

Chapter 2 — The Holy Scriptures

Q1. What are the Holy Scriptures?¹

A. The written Word of God (John 5:39, 2 Tim. 3:15).

Our question uses the word “holy” to speak about the Scriptures. What is holy? It means to be set apart for God or to be sinless. Think about the tabernacle worship. Israel had normal tools, like forks, that were only allowed for use in the tabernacle. Why are they called holy? Because it is the Word of God. God is holy. The Bible is given by the Holy Spirit. How do we call that giving by the Holy Spirit? Indeed, inspiration. Think for example about a good friend that inspires you. Then he gives you great ideas. We work them out in writing or painting. When we speak about inspiration of the Bible it is a bit different. The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers. He guided their minds. When for example Moses wrote, the Holy Spirit gave him the ideas and words in his mind. But He guided it in such a way that the writers did not make any mistakes. There were no errors. In the New Testament, the word “inspiration” literally means “God-breathed.” Think about the creation of Adam. After God formed his body, He breathed in his nose. Then Adam became a living being. How was Adam then? Yes, without any mistakes. He was made perfect.

Our question not only speaks about holy in itself but more specifically about the Scriptures. Why is the name Scriptures used? Simply said it means a writing. Think about the word “inscription.” Then you carve words in wood, metal, or stone. What happens if you do it well? It remains always there. Think about some pottery that found with a 3000 years old inscription. We are still able to read those words. We can also think of that when we speak about the Bible. These words are as it were ‘carved’ on paper. They will remain forever. What is another name for the Scriptures? The Bible. That is a Greek word which means “books.” Why would we call it books? As we saw a previous time, the Bible has different human authors. It is a collection of books. The Bible has 66 books in total, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

In our answer it speaks about a “written” book. What do we need for writing? A person, idea, pen, ink, and paper or some other material to write upon. Think about writing a letter to a friend. You need some material and ideas to write him or her. What is the advantage when you write it instead of speaking it? Indeed, it is more trustable. It is less changeable. In our answer it speaks about the written “Word of God.” Why is it the Word of God? We can say, God speaks through this book to humans. It is His words that are put on paper. Another question to think about, is it enough to have a Bible to be saved? No, man by nature is blind. He needs the Holy Spirit to bring the matters in his heart. The question now is, was there always a Bible? What do you think? This is what we think of in our next question.

Q2. Has there always been a written word?

A. No, prior to the time of Moses there was no written word.

Why do we even ask this question? It is simple, the Word of God is needed for salvation. But how can God’s Word be communicated? We have different options. First, written on paper, and second, spoken with the mouth. Can you give an example that God’s Word was spoken? Yes, to Abraham.

¹ Literally it says: Q. What do we understand by the Holy Scriptures? A. The written Word of God.

God called him out of Ur. Let's give an example of these two possibilities of communication. You have a new worker at your farm. You need to teach him how the tractor works. What are your options? The first option is to give him a written manual. The other option is to speak to him and pointing things out in the tractor. Both options will work. In our question it is about the "written Word." Did the Bible, as we have it, always exist?

Before we can answer that question, we must think about time. When did time begin? At creation. That was about 4000 years before the coming of Christ. For us this is about 6000 years ago. What is the answer? Was there always a written Word of God? The answer says, "No, before the time of Moses there was no written Word." Why is Moses mentioned? He was the first Bible writer. What books did he write? The following five:

- 1. Genesis. That means beginning. Think of the beginning of the earth.
- 2. Exodus. That is, the way out. Think of the exit out of Egypt.
- 3. Leviticus. Levi was the forefather of priests. This contains laws for the tabernacle.
- 4. Numbers. This book has many counting of the people of Israel.
- 5. Deuteronomy. Deutero means second, nomos means law. A repetition of the law

We call these five books the Torah. That means a law or teaching. This reminds us what Jesus said about the Old Testament. He called them the "law and the prophets." No, the mentioning of Moses does not mean that he invented the alphabet. That existed already. But if we think about Bible, we can say that it was not only written by Moses. Who also wrote a part of the Bible in the time of Moses? That was God Himself. Think about the law that was given at Sinai. We read that God wrote the Ten Commandments in the tables of stone. Now we have to think about an important question. Did Adam have a Bible? Did he have God's Word on paper? No. He did not. Who else lived before Moses' time? Noah and Abraham. Possibly they had some histories that we have in the Bible on paper. But the difference is that they were not "officially inspired" and "faultless." That means, such writings did not have any official authority. You can think about the first laws of the United States. When the Puritans came across the ocean, they lived according to some laws. But these laws were unofficial. Most of them were spoken rules. Only later it was written on paper and made official. But what would be the issue when Adam, Abraham and Noah would not have the Word of God? There could never be saved. So, how is it possible that they saved? We see this in question 3.

Q3. How did God then communicate His Word prior to Moses?²

A. By oral communication and special revelation to the patriarchs. (Gen. 18:1; Gen. 28:12)

In other words, how did God make Himself known to people? How could people be saved in the time before Moses? Do we remember? We have two ways of communication: written and spoken. In our answer, we see that God used "oral communication." We could say, God spoke to them for communication. The word "oral" comes from a Latin word that means "mouth." In other words, the mouth is used to communicate. How would that have looked like? Think of a father or a mother in Abraham's time. They spoke to their children. They told them what they needed for salvation. A question about, how do we use this method today? Think of our classroom. What do we have? Indeed, we use textbooks. But also we will have a teacher that speaks. He tries to communicate by

² Literally: Q. How did God then reveal His Word? A. By speaking orally to the fathers and by other revelations.

speaking the knowledge that is needed. What are some examples that God spoke to people? Adam in the garden, “Where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9), and later the mother promise, “I will put enmity between thy seed and her Seed” (Gen. 3:15). Again later, God told Noah to go into the ark.

But God also made himself known in another way. We call this “special revelation.” That means, God revealed Himself directly to people without having it put on paper first. What are the different ways of special revelation? We see five in the Old Testament,

- 1. Spoken words. Think of Adam (Gen. 3:15)
- 2. Dreams. An example is Joseph (Gen. 37)
- 3. Visions. God revealed Himself in this way to Abraham (Gen. 15:1)
- 4. Angels. Two appeared to Lot (Gen. 19)
- 5. The Angel of the LORD (Ex. 3). Who is that? Jesus before His birth in Bethlehem.

Let us think a bit more about God’s special revelation. What is the most special revelation of God’s Word? Think about the beginning of John’s gospel. What do we read? Indeed, “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). What does this refer to? Jesus’ coming as human being. What is Jesus? God in person.

Now, the question is to whom did God reveal Himself in the time before Moses? Our catechism says “the patriarchs.” What is a patriarch? It is indeed a difficult word. But we can hear some elements that we might know. We hear the word “pater.” How does that sound like? Indeed, “father.” That is also its meaning. Further, we hear the word “arch.” This reminds you of Michael, the arch-angel. “Arch” means “chief or head.” So, Michael is the head of the angels. He rules over them. If we combine the two, we can say that patriarchs are forefathers. This is specifically true for Israel. What are the names of some patriarchs? Think of the three important ones. Indeed, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now our catechism says that God spoke to them. Do you know of an example? Yes, God called Abraham out of Ur (Gen. 12). How did God do that? He simply spoke to him. The question makes clear that these patriarchs had a knowledge about God that was saving. This means that Abraham knew Jesus Christ. How do we know? Jesus Christ said about Abraham, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56). So, we see that people before the time of Moses did know about God. Some did know Him in a saving manner. This was not via the Bible but by God’s special revelations.