



A Course

In

STUDIES IN THE
ENGLISH BIBLE

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

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AMERICAN BIBLE COLLEGE

Pineland, Florida 33945

INTRODUCTION

The gospel is intended for all men and must be made available for them in ways that they can understand. The achievements of the 19th and 20th centuries show that the Bible, the one Book for all mankind, quickly established itself as a common possession wherever given, and continues to fulfill its great mission as the savor of life unto life, a guide and a lamp to the stumbling feet of the nations. It is one of the wonders of its worldwide application that the Bible is at home in America, Palestine, England, Africa, Syria, and Japan [and through the whole world].

The first book to issue from a printing press was a Latin Bible (Gutenberg Bible). Though the exact date is not known, it was during the period 1450-56. In the latter part of the fifteenth century it is estimated that 144 editions of the Latin Bible were printed in various parts of Europe, while in the sixteenth century the number of editions increased to 438. The Scriptures are now available in over one thousand languages. It is agreed that the annual output of Bibles and portions of the Bible now exceeds [millions of copies]. We should remember, however, that the chief glory of the Bible is not found in the number of its editions or copies, but in its unfailing mission as a beacon light pointing to God, and as an untiring teacher showing the children of men how to reach Him through Christ.

The greatest single factor in the development of life among English-speaking people has been the Bible. Its unique position in the life of our forefathers has been attended by unique results. The whole of our cultural, political, social, and religious history has been powerfully influenced by the English Bible. It is our great heritage. To cherish the Bible in the modern generation of youth is to show in part an appreciation of the heroic struggles of the pioneers in English Bible translation who sought to make the Word of God available to their generation. But the Bible deserves to be studied for its own sake; its message needs to be understood; its claims repeated and acknowledged, and its one mission fulfilled, that is, to reveal the unceasing activity of God in seeking to bring to the sons of men the abounding life in Christ. In simplest terms the Bible is the record of God's acts in redeeming love. We can never understand the plan of the ages apart from the Book of ages, nor the increasing purpose of God apart from the leading of the Spirit of truth in making His Word known. If we continue to move in the sphere and spirit of the Bible we are assured at once that we will continue in broadness of outlook, fervent in love, evangelistic and missionary in our program of sharing with others the things of Christ, and generous in our support of the Lord's work.

If the present volume contributes in any way to a fuller appreciation of the significance of the Bible in Christian life and work, the author will be grateful.

J. McKee Adams
Louisville, Kentucky

The American Bible College wishes to thank the former Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist convention for their consent and aid in the use Dr. J. McKee Adams' book, *OUR BIBLE*. Likewise, appreciation is given to Drs. Phil Stringer, David H. Sorenson, and David W. Daniels along with other noted quotations.

It is our desire that this course will cause you to appreciate the heritage that you have in the living Word of God as He has preserved it down through the ages.

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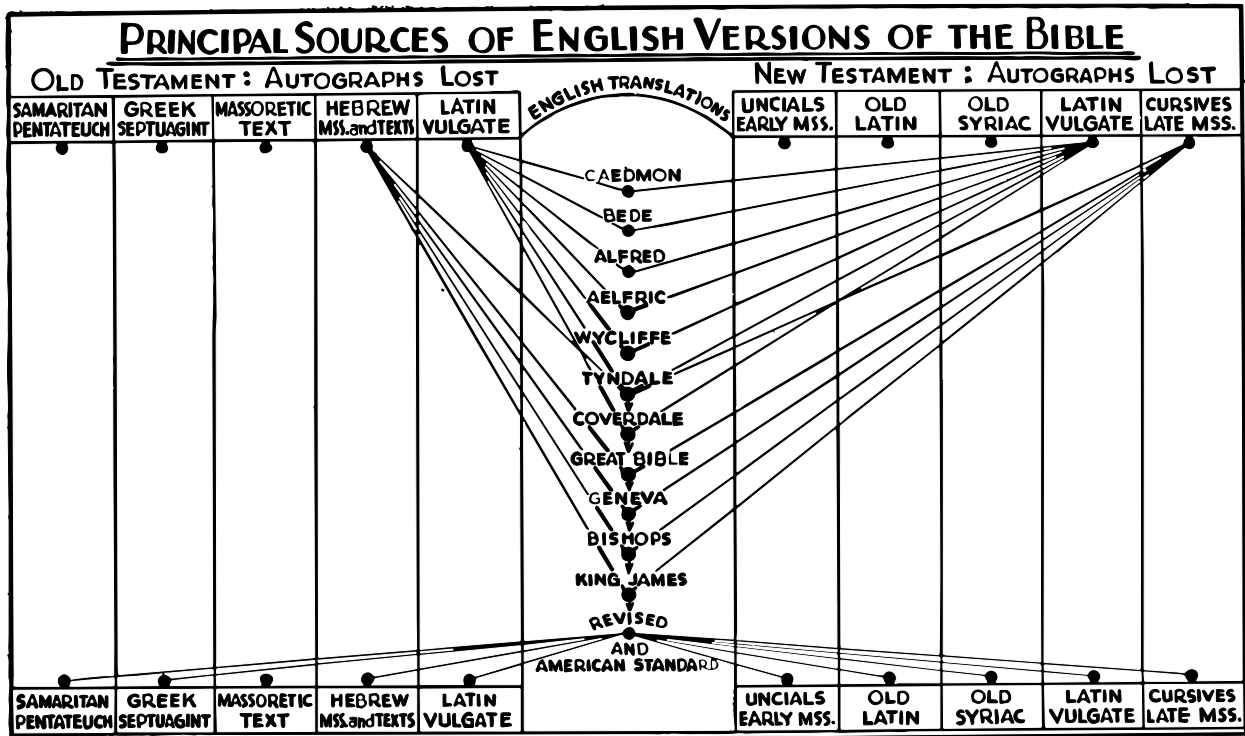
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CHAPTER I

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REVELATION

INTRODUCTORY

The student's approach to the study of the Bible should be along the line of its historical development, beginning with the first steps and continuing until it stands before Him as an understandable product. The first requirement of Bible study is the recognition of divine activity in human experience making for an orderly and progressive unfolding of the will of God to men. The earlier phase of that process took place in the experiences of the chosen people of Israel and is recorded in the Old Testament, while the latter falls within the New Testament period heading up in Jesus and the apostles. The first books of the Bible, the five books of Moses, were written one thousand four hundred years before the dawn of the Christian era; the last portions, the writings of the apostle John, are placed at the close of the first Christian century, c.100 A.D. Here is a period of approximately fifteen hundred years in which historic development of the Scriptures was taking place, the full growth being reached when all of the several parts both of the Old and New Testaments were brought together into one volume, the Bible. As will be pointed out later, there is no great difficulty in marking the stages of this orderly growth, but the fact here emphasized is that the Bible must be studied in relation to historic order, *the product of the Spirit of God working in and through human experience*.¹

¹ Over against this view of the origin of the Bible is the Mohammedan tradition regarding their sacred book, the *Koran*. For centuries Mohammedan leaders debated whether the *Koran* was created or uncreated. The theory that prevailed was that there was a "sending down" of parts through a period of about twenty-three years, until the whole of the *Koran* was in the hands of the prophet. The parts sent down, however, were not the products of Mohammed's thinking nor had anything to do with human thought, but had previously existed on the "perfectly preserved table in heaven."

Our purpose in thus stressing the divine and human elements in the making of the Bible is to place the Word of God at the center of human experience where it belongs. It was written neither for angels nor by angels, but for men and by men under the direction and influence of the Holy Spirit. This is the proper approach to the Bible. It is reasonable and understandable because it falls within the range of life. The Bible was never intended as an object of worship, rather was it given to show men *how* and *whom* to worship, to lead them to reach up for divine light and fellowship. In itself, the Bible is God's self-revelation to mankind through human writers which began in the Old Testament and reached its perfect and completed expression in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. No truer estimate was ever put on the Scriptures than that uttered by Jesus: "Search the scriptures, for in them ye think that ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." (John 5:39-40) The Scriptures, then, stand as the permanent and final record of how God has made himself known to the world in Christ in redeeming love and grace. In accepting this view we thereby exclude all other books as secondary in interest and importance. All the light that the world needs in order to find God is reflected in the Bible. Regarded from any viewpoint, it is undergirded throughout with the purpose of God to save the world. Redeeming love is a part of every page of the Bible story, just as the water-mark is a part of the writing paper, and can never be removed without destroying that in which it is embedded.

Now when we define the Bible as the final record of God's self-revelation, we definitely characterize it as falling within the realm of religion. It is a religious book. Here one finds the spiritual and physical biography of the human race. [Although the Bible is not primarily a scientific book, it is nevertheless scientifically correct in all scientific matters. However, the principal theme of the Bible is God's saving grace and mercy.] Here we may stand in full confidence, claiming for the Scriptures the final word regarding the quest of God for men, and how redemption was finally achieved through His self-revelation in Christ.

It is now in order to ask, What is meant by *revealing activity* of God? What is *self-revelation* or *self-disclosure*? But perhaps more fundamental for us at this point is the simple question, What is *revelation*? And, finally, in what manner is the Bible the record of God's activity in revealing himself?

I. DEFINITION OF THE TERM—REVELATION

The word "revelation" was brought over into the English language from the Latin. Its root meaning is

"to unveil" or "to uncover" so that what was hidden was now made known. In turn the Latin word expresses the term originally used in the Greek New Testament, *apokalupsis*, which means "drawing back the veil," a vivid conception of drawing apart the curtains in order that the audience may follow the action of the play. One book in the New Testament is called The Revelation, thus indicating that its contents have to do with the unveiling of the future, or giving a preview of the events which will occur in the future. Accordingly, when we state that God is engaged in revealing activity, we mean that He is drawing back the curtain from that which is hidden; His self-revelation is the act of making Himself known, the disclosure of His nature and of His purposes with regard to men and the course of the world. Those are the elementary ideas in the word. When we attempt to define the term so as to include the biblical conception of revelation, we meet with difficulty. As expressed in the fine words of Principal Fairbairn: "Revelation can only concern what is so above nature as to be beyond the power of man to *discover* or of nature to *disclose*; in other words, it must relate to God, proceed from Him, and be concerned with Him." From which it is clear that we are concerned only with the activity of God in making himself known. But any activity of God in revealing, in the nature of the case, must be on the order of that which is above the natural, hence supernatural. With this in mind let us attempt another statement. Revelation is the supernatural act or divine process in which God gives to the human messenger or writer glimpses of Himself, His will, and His truth. No writer in the Bible undertakes to explain how revelation takes place; the fact is simply stated that the origin of all "unveiling" of the divine nature and purpose is God. It is therefore God communicating with men the truth about Himself for a special purpose or end.

II. THE METHOD OF REVELATION

Though there is no biblical statement as to the method of revelation, we are not left wholly in the darkness regarding certain conditions under which it must have taken place. We know that man is not the source of revelation nor is it a development of any resources within him. God reveals, man receives, and all that man has ever received has been given to him by God. The act of revelation has therefore at least two aspects, the divine and the human; the first being the source, and the second the method. Now two conditions are necessary in order that revealing activity might occur.

A. God Is Able to Communicate with Man

The Christian view of God is that He is the supreme personal Being directing all of the affairs of the world in keeping with His will and purpose. He is therefore purposeful and responsible in all divine activity. The world is not ruled by blind chance or natural law, but by the will of God. Being interested in the affairs of men, He takes part in all events and determines their outcome in keeping with His purpose of grace. In other words, God is not detached from men and the world. He is able to speak and to be understood. Any other view would be fatal to the very idea of the existence of God and of man in a world of order and purpose.

B. *Man Is Able to Receive God's Communications*

This is a necessary condition of revelation and is based primarily on the spiritual nature of man who was created in the image of God. We understand that "the image of God" refers to no outward form answering to the physical characteristics of man, but that He is perfect in his spiritual and moral nature, in His intelligence and will. God is spirit. Man, created in the image of God, shares with his Maker likeness in kind, though not in degree, of spirit, moral qualities, intelligence, and possession of will. The receiving end of a wireless system of communication is perfectly in tune with the broadcasting point. When God flashes out the revelations of Himself, man is the only creature in all the world who is constituted to understand Him. Of equal importance is the fact that man is not only capable of understanding the divine message but that he is actually made with the desire to "listen in," to feel after God, to reach up and to follow the gleam. It is this ability to hear and this inclination to reach up that mark him as the highest order of creation and as a being of the God kind.

III. THE OBJECT OF REVELATION

As expressed in the Bible idea of revelation, God is engaged in the great process of making *Himself known*. All revelation comes from Him and is concerned with Him. While nature reveals God, man cannot discover Him unaided, God unveils Himself to the vision of the mind and heart of man. In a real sense revelation is the result of fellowship with God. There is an increasing understanding of truths about God that results from this spiritual contact which is essentially revelation in the Christian sense. Man can never know God fully; while He can be partially known, the perfection of His Being holds out the eternal hope of enlarged vision. It is important that we name here certain steps in man's growing conception of God, the steps that are intended to lead on forever to higher things.

A. *God is a personal Being*, perfect in all His nature of holiness, goodness, purity, love, truth, mercy, and grace. Jesus revealed God as the loving, Heavenly Father.

B. *God is the Almighty Being*. By this is meant that He is self-sufficient, sovereign over all the created universe which came from Him. All power belongs to Him, its source and author. God rules the world and directs its end.

C. *God is the Saviour of the world seeking always to bring deliverance to sinful men through the offer of salvation in Jesus*.

IV. THE MEASURE OF REVELATION

In a true sense the capacity of man is a measure of God's revelation. If we are to come to knowledge of God in experiences of life, it must be one of growth and increase. In the epistle to the Hebrews there is a fine statement of this fact: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things by whom also he made the worlds." (Heb. 1:1-2) That means that revelation has been piecemeal and at separated seasons because of the limitations of man. He could not receive it all at one time nor can he now take in fully everything that God is desirous of telling him. In other words, the process continues while God unfolds Himself to man, new truth being added to the old, fuller light to that which is in part, and more knowledge to that which has been appropriated by the believers. It is true that we shall never know all about God; deeper understanding awaits the searching heart.

V. THE PLANE OF REVELATION

In the nature of the case, if revelation is to come to man it must reach him where he is. Man is a creature of time and sense, subject to limitations of space. He moves from one point to another on the plane of history, adapting himself to his environment or changing it for the development of his life and character. This is the place where God meets him, where He reveals Himself in saving grace. It is the glory of the Christian idea of revelation that, while men are stumbling, searching, and crying out for God, feeling for Him as gropers in darkness, God stoops, descends into the midst of life and offers spiritual salvation. The supreme revelation of God to the world was made in His Son. In the earthly career of Jesus we have the full and final answer to every thought of God concerning man. It was on the plane of historical

experience that His life was lived, where He labored and died as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) It is on the plane of historical experience that man understands the need of that revelation and receives it.

VI. THE RECORD OF REVELATION

Finally, the record of God's revelation is the Bible. The Bible tells us all that we know about God, every fact that we know about Jesus. But everything that it says has been made known to men through the working of the Holy Spirit. The Bible was not created as man, but grows as the enlightened heart and mind of man received the truth. Man did not always understand everything that the Holy Spirit revealed, but here faith entered to assist him in accepting and believing. We regard the Scriptures as setting forth the history of man's redemption in clearest terms which all can understand. It meets all religious needs of the human heart and life, and in the realm of religion it is sufficient, trustworthy, final, and authoritative.

This does not mean that God is no longer speaking to men, or that revealing activity has ceased. If that were true, the whole of Christian experience would of necessity be on a declining rather than an ascending scale. The truth already revealed and partially known ever expands as the thoughts and purposes of men are broadened to receive and to follow its fuller meaning. One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to illumine the minds of men for a larger reception of the meaning of salvation and service in Christ. "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you." (John 16:14)

That is a continuous process in the present life of the Christian; nor is there any statement that it will end in the world to come. The great Saviour can never be fully known; the best that we can do is to strive to lay hold on the outer garment of the mysteries of His Person, His sufferings, and His kingdom as they shine out in the Bible. In this manner we must approach the Book of love and life in sincerest effort to know Him, the fellowship of His sufferings, and the purpose of His grace through us for others.

END OF SAMPLE