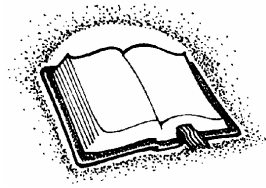


Unlocking the Bible (1)



INTRODUCTION: What is the Bible?

Despite it being the 'manual' for Christian living, the Bible is a relatively closed book for most of us. This series is intended to help us become better acquainted with its characteristics, purpose and structure.

If, as somebody once described it, the Bible is like an exhibition, it helps if, before we go in, we are prepared for what to expect and have some guidance as to what – and where - the various components are displayed.

Characteristics

The Bible is a record of experience, not a deliberate textbook. It is not a proposal, the putting forward of a theory, but a record approved by consensus of what has been learned in context. So, it is good to remember that the Bible is a **collection** of recorded experiences encountered at different times by various people in a range of situations.

These experiences were recited and recalled by various generations and eventually recorded, first orally and later in more permanent forms. They would be verified by those who heard and repeated them. By common endorsement they became accepted as authentic accounts of people's experience of God; and, as such, still communicate teaching and inspiration for generations to come.

Purpose

Many of these disparate records were grouped together for different purposes.

The final form of the Bible, as we have it, is the outcome of consensus, from the early church fathers that these books indeed record the dealings of God with His people.

The basic principle for regarding the Bible is to accept it as we have received it in the belief that God, in His providence, has overseen its development and the various processes that have resulted in its final format. It is therefore a book to be fully understood as we engage in a similar context of discovering God and encountering Him in a dynamic relationship.

In pursuing that understanding, it is useful to ask three questions as we read it: What does it say? What does that mean? And, How does it apply? The answers will indeed confirm that "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path*".



In the next article we will look more closely at the overall structure before going on to take a glimpse at individual books.