

The Bible - What is it? (part 2)

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[0 : 00] As I said last week, we could perhaps report on the latest theological research. It's always a good idea to be up to date with what the academics are saying.! Or we could wait for the words of some spiritual leader.

See what the Archbishop of Canterbury's got to say perhaps for this week. Or we could do what the Quakers do and be quiet and wait for the inner light.

Well, the scripture does certainly tell us to be still and know that I am God. And yet, at heart, we don't do any of these things. When we find out what God has to say to us, we look at this book.

And so, what is this book? That's the question we've been trying to answer. Let's see if my... I think it's disconnected itself. Never mind, I'll use the keys. Don't worry, it doesn't really matter.

So, what is the book we're talking about? Well, it's actually a collection of 66 different books, which we call the Old and New Testaments. If you look at the contents page of your Bible, you'll see them listed out there.

[1 : 19] But more to the point, of course, why does it matter? Why is this book worth studying?

The last part of it was written some 1900 years ago. The earliest documents go back to the mid-Bronze Age, probably several thousand years ago.

Why should we bother to study this book at all? Why do we have it central in the things that we do in this church? And I gave you two answers last week, and I put them up here again this week.

We do it firstly because it claims to be a record of God's dealing with mankind, and in particular what God is doing about saving mankind from himself.

And secondly, it makes the even more remarkable claim that behind the variety of all the different human authors of the book, and there are lots of different human authors, there is in fact one divine author, and the fact that the Bible was written by God himself.

[2 : 28] And what we've been doing is looking through these books to try and look at what the Bible says about itself to see if it does indeed make these claims, and as we look through to see if these claims are actually plausible, whether we can actually regard them as being true.

So last week we looked particularly into the Old Testament, the 39 books of the Old Testament, and we looked at those headings, and I put some of the references on the slide, and I suggest you look them up now.

They should go up on the website, and unfortunately I took the wrong files home last week, so last week's sermon is not yet up on the website, but they should go up on the website. But we sort of looked at these following things.

We looked at the fact that God speaks and man speaks, and that fact that we speak as part of the image of God makes us so very different from all the other creatures that inhabit this planet.

We looked at the law of Moses, how it was meant to make the Jews the wisest people, and the other people were supposed to look on in envy and say what wise laws these people have.

[3 : 46] We looked at the different sorts of literature, and we looked at the different ways of responding to it, how we look at the law and the wisdom literature, and how we were supposed to meditate on it and study it, particularly Psalm 119, that we've read several parts of now, is very much on that topic.

And then we looked at what the prophet Amos said, and we saw that the prophet Amos, well it starts with the words, says these are the words of Amos, so Amos is claiming to be the author of this book, but equally he says, thus says the Lord.

What he says, he's claiming are the very words of the Lord himself. So that was the Old Testament. Now we're going to go on to look at the New Testament.

Unlike the Old Testament, which was written over a period of well over a thousand years, the New Testament is written over a relatively short period, less than a century, and what is in it?

Well, again I put on the slide what is in it, the four gospels as we call them, the good news about Jesus, and they are historical books that tell us about the life and teaching of Jesus.

[5 : 08] It's largely historical in approach, although they all make some comments, and John's gospel perhaps makes a bit more philosophical comment than some of the others, a theological comment, but essentially they're books of history that tell us about the life and teaching of Jesus.

And then we have the book of Acts, which tells us what happened after Jesus returned to heaven, the early life and the spread of the church, and how it's spread out over the Roman world.

And then we have a whole raft of letters, quite a lot of letters, written by Paul, written by Peter and James and John and Joe, and one, the book of Hebrews, that we don't really know who wrote it.

But there are a whole lot of letters on theological and pastoral issues. And then at the end, we have Revelation or the Apocalypse and Apocalypsis, which means an unveiling.

And that, if you like, is kind of future history, although it's written in a very symbolic way. It's an unveiling of the present state and the future of the church, but not now from the perspective of the earthly historian, but from the perspective of heaven.

[6 : 31] That's what the New Testament is. There were many other writings referring to Jesus, and he appears in various secular histories.

But why were these books chosen for the New Testament? Well, largely because the books were regarded as having apostolic authority. And as I said, it wasn't until the Council of Carthage in AD 397 that the final list was agreed, but that's slightly misleading because most of these books were accepted as true scripture long before that.

And mainly the issue was, were they either written by apostles, or if not, were they written with apostolic authority, and were they consistent with the apostolic teaching? They also pointed out last week what the rather surprising fact that the New Testament is written in Greek.

Why is that surprising? Well, because Jesus and the apostles would have spoken in either Hebrew or Aramaic, and so when we read the words of Jesus, we're in fact already reading them in translation, which is why the exact wording sometimes differs from gospel to gospel.

They're not actually quoting the words exactly as Jesus said them, but we're reading them in translation into Greek. And when it does, on one of very rare occasions actually quote the Aramaic, it says so, but that's what it's doing.

[8 : 04] So we're going to look now into the New Testament largely, although I'm not actually going to start in the New Testament. And I'd like to look under these headings.

First of all, we're going to look at how the Old Testament and the New Testament are linked together. And then we're going to look at Jesus' own testimony to the scriptures, particularly to the Old Testament, because those were the scriptures he had, and what he said about it.

And in a sense, that's going to be the most important part of our study this morning. But I am trying to work roughly in chronological order, which is roughly the order in which the books are written, laid down in our scripture.

Not entirely so, but roughly that's the case. And so we'll go on to look at some of the letters, the purpose and the use of scripture, as they're referred to in some of the letters.

And we'll particularly look at what Peter has to say, whether the New Testament is scripture, which is obviously a fair question to ask, since Jesus' references obviously were only to the Old Testament scriptures.

[9 : 12] And then we're going to look at the final warnings, particularly as we get at the end of Revelation. So, a promise to be fulfilled.

Because we looked at the Old Testament last week largely in its own terms, but there is one important thing to be added. Much of the Old Testament, as we saw, is sort of practical spiritual advice for the Jews.

But all the way through the Old Testament runs this message of something being uncompleted, a promise for the future. This isn't God's final word.

Now, of course, we could easily do a whole sermon just on this topic, but we won't do that. But let's just look at it, just a few, very few verses here, in fact, but just to give us the idea. And I'll read them out to you, but if you want to follow them in your script Bibles, I've put what I hope are the correct page numbers on the slide there.

So, first of all, Genesis 3, verse 15. We looked last week at the beginning of Genesis and how it talked about God speaking to man and indeed man speaking both to God and to the creation around him.

[10:34] Then, of course, Adam spoke a bit to, or Eve spoke a bit too long to the snake, the serpent, who, of course, is a symbol of Satan. And then, in chapter 3, we find God's word, in fact, here, not to man, but to the serpent himself, to Satan himself, where he says the following, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. So this, if you like, is God's declaration of war on the serpent. There's going to be war between the offspring of the woman and between the serpent, the Satan, the devil.

And they're going to be in a state of enmity, but there is this promise that the offspring of the woman will crush the serpent. And all the way, as we read through the Old Testament, we find that this promise is fleshed out.

There's quite a lot of it in Isaiah, actually, but we'll see some of that when we look at the New Testament quotations from the Old Testament, so I won't refer to Isaiah. Instead, let's just look briefly into the Psalms.

In Psalm 110, verse 4, we find these words. This psalm is probably written by David himself. It's labelled a Psalm of David and what it says, it looks as though it probably is written either by David himself or certainly about him.

[12:14] And it says the following, the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. Who on earth is Melchizedek?

Well, actually, Melchizedek is a quite obscure character that we come across in Genesis and at one point had some dealings with Abraham. But the point here is that he was both priest of the Most High God and he was also king of Salem, king of the city that was later to be Jerusalem.

David was the king of the Jews and had been promised that there would always be a descendant on his throne. But David was certainly not a priest.

At the time, there was a functioning priesthood based on the line of Levi. And the fact that there was a separation between the king and the priest obviously made a difference as it were because the king had these, if you like, the secular power, the power of the law in this world, but the priests, of course, had the spiritual authority.

But David is promised here that the Lord's descendant would be both king and priest. And if you want to follow this idea up a bit more, just look in Hebrews 5-7 which has a lot more to say about it.

[13:45] I won't actually have time to do that today but Hebrews 5-7 expands on this idea quite a lot. And the more we read through the Old Testament, we find this promise of a future king, of a new covenant, and a new law that is somehow better, in some sense, better than the old one, comes to dominate the writings of the Old Testament prophets.

And we find this particularly among those books written just before the Jews were sent off to exile in Babylon, books like Isaiah and Jeremiah, and even more so those books that were written after the Jews returned from Babylon, which seemed, at one sense, to be a fulfillment of the promises of God.

And yet, it wasn't what they'd come to expect. They found, in fact, that the reality was very different from what the promises seemed to imply.

And the prophets who write post-exile have to deal with that issue, the difference between what they expected and what they found the reality actually was. And so, in the prophet Zechariah, who was very much an apocalyptic prophet, a lot of the images in Revelation actually come from the book of Zechariah.

Zechariah was very much into symbols one way or another. And he says this, Zechariah 3, verses 8 and 9, Listen, O high priest Joshua, and your associates seated before you, you are men symbolic of things to come.

[15:24] I am going to bring my servant, the branch. See the stone I have set in front of Joshua. There are seven eyes on that one stone. I will engrave an inscription on it, says the Lord Almighty, and I will remove the sin of the land in a single day.

And though he doesn't tell us here what that inscription is, later on he does, it's holy to the Lord. Joshua was the high priest. The civil ruler was Zerubbabel, who was indeed a descendant of David.

But we're told here that he's Joshua, the high priest, who is the symbol particularly of my servant, the branch. And this idea of the branch, the branch and the root of Jesse, was very much the prophet's idea of the coming king.

Finally, let me remind you of the words we looked at this last week, but the two verses, the words with which the Old Testament ends, Malachi chapter 4, verses 5 and 6.

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of their fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.

[16:46] We always like to end on a positive note, don't we? And in a sense, the Old Testament does in that the prophet Elijah will come and yet the last words are actually a curse.

That if you don't listen to when the prophet comes, then the Lord would strike the land with a curse. So if you move just a few pages forward in your Bible, but some 400 years forward in time, in Matthew chapter 1, 20 to 23, and we find that the New Testament authors find themselves explicitly and consciously saying they are describing the fulfillment of all these Old Testament promises.

So as I say, just a few pages on in your Bible, but 400 years later, Matthew chapter 1, verse 20 to 23, we read the following. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived of her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has said through the prophet, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. Jesus, of course, is the Greek form of Joshua. So in calling him Jesus, Joshua, they are referring to Zechariah 3, verse 8.

[18:31] And then we get a quotation from Isaiah. Now if you look back in Isaiah, you might find that there is some reference in this passage to Isaiah himself and his wife but it's clear even when you read in Isaiah that the full fulfillment of this is something much greater, something still to come.

God with us. Isaiah couldn't describe his son as God with us. Because there is, he might have been a sign as it were of God, that God is with the people but explicitly the son God with us has a greater fulfillment to come.

And what's Matthew saying? He says, well, this is it guys. Here it comes. You know about all these Old Testament promises and now here it is. And that brings us on to consider what Jesus himself said about the Old Testament.

And if we claim to be disciples of Jesus, surely it's important to see what he had to say about the scripture. And the answer, in fact, is quite a lot. We are told in the New Testament that Jesus taught with authority himself.

Not like the scribes who were always a bit tentative. But Jesus taught with authority. And yet he was happy to acknowledge, wasn't he, the authority of the scriptures over tradition.

[20:01] As far as Jesus was concerned, the scriptures always trump human traditions. Maybe nothing wrong with human traditions as such, but if it comes to a conflict, then it's the scriptures that we listen to.

So Mark 7, 5 to 13, we read of this frank debate, shall we say, between the Pharisees and Jesus. And it says, the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with unclean hands?

What did Jesus reply? He says, Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites as it is written. These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

They worship me in vain. Their teachings are but rules taught by men. End of quote. And then he goes on to apply this to the Pharisees. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on the traditions of men.

And he said to them, you have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions. For Moses said, honor your father and your mother.

[21:16] Then anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death. But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is korban, that is a gift devoted to God, then you no longer let him do anything for his father and mother.

The meaning seems to be that the money that he might have set aside to look after his aging parents would instead be paid into the temple funds.

And thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you've handed down and you do many things like that. If it comes a conflict as often there does between the traditions of some church or other organization and what the scripture says, Jesus is saying, well the scripture always wins or it should do.

Scripture trumps the Pharisees' traditions. The scripture trumps the traditions of the Catholic church if they're contrary to God's word. The scripture even trumps the traditions of the reformed churches if they're contrary to God's word.

But the main thing that Jesus had to say about the scripture of course was that it pointed to himself. Luke 24, 25 to 27 he makes exactly this point.

[22 : 46] He said to them how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. Well we don't have time to go through all the Moses and all the prophets again but that's what Jesus said that they all the scriptures point to Jesus and here's some more things along the same line some more specific examples.

What about the law and the prophets? Do not think that I have come to abolish the law of the prophets I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them I tell you the truth until heaven and earth disappear not a smallest letter not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.

It's Matthew 5 17 18 from the Sermon on the Mount. Luke 4 17 to 21 again goes back to Isaiah Isaiah was really seems to have been the New Testament writer's favorite prophet he gets quoted as much as everybody else I think almost.

Luke 4 17 to 21 the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him unrolling it he found the place where it is written him here so I should say him here is Jesus himself of course unrolling it he found the place where it is written the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to release the oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor then Jesus rolled up the scroll gave it back to the attendant and as they used to in those days he sat down to preach to comment on the word of God the eyes of everyone in the synagogue it says were fastened on him and he began by saying to them today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing in other words who's the me that the prophet is referring to who is it on whom the spirit of the Lord has come it's Jesus himself and what has he come to do to preach good news to the poor to proclaim freedom for prisoners recovery of sight to the blind release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor that's what

[25 : 32] Jesus had come to do Isaiah had said it was going to happen but now that promise is fulfilled Jesus clearly regarded the Old Testament as being about himself in John chapter 5 37 to 40 we read this the father who sent me has testified himself concerning me you've never heard his voice or seen his form nor does his word dwell in you for you do not believe the one he sent you diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life these are the scriptures that testify about me and yet you refuse to come to me to have life note here that Jesus seems to be equating the testimony of the scriptures with the testimony of the father himself he says the father who sent me and testified concerning me where is that testimony to be found well it's in the scriptures the Old Testament scriptures and he says well you know you study the scriptures because you think through them you possess eternal life and actually that's true but only if you do what they say only if you listen to them finally in this section let's say

Jesus regarded scripture as definitive John 10 34 to 36 Jesus answered them is it not written in that your law I have said you are gods quoting from a psalm there if he called them gods to whom the word of God came and the scripture cannot be broken what about the one whom the father sent apart as his very own and sent into the world why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said I am God's son there's a lot in that verse but I'd just like to focus on Jesus' words there about the scripture he says the scripture cannot be broken what the scripture says is going to happen will happen we use various phrases to talk about the scripture and the inspiration of scripture and so on but to me that is the key one the fact that the scripture cannot be broken

I went to a conference years and years ago when I was a student and one of the speakers says you can't argue with Paul at least you can't at this conference it was an IVF conference so you weren't allowed to argue with Paul at that conference well Jesus says the same thing you're not allowed to argue with the scripture at least in this church you can discuss what it means but you're not allowed to argue with it well I thought in some ways I could very well stop there but it does leave open a few questions and the New Testament writers do go on to expand on this view of the scriptures so I think it is worth examining what they've actually got to say so let's do that so 2 Timothy 3 14 to 17 you probably all know this it's the it's the evangelical proof text isn't it I could have started there but I chose not to I think of course we need to think about what it means but 2

Timothy 3 14 to 17 Philip writing to Timothy his protégé sorry oh it's 14 sorry yeah I actually wrote four down in it originally and then realized it was corrected it is definitely 14 sorry 2 Timothy 3 14 to 17 but as for you continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of because you know those from whom you learned it and how from infancy you've known the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ so that's what it points to Jesus Christ then he goes on to say all scripture is God breathed breathed out by God and is useful for teaching I think there's a semicolon here

I mean not in the Greek of course because it doesn't have semicolons but I think that's the meaning it's useful for teaching and then he goes on to expand what he means by teaching a bit rebuking correcting and training in righteousness why so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work that's what you study and train for isn't it Deborah's going to be doing a PhD so that she's qualified to teach that's what the doctor means of course it means one who is qualified to teach one who is has authority then on her own in order to speak and that's why we study God's word so we may be equipped for every good work well I say this is the evangelical proof text but it's still worth looking to see what it says tells us first of all that all scripture is breathed out by God the older translations say inspired by God but that's not actually

[31 : 17] I think what the Greek means that inspired means breathed into but it's not actually saying that it says God has breathed it out and of course the words for breath and spirit are the same in Greek and so in other words it's God's spirit going out into the world and as it were condensing on the page God is the ultimate author notwithstanding all these human authors that we know that the scripture does have and we're told that all scripture is profitable that may seem a bit of a struggle sometimes if you ever read the genealogy in Genesis 5 or maybe the statistics that you read in numbers or in a different view perhaps you read the poems in the Song of Solomon and think how exactly do I profit from this and yet Paul tells us that all scripture is profitable and if we haven't looked at these passages then we haven't got the whole counsel of God and so perhaps we need to do a series on Genesis 5 but I don't think

I'm volunteering to do it you know we should all scripture is profitable it tells us well how is it profitable well it's the Christians primary weapon isn't it Ephesians 6 verse 17 take the flat jacket of salvation and the AK-47 of the spirit which is the word of God well actually that's not quite what it says if you look it up but that's what it means take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God he's talking about the gladius the short sword the short sword is the assault rifle of the Roman world it was the infantryman's standard weapon the Roman legionnaire would do and if you were a Roman soldier it was both what kept you alive and was your primary method of attack no legionnaire would dream of going to battle without checking that his sword was clean and sound and sharp that would just be stupid wouldn't it his life was going to depend on this his victory was going to depend on this so he would certainly make sure it was sharp and clean and he'd drill and train constantly in its use of course to do anything else was fully you would train I guess until it was he almost didn't have to think about it it was just instinctive how to use his sword in both defence and attack so how much attention do we give to sword drill

I'm sure none of us train as much as we should do in the word of God and notice also he does say Paul does say it's the sword of the spirit in a sense it's not our weapon it's the spirit's weapon so often you hear in Christian circles today people who want to say oh we don't need to study the bible we have the spirit or something like or words to that effect or you know that was the word for 2000 years ago I want to hear the word for today but that's not what Paul that's not Paul's attitude yes we need the Holy Spirit of course we do Paul was always on about the Holy Spirit he says when I came to you I wanted wrote to the Corinthians when I came to you I spoke not with plausible words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit's power but what was it he took to the Corinthians

not some primarily some fancy sort of spiritual you know demonstration making them all fall over or fly up in the air or something but the word of

God the the primary weapon of the Holy Spirit himself and therefore of the spiritual preacher is the word of God Hebrews expands on this idea a bit Hebrews 4 verse 12 this is the one book in the New Testament that we really have no idea who wrote it people do dispute some of the others but we have no idea who wrote Hebrews I like the tradition it was written by Barnabas but I have no absolutely no authority for that but it just seems like a nice idea you feel that Barnabas ought to have written something but whether he did or not it is still the word of God and it was written to the Hebrews for the word of God is living and active sharper than any double edged sword it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart the Roman soldier would want to get his sword into some vital organ of course to kill his opponent before the opponent could kill him but the word of

God it says goes even deeper than the Roman soldier's sword it does pierce to the heart but not just the physical heart but the spiritual heart it gets down to the bones right inside and that's what the word of God is for but how does it do it well it does that by pointing to Jesus Hebrews 1 verses 1 to 3 the beginning of the letter of Hebrews when the writer starts by telling us what he's about to write about he says the following in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe the son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being sustaining all things by his powerful word and after he provided purification for his sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven he talks there about the word of the father and the word of the son who sustains all things by his powerful word now you can argue the philosophy of whether that is in some sense distinct from the word of

[38 : 27] God but whether it is or not certainly clear that the word of God as we have it written down is there to point us to the son to point us to Jesus that's what the prophets and the other old testament writers were on about and that's what the new testament is there for so let's just one more look at one more reference on what the new testament says about the scripture or at least the letters at least it would be a fair question to ask I guess are the new testament writings themselves scripture because Jesus only talks about the old testament scriptures Hebrew says well yeah we have the old testament scriptures but God has spoken to us by his son does that mean we don't really need the new testament scriptures written down but after all the scriptures point to Christ it's in these new testament writings that we learn of

Christ so it would be very strange not to regard them as scripture wouldn't it seem odd that the old testament writings which talk us in a sense forward as scripture and yet the writings that actually describe the fulfillment of the promise would not be regarded as scripture it just wouldn't make any sense and another thing that I've put these two together not because they naturally go together it's just that Peter happens to deal with both these issues Peter deals with the issue of a weapon in untrained hands did you read in the news this week or last week was it of a young child who accidentally killed a shooting instructor she'd had an Uzi submachine gun put into her hands and I think a nine year old girl very stupid thing to do and the instructor paid for it with his life she lost control of it and he took a bullet to the head weapon in untrained hands can be quite a dangerous thing but

Peter deals with both these issues in this passage here just a couple of verses to Peter chapter 3 verses 15 to 16 he's actually talking here about why is it that the Lord hasn't yet returned as he promised to do and he says the following bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him where did Paul's wisdom come from it came from God he writes the same way in all his letters speaking in them of these matters his letters contain some things that are hard to understand which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other scriptures to their own destruction now if you read the new testament there is at least one occasion on which

Peter and Paul disagreed Paul tells us about that I think it's in Galatians is it or Colossians I can't remember one of the two and yet the apostle Peter first of all he says that Paul is a dear brother and he clearly states here that Paul's letters are the wisdom that God gave him and that they are scripture and when he talks about the other scriptures he must surely be referring not just to the Old Testament but to the other New Testament writings the gospels and so on and he also gives us that

warning that in untrained hands you can twist them to your own destruction and that does happen at the reformation of course people talked about the fact that we should read the scriptures for ourselves and that there was a private judgment and I think that that's true you know we shouldn't just rely on the interpretation of the church but it is also true that we do have to read them carefully and listen to teachers and listen to what to the whole message of the scripture the whole counsel God we need to study the scripture properly we need to think about it and seek understanding otherwise we can get hold of the wrong end of the rifle and that's nearly always fatal we can't just pick out random verses and regard them as God's message to us I was a little unhappy about in one sense having to do that even going through these things the scripture says about himself I had to pick verses to some extent out of their context you really ought to go back and check that I'm not pulling the wood over your eyes check that I'm not just taking a verse out of context and making it mean something to what it really does mean we need to examine the scriptures carefully we need to make sure we understand what it is really saying not just say take some random text and make it mean what we want it to I had a quote somewhere of some preacher being described as ten thousand thousand are his texts but all his sermons one we shouldn't twist the scriptures to what we want it to say even if what we wanted to say is true we still shouldn't be forcing the scriptures to say it when they don't we shouldn't be too ready to assert that our particular hobby horse is the only true and possible interpretation of a particular passage how much dissent has been caused among [44 : 29] Christians about the book of Revelation for instance! as to what exactly these passages mean and how to read them can't we agree that they are difficult as Peter says many some of the scriptures are hard to understand and that in a sense our interpretations do have to be slightly tentative we have to say well as far as we can see this is what the scripture means and most importantly of course interpret them with other scriptures which are perhaps clearer easier to understand and to read the whole book again not just take a small passage out of its context and say this clearly means that when it very probably doesn't and one of the dangers of having a high view of the scripture is that we become fundamentalists in the wrong sense of the term the bad sense of the term because it's come to mean a bad word on the TV news nowadays fundamentalists are people who don't think for themselves like that sometimes sometimes we can quote the scriptures as an excuse for not thinking for ourselves for not achieving wisdom which is what scriptures tell us therefore that we should achieve wisdom and we just quote a few proof texts and we quote them in an sort of ultra literal way forgetting that there are different sorts of literature in the scriptures and then we go around condemning as a heretic anyone who disagrees on some trivial point that is not the way to study and interpret the scriptures it's not how scripture itself tells us to use it it tells us to seek wisdom but we should be fundamentalists in the true sense in the original meaning of the term term comes from a book that was written the fundamentals which was to defend the word of God against an attack from liberal thinking and certainly we need to be fundamentalists in that sense that we regard the scripture as the foundation of our faith what it means isn't it fundament is the foundation and we should regard the scripture as the foundation of our faith why because it's the place where we find the savior and we need to be well drilled in its proper use and just finally close

I pointed out that the old testament finishes with the curse and in a sense so does the new testament as well or at least there's one very near the end of it revelation 22 verses 18 to 19 john writes i warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book if anyone adds anything to them god will add to him the plagues described in this book and if anyone takes away from this book of prophecy god will take away from him he share in the tree of life and in the holy city which is described in this book text for mathematicians perhaps you shouldn't add and you shouldn't take away god we shouldn't add anything to god's word because we do god will add something the plagues described in the book and if we take away then god will take away something even more his share in the tree of life and the holy city this curse of course could just refer to the book of revelation but I think most interpreters take it as referring to the whole of scripture the scripture is now complete everything that needs to be said has been said now of course that's not everything that needs to be said about anything as I say as pointed out last week the scripture doesn't say much about nuclear physics or computer programming

I don't think it says a lot about biochemistry either actually these are things that are worth studying but everything that needs to be said for salvation has been said we need to and these are warnings to listen to the word of god adding to it or taking away from it are just different ways really of twisting

the scriptures to mean something different and he says no don't do that listen to it study it gain wisdom think about it it does tell us all we need to know about the nature of mankind and the perilous state of mankind and more importantly what god is doing about that perilous state and above all it tells us about Jesus Christ and the new testament presents Jesus as prophet priest and king Jesus is the prophet who declares the words of god to us
Jesus is the priest who makes peace with god so that the law doesn't condemn us and Jesus is the king who is the law giver the very source of the words and so we ignore misuse the scripture at peril but if we use it properly as that reading that Phil gave us earlier from psalm 119 tells us it will enable us to rebuild our lives from the inside out so let's remember and heed those warnings that it gives us to listen to the word of god our final hymn points to the same place as the scripture does to to!