

THE EMPTINESS OF (MAN-MADE) TRADITION, RITUAL, CEREMONY, WORKS MARK 07:01–13

Introduction

This passage is of critical importance for the destiny of both man and religion. Why is it so important? Because neither man nor religion can survive being institutionalized, that is, being based and focused upon tradition, ritual, ceremony, and works. Survival depends upon the hearts of man and of religion. The heart of both must be focused upon acceptance and reconciliation, approval and redemption, peace and love, humility and giving, joy and hope. Men can survive only when they...

- accept each other and are reconciled to God in Christ (together).
- approve each other and are redeemed.
- live in peace and love.
- experience the joy and hope of Christ.
- walk humbly and live a life of service.

I. Tradition can be placed before need (vv. 1-5).

II. Tradition can be hypocritical honour (v. 6).

III. Tradition can be empty, worthless worship (v. 7).

IV. Tradition can be man-made commands (v. 8).

V. Tradition can be kept before the commands of God (vv. 9-12).

VI. Tradition can nullify the Word of God or make the Word of God ineffective (v.13).

I. *Mark 07:01–05 Religionists and Tradition*

Tragically, tradition can be placed before people's legitimate needs. The scene is that of religionists who found fault with Jesus' disciples. The religionists were a fact-finding commission from Jerusalem. They had come to investigate Jesus, to see exactly what was going on. News of Jesus' preaching and healing and of His conflicts with local authorities was constantly being brought to the leaders of Jerusalem. They had already sent one fact-finding commission to confront Jesus. Their report had not been good. They had accused Jesus of healing and casting out demons by Beelzebul. They had also accused Him of breaking the Sabbath law.

The same type of investigation had been done on John the Baptist, the man who was said to be the forerunner of Jesus. Not only his preaching and baptism and but also his priesthood had been suspect (Jn. 1:19). The questioning of John by the religionists was to be expected, for John's father, Zechariah, was a priest (Lk. 1:5); and in the eyes of the authorities, all the sons of priests were automatically priests by descent. However, John was not a priest like other priests. He was most unusual, for the way he lived and

preached was radically different (Mt. 3:1-12). He was a nonconformist, and the authorities had to find out why.

Thought 1. Too often institutional religion is suspicious and opposed to the unusual.

=> If a person is different or does things differently, he is questioned.

=> If a person is unusually blessed or if miraculous things are happening in his life and ministry, he is questioned.

The whole country was buzzing with news of Jesus' claims and unbelievable miracles. People were stirred up, dangerously so. All this necessitated another commission being sent out to investigate Jesus.

When the commission arrived, they immediately saw the disciples breaking one of their traditions. The disciples were eating with unwashed and unclean hands. Of course, what they were referring to was not that the disciples had bad manners nor that they were practicing bad health. They were referring to the fact that the disciples were unclean in the eyes of God. Why? Because the disciples had not washed their hands as a sign to God that they were offering themselves and their food to God. The traditional ceremony of washing one's hands before meals (as a sign of thanksgiving to God) had been broken. The disciples were ceremonially unclean.

The Law of Moses prescribed washing before handling some items. The idea was to instil within the people the holiness of God and His temple, and the need for man to be *spiritually clean* before approaching Him or handling His affairs. But what had happened was that some religionists had added to God's Word. They had taken the Law of God, including the laws of cleansing, and had added thousands and thousands of rules and regulations. There was a rule governing practically every thing a person did, so many rules in fact that no one could conceivably keep them. Instead of pointing a person to God and to the need for cleansing the heart, the rules caused a person to concentrate on the rules and the keeping of them. The rules became the centre and focus of attention, not God.

In the case at hand, the rule being broken was that of washing the hands before eating a meal. The disciples had violated the tradition of the church and had embarrassed the religious faithful of their day. In the eyes of the investigating committee, the disciples were unclean in the sight of God. They had broken a tradition of the elders and there was no excuse for it, not if they were the disciples of a true Rabbi. A true Rabbi would be teaching his disciples the traditions of the elders, not ignoring and violating them. Thus, the commission brought their charge to Jesus (v. 5).

II. *Mark 07:06 Tradition and Hypocrisy*

Tradition can be hypocritical honour. Jesus took the charge of the religionists and turned it against them. He quoted from Scripture, applying Isaiah's words to their spiritual condition (Isa. 29:13). His words were strong and forceful: He called them "hypocrites" (See *Hypocrites*, Mt. 23:13). They honoured God with their lips, but their heart was far from Him.

Thought 1. A hypocrite gives lip service while keeping his heart far from God. He acknowledges God and attends worship, but this is about all he does. However, there are some who are *religiously deceived* (see the Pharisees and Scribes). They study the Scripture, pray, witness, help the needy, and keep the rules. They would even fight to maintain religious tradition. Yet, Jesus says they are hypocrites. Why? Because their heart is not God's. They refuse to personally accept Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah and Saviour of the world. They do not know God personally, not in the depths of their heart (Jn. 14:6).

Titus 1:16 *They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

1 Pet 1:18-19 *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

2 Pet 2:18-19 *For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.*

1 John 4:2-3 *This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*

MATHEW 23:13 HYPOCRITES (HUPOKRITES)

One who pretends, puts on a show, acts out something he is not. At first the word simply meant one who replied or answered. Then it came to mean acting, as actors play-acted the lines of a scene. Finally, the word was used in the worst sense: play-acting; pretending; one who wore a mask to hide his real self; one who acted one way but who was really another way; one who put on an outward show.

The religionists, the Scribes and Pharisees, were hypocrites.

- => They acted as though they believed and loved God, yet they did not accept God's Son.
- => They pretended to be seeking God; but they were really seeking profession, esteem, recognition, honour, position, power, and security (Mt. 12:1-8).
- => They showed a concern for the things of God, but they were really concerned with the things of this world.
- => They acted humble and helpful; but they were really full of pride, envy, possessiveness, selfishness, and covetousness.

=> They claimed to be ministers of God's religion; but they were really ministers of a man-made religion, a religion that honoured man's ability to be good and to do enough good to become acceptable to God.

=> They professed God's Word, but they added to and took away from His Word.

What Christ had to say about hypocrites is very serious. His words are a warning to every pretender and deceiver.

=> Hypocrites will receive the greater damnation (v. 14).

=> Hypocrites are sons of hell (v. 15).

=> Hypocrites are fools and they are blind (vv. 17, 19).

=> Hypocrites are blind guides (v. 24).

=> Hypocrites are full of greed and selfishness (v. 25).

=> Hypocrites are full of everything unclean (v. 27).

=> Hypocrites are snakes, a generation of vipers (v. 33).

=> Hypocrites shall not escape being condemned to hell (v. 33). □

III. Mark 07:07 Tradition and Worship

Tradition can be empty, worthless worship. Jesus accused the religionists of worshipping in vain. "You Samaritans worship what you do not know" (Jn. 4:22). A religionist worships, but with an empty heart. Jesus taught that true worship must be *in spirit and in truth*, not only *in spirit*, but *in truth* as well (Jn. 4:24). A person who denies Christ or denies God's Word cannot truly worship God (Jn. 14:6; 17:17). He may worship; but his worship is empty, worthless, unacceptable. The religionists of Jesus' day were professing religion with their lips, but denying Christ, God's Son, in their hearts (vv. 17-20).

IV. Mark 07:08 Tradition and God's Commandments

Tradition can be man-made commands. A religionist teaches tradition as God's commandment. He teaches his tradition as he practices it or proclaims it. Tradition is *man's idea* of what should be or what should not be done. Some traditions are good; however, they are not to be taught as though they were the commandments of God. As important as some traditions may be, they are not as important as God's Word.

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

Col 2:8 *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*

Titus 1:14 *And will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. (see John 17:17)*

V. *Mark 07:09–12 Tradition and the Commandments of God*

Tradition can be kept before the commands of God. Jesus made another serious charge. He said that the religionist broke God's law in order to keep the traditions of religion. And Jesus gave an example:

“Scripture says, ‘*Honour your father and mother.*’ But your tradition says that once a person vows to give a gift to the temple, he can never back out of the vow, even if he later needs the gift to take care of his parents.”

Jesus was saying, “I am not the law breaker, the hypocrite. You are. You are the ones who are breaking God's law. You put your own rule above the law of God.” (Several notes should be read at this point to see the background of this conflict. *Religionists*, Mt. 12:10; *Corban*, Mk. 7.11; *Teachers of the Law*, Lk. 6:2.)

Mark 7:8 “*You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.*”

1 John 3:23 *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

John 13:33-34 “*My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*”

Isa 29:13 *The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.”*

MARK 07:11 CORBAN

A gift dedicated to God. When a person gave a gift or left an estate to God, he simply pronounced the words, “My goods are corban.” It was an official statement that was legally binding. Once the statement was made, the goods belonged to the temple. The problem arose when the religious leaders went too far in encouraging such gifts and estates. They tried to secure the vow even from those who had parents or family members that needed help. In such cases, a person was evading the most basic duty: caring for his family members (Exo. 20:12; 21:17) □

MATHEW 12:10 RELIGIONISTS

The religionists' conflict with Jesus over religious beliefs and rules is sometimes thought by modern man to be petty and harsh, or else such conflicts are just not understood. Three facts will help a person in understanding why the conflicts happened and were life-threatening, ending in the murder of Jesus Christ.

1. The Jewish nation had been held together by their religious beliefs. Through the centuries the Jewish people had been conquered by army after army, and by the millions they had been deported and scattered over the world. Even in the day of Jesus they were enslaved by Rome. Their religion was the binding force that kept Jews together, in particular...

- their belief that God had called them to be a distinctive people (who worshipped the only true and living God).
- their rules governing the Sabbath and the temple, intermarriage, worship and cleansing, and what foods they could and could not eat.

This belief and these rules protected them from alien beliefs and from being swallowed up by other peoples through intermarriage. Their religion was what maintained their distinctiveness as a people and as a nation.

Jewish leaders knew this. They knew that *their religion* was the binding force that held their nation together. Therefore, they opposed anyone or anything that threatened to *break* or *weaken* the laws of their religion and nation.

2. The religionists were men of deep, deep conviction. They were strong in their beliefs; therefore, they became steeped in religious belief and practice. To break any law or rule governing belief or practice was a serious offense, for it taught *loose* behaviour. And loose behaviour, once it had spread enough, would weaken their religion. This is the reason Jesus was committing a great offense by breaking their law. In their minds, He was weakening their religion and threatening their nation.
3. The religionists were men who had profession, position, recognition, esteem, livelihood, and security. Anyone who went contrary to what they believed and taught was a threat to all they had. Some religionists undoubtedly felt that Jesus was a threat to them. Every time Jesus broke their law, He was undermining their very position and security. (See Mt. 12:1-8; 16:1-12; 21:23; 22:15-22; 22:23-33; 22:34-40; 23:1-12.)

The errors of the religionists were fourfold.

1. They misinterpreted and corrupted God's Word. The religionists (Jewish teachers) corrupted God's Word (Rev. 22:18-19; Prov. 30:6).
 - a. A person corrupts God's Word by taking away from the words of Scripture. A person takes away from God's Word...
 - by denying sections that he does not like or understand.
 - by neglecting to live the whole counsel of God.
 - by interpreting some commandments too loosely.

- b. A person corrupts God's Word by adding to the words of Scripture. A person adds to God's Word by interpreting and living too strictly. Such exalts the flesh and is nothing more than extreme discipline and self-control. Of course, both discipline and self-control are commendable and are qualities demanded by God's Word, but they are not an end in themselves.

God's Word is practical and leads to an abundant life, to real living. It is not cold, harsh, restrictive, monastic, unrealistic and impractical. God did not give His Word for a select group (clergy); He gave it for the common man. "His commands are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3).

The Sadducees were especially guilty of taking away from God's Word. The Pharisees and Scribes were especially guilty of adding to God's Word (see Acts 23:8).

Thought 1. Note two things.

- 1) There are beliefs, religious practices and traditions that are not of God. Men do add to God's Word, putting restrictions upon people that God never intended.
 - 2) There is a judgemental and censoring spirit in the heart of religionists when their beliefs are broken.
2. They committed serious sin after serious sin in God's eyes. Paul lists them, and the indictment is one of the most terrible ever drawn up against man. (1 Th. 2:15-16).
- a. They killed the Lord Jesus. Note the title "Lord." They thought they were killing only a man, only a carpenter from Nazareth, but they were actually killing the *Lord*. By Lord is meant all that is included in the title: the Lord God, the One who came *out of heaven* itself, the very Son of God Himself. The terrible guilt is clearly seen:

=> *the guilt of killing a person.*

=> *the guilt of killing the Lord Himself.*

- b. They killed their own prophets. This was a charge that has often been levelled at the Jews.

Mat 23:31 "So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets."

Acts 7:52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him.

- c. They persecuted Christian believers. They not only rejected the gospel, but they wanted to destroy the message and those who followed and proclaimed it. They did not want anyone following Christ.

Acts 4:1-3 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

Acts 11:19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

Acts 17:5 But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

- d. They did not please God. No person can please God if he stands in opposition to Christ. The only way a person can please God is to surrender his life to Christ — to give all he is and has to Christ. The Jews were not about to do this. Nothing was going to break them away from their own religious ceremonies and ideas about religion.
 - e. They were contrary to all men. They opposed and hated anyone who did not believe as they did. They should have loved those who differed, but instead they bitterly despised them.
 - f. They tried to stamp out the Word of God lest some person be saved. Just imagine trying to stop God's Word. How in the world can a man stop the Word of God. The answer is self-evident. Even a world of men could not stop God's Word. This is the foolishness of men, and it was the foolishness of the Jews.
3. They rejected God's way of righteousness, God's Messiah, which is Jesus Christ.
 4. They allowed religion in its tradition and ritual to become more important than meeting the basic needs of human life: the need for God and the need for spiritual, mental, and physical health. Christ, being the true Messiah, was bound to expose such error. Thus the battle lines were drawn.
- => The Messiah knew that He had to liberate people from such enslaving behaviour. He had to save them so they could worship God in freedom of spirit.
- => The religionists felt that they had to oppose Christ because He was a threat to their nation and to their own personal position and security.

The religionists' attack took two forms.

1. First, they tried to discredit Christ so the crowds would stop following Him (cp. Mt. 21:46).

Mat 12:10 And a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

Luke 6:7 *The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.*

Mat 22:15-16 *Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are."*

Mat 22:17 *"Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"*

2. Second, failing to discredit Him, they sought some way to kill Him.

Mat 12:14 *But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.*

Mat 26:3-4 *Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him.*

Luke 22:2 *And the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people.*

John 5:18 *For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

John 7:1 *After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. □*

LUKE 06:02 TEACHERS OF THE LAW SCRIBES, SCRIBAL LAW, PHARISEES

These Pharisees were probably Scribes, the teachers of the law. The Scribes were a profession of men sometimes called lawyers (Mt. 22:35). They were some of the most devoted and committed men to religion in all of history and were of the sect known as the Pharisees. However, every Pharisee was not a Scribe. A Scribe was more of a scholar, more highly trained than the average Pharisee. They had two primary functions.

1. The Scribes copied the written law, the Old Testament Scriptures. In their copying function, they were strict copiers, meticulously keeping count of every letter in every word. This exactness was necessary, for God Himself had given the written law to the Jewish nation. Therefore, the law was not only the very Word of God, it was the greatest thing in the life of the Jewish nation. It was considered the most precious possession in all the world; consequently, the

Jewish nation was committed to the preservation of the law (Neh 8:1-8). A young Jew could enter no greater profession than the profession of Scribes.

2. The Scribes studied, classified, and taught the moral law. This function brought about the Oral or Scribal Law that was so common in Jesus' day. It was the law of rules and regulations. There were, in fact, so many regulations that over fifty large volumes were required when they were finally put into writing. The great tragedy was that through the centuries, the Jews began to place the Oral law over the written law.

The Scribes felt that the law was God's final word. Everything God wanted man to do could be deduced from it; therefore, they drew out of the law every possible rule they could and insisted that life was to be lived in conformity to these rules. Rules were to be a way of life, the preoccupation of a man's thoughts. At first these rules and regulations were taught by word of mouth; however, in the third century after Christ, they were put into certain writings.

The Halachoth: rules that were to govern the ritual of worship.

The Talmud, made up of two parts.

=> The Mishnah: sixty-three discussions of various subjects of the law.

=> Gemara: the sacred legends of the people.

Midrashim: the commentaries on the writings.

Hagadci: thoughts on the commentaries. □

VI. Mark 07:13 Tradition and the Word of God

Tradition can nullify the Word of God or make the Word of God ineffective. Jesus charged the religionists with setting aside God's Word for tradition. Religious traditions may be described as institutional or personal.

1. Institutional traditions are such things as rituals, rules, regulations, schedules, forms, services, procedures, organizations — anything that gives order and security to the persons involved.
2. Personal traditions are such things as church attendance, prayers, habits, ceremonies, objects which a person uses (somewhat superstitiously) to keep himself religiously secure.

Jesus was attacking the fact that so many religionists put their traditions first while neglecting and ignoring God's Word (See *Religionists*, Mt. 12:10).

Mat 15:3 *Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?"*

Gal 5:1 *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

Col 2:20 *Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules?*

Heb 9:10-15 *They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings — external regulations applying until the time of the new order. When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. ■*

1 THESSALONIANS 02:13 WORD OF GOD

*And we also thank God continually because, when you received the work of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the work of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. **1 Thessalonians 02:03***

The Bible claims to be the Word of God (See *The Bible, Scripture*, 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

=> *The unity of Scripture* indicates an origin that could come only from one mind, God's mind (See *The Bible, Scripture*, 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

=> Scripture has changed millions of lives for God.

=> Fulfilled prophecy and archaeology substantiate a divine origin. (See *Genealogy of Jesus*, Lk. 3:23-38).

In fact, the unique feature of the Bible is that it has always been *exhaustively substantiated* to be the Word of God by any approach of investigation that is *serious* and *honest*. But note: both *seriousness* and *honesty* are necessary for the truth to be received. No less evidence could be expected from the mind and providence of God. For God can speak only the truth, and any pure investigation of truth can only substantiate His Word. But in saying this, it is necessary to recall that faith is an element in substantiating anything. Therefore, in accepting the Bible as the Word of God, faith is involved; it is one of the elements required.

However, the supreme authority for accepting the Bible as Word of God is Jesus

Christ. If we believe in the divine mission of Christ and His apostles then we must believe that the Bible is the Word of God (Jn. 5:39).

That Jesus Christ was a historical person is fact.

=> That Jesus Christ *claims* to be the Son of God is fact.

=> That Jesus Christ is the Son of God is faith.

That the Bible is an historical book is fact.

=> That the Bible *claims* to be the Word of God is fact.

=> That the Bible is the Word of God is faith.

1 Cor 2:12-13 *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

1 Th 2:13 *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, hut as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*

2 Tim 2:15 *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

2 Tim 3:16 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

Heb 1:01 *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.*

1 Pet 1:11 *Trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.*

2 Pet 1:20-21 *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Pet 3:2 *I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles.*

Rev 1:1 *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.*

Rev 14:13 *Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them." □*

2 PETER 01:19–21 THE BIBLE, SCRIPTURE:

“Word of prophecy” is better translated *prophetic word*, referring to the whole prophetic message centred in Jesus Christ. The *prophetic word* did not begin or originate in the mind of man, but in the mind of God. However, God used men as instruments and authors to communicate His message to the world.

Over a period of some 1500 years He chose kings, soldiers, peasants, farmers, scholars, priests, statesmen — approximately thirty-five authors from different nations, professions, and social strata. The original manuscripts were written in three different languages — Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

1. The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *biblos*, meaning a book. The Bible is also called “the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4) and “the Word of God” (Heb. 4:12). The Bible is divided into two parts:

=> The first part, the *Old Testament*, was written before Christ.

=> The second part, the *New Testament*, was written after Christ came. The word *testament* means a *covenant or an agreement*. Therefore, the Bible is God’s covenant, an agreement He has made with man. The Old Testament is His covenant with man before Christ came, and the New Testament is His covenant with man after Christ came.

2. The Old Testament has thirty-nine books which were designated as “the Law, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings or Psalms” (Lk. 24:25-27). The books are sometimes divided as follows:

=> Five Law Books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These five are known as the Pentateuch.

=> Twelve History Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

=> Five Poetic Books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

=> Twelve Short or Minor Prophetic Books: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

=> Five Long or Major Prophetic Books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

3. The New Testament has twenty-seven books which are sometimes divided as follows:

=> Four Gospels which cover the life of Christ: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

=> One History Book which deals with the early believers and early church: Acts.

=> Fourteen Pauline Letters or Epistles written to specific churches or individual Christians: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,

Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon and perhaps Hebrews.

=> Seven General Letters or Epistles written by other men to specific groups, each bearing the author's name: James, I and II Peter, I, II, and III John, Jude.

=> One Prophetic Book: Revelation.

4. The Bible has one central theme: Jesus Christ. He is the key to understanding what God reveals. He is the focal point of human history. In Him God reveals His purpose and program for the ages (Heb. 1:1-2).
5. The unity of the Bible is a miracle of God. Think of the facts: thirty-five different authors from unbelievably diverse backgrounds wrote over a 1500 year period. Think of the number and diversity of subjects, yet look at the harmony of purpose and theme. There is only one explanation. God has spoken and has preserved an authoritative record of His message: "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21).
6. The Bible claims to be the record of Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:39), and it claims to be the written Word of God (2 Pet. 1:21). As such it is inseparably linked with the living Word of God, Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23). Jesus Christ is the *living Word of God* and the Bible is the *written Word of God*. The written Word testifies to the living Word even as the living Word [Christ Himself] testified to the written Word. □