

The Hammer of God

Jeremiah 23:29

In an age of mass and constant communication, we should be reminded that our God is a divine community and from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit comes our desire to speak and be heard, to hear and understand. Because we believe in the living God who speaks, our understanding of revelation is central to our faith and life. How can we know and hear God? We do so as he reveals himself in the world which he made and rules (general revelation: Psalm 19:1-6; Acts 17:28; Rom. 1:19-20; Acts 14:17), but especially through the Scriptures (special revelation: Genesis through Revelation) he has given us. In the Bible we find our highest authority and the means to know the Creator. We'll look at the way Scripture comes to us, how it is described, and what happens when we interact with it.

Receiving the Bible

The Bible is one book consisting of a collection of 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. It was written by about 35 authors over perhaps as long a period as 4000 years. Archbishop Stephen Langton divided it into chapters in the early 1200s, and Robert Estienne assigned verses in 1551, for a total of 1189 chapters and 31,102 verses. The Old Testament chronicles the creation of the world until Malachi's promise of the coming of John the Baptizer (Mal. 4:5), not entirely in chronological order. The New Testament was written after the ascension of Jesus in 30AD until likely no later than 70AD. The old covenant "Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2), meaning they considered the Scriptures to be the very word of God which they were required to carefully preserve. Over and over the biblical writers will declare "God said" (e.g. Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11). Some were given dreams and visions and told what to write (Is. 1:1; Ez. 1:1), while others were simply filled with the Spirit as they wrote or as they dictated to a scribe (Jer. 36:4, 32). Jesus' view of the Old Testament is summed up when he said the "Scriptures cannot be broken" (John 10:35). The New Testament books were copied and widely distributed after being written down. We have over 5000 extant Greek manuscripts, the oldest of which date to AD 350, less than 300 years from the original autographs. There is no comparison with other ancient documents (Homer 643 mss; Plato 7 mss, 1300 years removed from original; Aristotle 5 mss, 1400 yrs; Caesar 10 mss, 950 yrs; Tacitus 20 copies, 1000 yrs). The scribal errors between manuscripts are insignificant and do not affect any major doctrine of the faith. Church councils in Hippo Regius (393) and Carthage (397) definitively identified the books of the New Testament, but they simply codified what was already widely accepted.

Describing the Bible

What does the Bible say about itself?

- Self-authenticating and inspired (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21)
- Supremely authoritative (1 Thess. 2:13; Act 17:11)
- Complete and sufficient (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19; Lk. 16:31)
- Clear (1 Cor. 2:15, 10:15; 1 Jn. 2:20)
- To be obeyed (James 1:22)
- Living and active, sharp (Heb. 4:12)

- All about Jesus (Matt. 5:17-18; Is. 61:1-2; Lk. 4:21, 24:44, 27)

Living with the Word

The goal of interacting with the Bible is not only information but rather transformation. This is because rather than staring at the Bible, we look through it to God. The Bible is living, active, and sharp to consecrates us (Heb. 4:12). It builds our faith (Rom. 10:17, 16:26) and nourishes us (Eph. 5:26; 1 Pet. 2:2). Regardless of what we do, it is effective—the hammer of God (Is. 55:11; Jer. 23:29).

Questions for Young Christians

1. How many books are in the Bible?
2. List as many books of the Bible as you can beginning with Genesis first, and then Matthew.
3. Who is the Bible all about?
4. Do you have your own Bible? What are some of your favorite stories?
5. What is your favorite book of the Bible and why?