Course Basic questions about the Bible, Egypt – *Summary 1*
Niek M Tramper, June 2011

I Why the Bible?

The authority of God´s Word is not a formal, nor static, but dynamic authority. This can be expressed by images like:

- *A manual for life*, summarized in the two commandments: You shall love God with all your heart; and you shall love your neighbour like yourself.
- *An oculist* – to reveal the truth to us. We cannot understand and grasp this reality without the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14).
- *A love letter*. Through His Word God searches us out of love. The *incarnation* is the final and total expression if His love.

Can we *defend* that the Bible is the true revelation of the true God? (and e.g. not Quran, not the Hindu Veda´s, or the book of Mormon)? *Truth is always ´practical´: it cannot simply be observed or established like a theory, it should be accepted and obeyed. Cf. Deut. 30: 11- 16; John 5: 37-39; Romans 10: 8-11. God´s truth is found in a Person: ´Anyone who has seen Me, has seen the Father´, Jesus says (John 14:9).*

à Can we prove that the Bible is true?

II Questions related to the authority of Holy Scripture

The concept of authority in general:

a. authority as *control*; cf. Deut. 6:6-8; Micha 6 :8; Luke 7:8
b. authority as *commission*; cf. Genesis 12: 1; Deut. 30:14, Matth 28: 18-20; John 7:17
c. authority as *relationship*; cf. John 13:15; Romans 8:15

To accept that the Bible is ´the inspired Word of God´, is a statement of faith. It is not something that can be proved with ´external means´. Still it is not irrational!
To convince us, God uses three kinds of witnesses:

a. *Historical witnesses* (prophets and apostles) and based upon them: the witnesses of the church through the ages;
b. *Actual witnesses* (people around us who are used to convince us);
c. *The Internal witness of the Holy Spirit*.

It is the Bible itself that must define what we mean by authority, rather than the other way round. The authority of the Bible includes: *control, commission and relationship.*

III The inspiration of the Holy Scripture

The authority of Scriptures is based on its *inspiration*. It is clear in the way Jesus used the (OT) scriptures: Scriptures were holy to Him, also in their literal expressions.
Key texts in the New Testament: 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Peter 1: 19-21.
Gods speaks actually through what He has spoken and what has been recorded in the past. What Scripture says is what *God wanted or allowed* to be recorded. Inspiration is a process of the Holy Spirit using the convictions, experiences, circumstances, intentions etc. of humans. Inspiration relates to:

- people (prophets, poets, leaders);
- writings itself;
- the finalization of the text, the history of documents and the final content of the Bible;
- the power and influence on listeners and readers.

àHow can you defend that Psalm 139: 19-23 is also the inspired Word of God…?

Christians affirm the Godly character of the Bible in a different way comparing to Muslims. This relates especially to the whole concept of ´inspiration´.

àWhat are implications of the Bible being 100% a Godly book and 100% a human book?

III The challenge of the Old Testament

The OT contains several challenges: there are many literal and historic contexts. Some authors seem to contradict each other. Is God's character in the OT different from his character in the NT? What is uniqueness of the OT, in comparing with the NT. How can we hear God's voice in difficult parts like Psalm 88 or Ecclesiastes 1? Why do we need the OT?

à Think about your main questions about the OT. What parts contain special challenges for you? What parts especially speak to you and why?

The NT is firmly rooted in the OT, as we notice this in the Gospels and the Letters, and not the least the book of Revelation. The OT doesn´t only present God as Creator of the universe, but also the fall of men, which is basic to understand God´s work of salvation and redemption. Without Moses and Elijah we cannot understand Christ (Matth 17: 1-13).

IV. The unity and clarity of the Bible

The unity of the Bible rests on the assumption that, behind the great variety in its human authorship, it ultimately has a single author - God the Holy Spirit. Unity means consistency and coherence, not uniformity.

à Do you have questions about paradoxes in the Bible? Or did people around you question you about it? Write down two or three of the main ones. What is your answer?

Expressions of unity in the Bible:

- One great universal narrative (E. Peterson): from creation to new creation
  1. Creation à 2 Fall à 3 Redemption in history à 4 New Creation
- The canonical shape:
  Torah, Prophets, Writings, Gospel, Epistles, Apocalyptic
- The progression of covenants:
  Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, New Covenant in Christ
- Gods Mission: starting with the whole creation (Genesis 1 and 2), choosing one nation from many nations (Genesis 12) in order to bless all nations, sending Moses,

sending the prophets, sending the Messiah, sending the apostles, sending the church among all nations…

The unity of the Bible is connected with its *clarity*. The clarity of the Bible means that Gods Word is *clear in its purpose unto salvation*.

à What does the Bible mean to us personally? Let us think about our daily practice with the Bible. What kind of images are applicable for our relation to the Bible?