was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1,3).

Then God ***said*** [*the word of God*], “Let ***us*** make man in ***our*** image, after ***our*** likeness (Genesis 1:26)... Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground, and ***breathed*** into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7).

Why did God speak in the plural (*let us make man in our image*) when he created humankind in his image? The Gospels reveal a Trinity of Persons perfectly united in the one Godhead – the eternal Father, the only-begotten Son (who is the eternal Word of God), and the Holy Spirit. John’s Gospel, chapter one, brings out the hidden meaning in the Genesis account of creation.

In the beginning was the **Word**, and the Word was *with God*, and the Word **was God**. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made (John 1:1-3).

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the **only begotten Son from the Father** (John 1:14).

And John bore witness, “I saw the **Spirit** descend as a dove from heaven and remain on him [Christ]” (John 1:32).

The New Testament revelation sheds light on God’s work of creation and on how God determined to restore and fulfil his plan after Adam’s disobedience and the downfall of the human race. God sent his only-begotten Son who takes on human flesh for our salvation. The Lord Jesus is both fully God – the eternal Word of God, and fully man – conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary who bore him (Luke 1:26-35), and anointed by the same Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22) to carry out the eternal Father’s plan of redemption and restoration through his death and resurrection.

### ***Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ***

From the beginning of the early church to the present, Christians have understood the importance of personally encountering the Risen Lord Jesus in and through the living and active Word of God in the Scriptures.

Jerome (347-420 AD), an early church Bible scholar who translated the entire Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek texts into the common language of his day (Latin), said that “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

You are reading [the Scriptures]? No. Your betrothed is talking to you. It is your betrothed, that is, Christ, who is united with you. He tears you away from the solitude of the desert and brings you into his home, saying to you, “Enter into the joy of your Master.”

### ***In the Bible it is God who speaks to us***

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), a German Lutheran pastor and theologian, who wrote extensively and preached widely from the Scriptures on the centrality of the cross of Christ and on ethical demands of the Gospel message, paid the ultimate price with his life when he was imprisoned and executed by the Nazi regime in 1945. His writings and the witness of his life and martyrdom continue to have significant influence on generations of Christians – Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox – throughout the Christian world. In a letter he wrote in 1936 to Dr. Rudiger Schleicher, his brother-in-law and close friend, he explains his approach to the reading of the Bible:

One cannot simply read the Bible the way one reads other books... That is because in the Bible it is God who speaks to us... If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature. But if it is God who says where he will be, then that will truly be a place that at first is not agreeable to me at all, that does not fit so well with me. That place is the cross of Christ. And whoever will find God there must draw near to the cross in the manner that the Sermon on the Mount requires. That does not correspond to our nature at all; it is, in fact, completely contrary to it. But this is the message of the Bible, not only the New Testament but also the Old (Isaiah 53!). In any case, Jesus and Paul understand it in this way – that the cross of Jesus fulfils the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The entire Bible, then, is the Word in which God allows himself to be found by us. Not a place that is agreeable to us or makes sense to us a priori, but instead a place that is strange to us and contrary to our nature. Yet, the very place in which God has decided to meet us.

(translation from the German by David Mcl. Gracie, *Meditating On the Word*)

### ***Encountering the face of Christ***

In our own present day many Christians are witnessing a renewed interest and rediscovery of the great treasure and power of God’s Word in the Scriptures. Benedict XVI [Joseph Ratzinger], who has



devoted his life to the study of the Scriptures and to the biblical teaching of the early church fathers, has written extensively on the importance of encountering the 'face of Christ' in the profound and intimate unity of the Scriptures:

Christian tradition has often placed the Divine Word made flesh on a parallel with the same word made book. This is what emerges already in the creed when one professes that the Son of God "was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man", but also a profession of faith in the same "Holy Spirit, who spoke through the Prophets".... as Saint Ambrose affirms (*In Lucam* VI, 33) – and clearly declares: "For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took to himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men" (*Dei Verbum* 13)...

In this rediscovered harmony, the face of Christ will shine in its fullness and will help us to discover another unity, that profound and intimate unity of Sacred Scriptures... "At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Christ thus retrospectively sheds his light on the entire development of salvation history and reveals its coherence, meaning, and direction.

- Benedict XVI, Address on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," October 2008

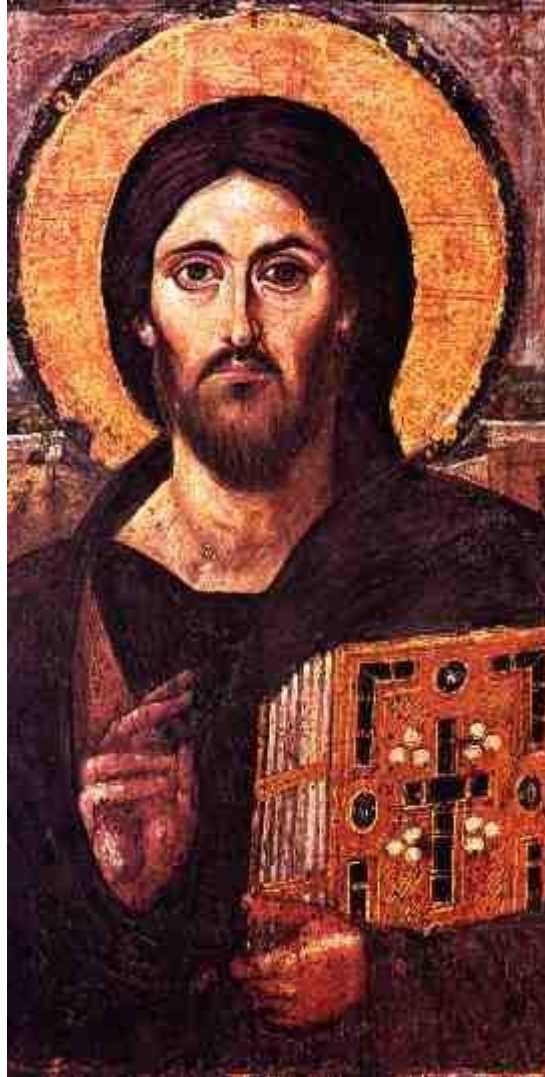
### **Reading the Scriptures spiritually**

In conclusion, it is important that when we read and study the Old and New Testament passages of the Bible, we must be very attentive to the unity and the content of the whole Scripture. It is also important that we learn to discern the full sense of Scripture both in its *literal* and *spiritual* senses together.

Hence, the importance of learning how to both read Scripture *prayerfully* and *interpret* it *spiritually* – through the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

[Don Schwager is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#) and author of the [Daily Scripture Reading and Meditation](#) website.]

## ***The Word of God Is Living and Active – Hebrews 4:12***



## **The Scriptures Are One Book in Christ**

### ***The Spirit of Christ present in the Old Testament***

“[Christ's words] are not only those which he spoke when he became a man and tabernacled in the flesh; for before that time, Christ, the Word of God, was in Moses and the prophets... [their words] were filled with the Spirit of Christ.”

– Origen of Alexandria, Bible scholar and teacher (184-254 AD)

### ***The hidden meaning of Christ's coming***

All Scripture describes the coming of the Lord. The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old Testament is brought to light in the New. Those who are unspiritual have always failed to see this hidden meaning. Yet even before Christ those who were spiritual could find the Words of God hidden in the words of the prophets, and so through this understanding could be set free.

– Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354-430 AD)

### ***The Scriptures Are Singing of Christ***

“You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time... In any passage

you care to choose, the Scriptures are singing of Christ, provided we have ears that can pick out the tune. The Lord opened the minds of the Apostles so that they understood the Scriptures. That he will open our minds too is our prayer.”

– Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354-430 AD)

### *Christ foreshadowed in the Old Testament*

“Every part of Holy Scripture announces through words the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, reveals it through facts and establishes it through examples... For it is our Lord who during all the present age, through true and manifest foreshadowings, generates, cleanses, sanctified, chooses, separates, or redeems the Church in the Patriarchs, through Adam's slumber, Noah's flood, Melchizedek's blessing, Abraham's justification, Isaac's birth, and Jacob's bondage.”

– Hilary, bishop of Poitiers (300-368 AD)

### *God has said everything in his Word*

“In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word – and he has no more to say... because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son.

Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty.”

– John of the Cross (1542-1591 AD)