

BIBLE DOCTRINES

Simply Explained



B.A.Ramsbottom

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By

B.A. RAMSBOTTOM

2011

GOSPEL STANDARD TRUST PUBLICATIONS

12(b) Roundwood Lane, Harpenden,
Herts, AL5 3BZ, England

© Gospel Standard Trust Publications 1986

ISBN 10: 0-903556-77-4
ISBN 13: 978-0-903556-77-4

1st Printing 1984
2nd Printing 1986
3rd Printing 1986
4th Printing 1988
5th Printing 1992
6th Printing 1995
7th Printing 1999
8th Printing 2001
9th Printing 2006
10th Printing 2012

Printed by Olive Press
Stotfold, Hertfordshire, SG5 4AN

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
God	7
The Bible	12
Creation	16
Man	19
The Person Of Christ	23
The Holy Spirit	26
Election	30
Redemption	33
The Resurrection	36
The New Birth	41
Sanctification	46
Providence	50
Eternal Safety	55
The Last Things	60

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago two small Irish children were left orphans, and the Roman Catholics tried to take them into one of their schools. The little children did not want to go, saying that they were not Roman Catholics. In the end the matter came before a judge, and in court they were asked dozens of questions about what they believed. They could answer them all. The judge (and I think he was a Roman Catholic) had to say, 'Well, these children know what they believe, and no one can shake them out of it, that they are Protestants.'

For a long time it has been my desire that our children should know what we believe. The Roman Catholics know their doctrines. The Jehovah's Witnesses know theirs. May our children not be in any doubt as to what is the truth. So many know all the Bible stories, but not the precious doctrines of our most holy faith.

The chapters of this book originated in a series of talks on 'what we believe' given in the Sabbath school at the chapel where I am pastor. The children were aged from seven to sixteen, and in most cases seemed to have little difficulty in understanding. Most interesting were some of the deep doctrinal questions which even some of the little ones asked afterwards.

We realize that it is easier for children to understand something explained to them personally than to read it from a book. With younger children it would be helpful if the chapters were read to them.

God's promise is: 'This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord.'

We have been encouraged to press on with this publication believing that there is nothing of this nature in print, and yet such a crying need.

A few things should be borne in mind in reading the book:

Bible Doctrines – Simply Explained

1. The children to whom the addresses were first given all had a general background knowledge of the stories of the Bible.

2. Obviously much more could have been said and many more things dealt with—but the desire was to keep the chapters simple.

3. The author writes as a convinced Strict Baptist but the doctrines are those held by all who believe the Reformed faith, commonly called Calvinism.

4. The various stories that are told are given as the author remembers hearing or reading them. It has been impossible to check the accuracy of each detail.

5. At the end of each chapter there are one or two suggested Scripture passages. These are not intended as ‘proof texts’ but rather as helpful Bible readings on the subject.

6. While the title is ‘Bible Doctrines Simply Explained’, the author fully realizes that it is only the meaning that can be explained. A true, spiritual understanding must come through the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

CHAPTER 1

GOD

Many years ago an old man lay ill in bed. He was a wicked old man who did not believe in God. Over his bed he had written ‘GOD IS NOWHERE’.

One day his little granddaughter came into the bedroom to see him. She was just learning to read so he asked her to try to read what was written over the bed. Slowly she began, and what she read was this: ‘GOD ... IS ... NOW ... HERE.’ *God is now here!*

The old man trembled. For the first time he realized that there *is* a God.

The first thing in religion is ‘I believe in God’.

How do we know about God?

The Bible tells us (Romans 1: 20) that even by looking at the beautiful things that God has made we may know there is a God. The running streams, the beautiful sunset, the sea, the sky, the stars, the mighty mountains and hills—in all we can see that there is a God. All cry out, ‘There is a God, and He made us!’

But it is in the Bible that we really learn about God. Who is God? What is He like? Are there more Gods than one? The Bible gives us all these answers.

One God

You will have heard at school of how the Greeks and Romans, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Vikings believed in all sorts of gods—Mars, Jupiter, Mercury, Diana, Thor, Woden: men gods and women gods, gods of war, gods of love, gods of all kinds of things. The Bible tells us there is

Bible Doctrines – Simply Explained

only one true and living God. All the others are false gods, dead gods. Our God sees. He hears. He speaks. He knows. He is the living God.

What is God like?

I asked a group of children to find out as many words as they could to describe God—so that, from the Bible, we could find out what He is like. Very quickly we found the following:

God is holy, pure, and righteous. He hates sin.

God is almighty. He can do anything. He can do everything. (Of course, the old Puritans used to say, ‘God can’t *die* or *lie*’.)

God is eternal. You know the story of Moses and the burning bush. There God told Moses His name is ‘I AM’. Only God can always say that. A hundred years ago you and I could not say, ‘I am’. In another hundred years, you and I will not be able to say, ‘I am’.

God is immutable. This may seem a hard word. Why not just say that God does not change, He is unchanging? Because immutable means more than that. It means that God cannot change.

God is invisible. We cannot see Him, but He can always see us. Think of the little children’s hymn:

God is in heaven. Can He see
When I am doing wrong?
Yes, that He can: He looks at me
All day and all night long.

God

God is love. God is merciful. God is wise. God is gracious.

Where is God?

Once I asked a group of children this question: Where is God? Three hands went up, and there were three different answers. *But all were right.*

‘God is in heaven.’

‘God is everywhere.’

‘God is here.’

The Trinity

You girls and boys will have heard people speak of ‘the Trinity’. What does it mean?

The Bible teaches us that there is only one God, but there are three Persons in that one God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

God the Father is God.

God the Son (the Lord Jesus Christ) is God.

God the Holy Spirit is God.

People have tried to explain the Trinity, but no one can ever explain it. There is a story that years ago a minister said to his morning congregation that in the evening he would ‘explain the Trinity’. That afternoon he saw one of his old deacons kneeling by the river with a spoon in his hand. ‘Whatever are you doing?’ he asked.

‘Emptying the river with the spoon,’ was the reply.

‘You can never do it.’

‘I shall do it as well as you can explain the Trinity this evening!’ said the wise old man.

Bible Doctrines – Simply Explained

But though we cannot explain it or understand it, we must believe it. People *have* tried to explain it. The reason the Irish have the little three-leaved shamrock for their emblem is because Patrick (usually known as St Patrick) when asked about the Trinity plucked a shamrock and said, ‘Three in one’. Three leaves; one shamrock. Some have said our finger is bone, blood, and skin. The Puritans spoke of the sun, its beams, and its heat. But none really can explain the Trinity. It is a mystery—yet a mystery told to us in the Bible.

There are many things I cannot understand and yet I most firmly believe. I firmly believe that when I press the light switch, a light will come on in the bulb in the ceiling. I know it. I am sure of it. But I am no electrician; I cannot explain it.

How then can we think of the Trinity? Well, whenever Father, Son, or Holy Ghost are mentioned, each one is described as God—yet still the Bible says, ‘Only one God’.

Then the three are joined together as being equal. Perhaps the text repeated more than anything else is ‘the benediction’. You hear it at the end of every service. Here all three Persons are joined together as one God: ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God [that is, the Father], and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all’ (2 Corinthians 13: 14).

Also when a person is baptized he is baptized ‘in the name (one name) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost’ (Matthew 28: 19).

But perhaps the most helpful for children is the account of when Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan. There was God the Son in the water. God the Holy Ghost could be

God

seen coming down like a dove from heaven. God the Father's voice could be heard speaking: 'This is My beloved Son.' Three Persons, one God. In the early days of the Christian church there was a saying: 'Would you know the Trinity? Then go to the river Jordan.'

The wonderful thing is that the great, holy God makes Himself known to men and women, boys and girls. He makes Himself known in the Lord Jesus. Until He makes Himself known all is a mystery. A mystery is something that cannot be known until it is shown to us.

If a golden cup were hidden in your house, what it was and where it was would be a mystery. But if the person who hid it should pull up the loose boards in your bedroom floor and take that cup, and show it to you, even *give* it to you, then the *mystery* would be *revealed*.

We need to pray: 'Lord, reveal Thyself to me.'

The wisest cannot know it without it being revealed. The simplest can if it is revealed. Was it not a complete idiot boy, who hardly spoke all his life, who before he died said, 'What can I see? What can I see? I can see One, and the One is Three. Three-in-one and One-in-three! And all the Three are all for me'?

Suggested Bible readings

Psalm 104 (especially the first few verses). There are other similar Psalms.

Isaiah 6.

Isaiah 40 (especially verses 12 to 26).

Matthew 3: 13-17.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLE

The Bible is God's book. It tells us all about God. It is true from beginning to end. When you have a textbook at school (say chemistry or history) you do not want any mistakes in it.

We say that the Bible is inspired. 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3: 16). What do we mean? We do not just mean what people mean when they say of a boy in a race, 'He ran like someone inspired.' We mean much more than this. We mean GOD-BREATHED. God breathed out the Bible.

Different men wrote—Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and others. They wrote over hundreds of years. Some were very clever; some were simple men. But their words all agree. They claim special authority for themselves.

We are told that 'holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' (2 Peter 1: 21). The word 'moved' is the word used for a ship being carried along before the wind. Peter well knew how the ships were moved on the Sea of Galilee; and he uses the very same word for how he (and the other writers) were moved by God.

God did not use the writers of the Bible just like a boy or girl may use a typewriter. The typewriter does not know or feel anything. The writers felt what they wrote, and Paul does not write like Peter, or Peter like John. But God saw that the very words He wanted to be written were used.

The Bible

We also use the word infallible. That means more than saying the Bible is true. It means that there just cannot be anything wrong in the Bible (though, of course, there are things we cannot understand).

You will often hear people saying the Bible is not true. Perhaps a teacher at school, or a friend. But it is very, very important that we hold fast to the truth of the Bible. Really it is as simple as this: *If God has been kind enough to give us a book about Himself, He will make sure there are no mistakes in it.*

People so often will talk about contradictions in the Bible. They say, ‘One place says this and another place says something quite different.’

Let me illustrate by a story. In the early years of my pastorate two teenage girls from chapel both sent me a postcard. They were on holiday together, staying in the same place. The postcards were written the same day, posted the same day, and arrived together. One said, ‘It is a most beautiful day. The sun is shining.’ The other said, ‘It is raining.’ They were both honest girls. Why did they write different things, and yet both told the truth? No doubt you can think of lots of answers. So it is with God’s Word.

Have you noticed how the Lord Jesus always spoke so reverently of the Bible? He said, ‘The Scripture cannot be broken’ (John 10: 35). When He first preached He quoted from the Bible to introduce Himself (Luke 4: 16-21). When He fought Satan He used the Bible as His weapon (Luke 4: 1-12). He quoted the Bible to teach His hearers (John 6: 25-34) and to silence His enemies (Matthew 15: 1-9). Even on the cross the Lord Jesus quoted Scripture (Matthew 27: 46). And when He was risen from the dead

He still spoke of the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24: 27).

Probably the kind of things that people at school tell you they do not believe are about Adam and Eve, about Noah and his ark, about Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt, or about Jonah and the whale. It is very interesting that Jesus Himself picked out all these stories and referred to them as being true! (Matthew 19: 4, 5; Luke 17: 26, 27; Luke 10: 12; Matthew 12: 39-41.)

Some girls and boys will ask: 'What is the Apocrypha?' The Apocrypha is a number of old books from Bible days which have never really been counted as part of the Bible. Our Bible consists of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New. You will notice that often in the New Testament the Old is quoted with 'God said', or, 'The Holy Ghost said', but never is the Apocrypha quoted.

Our Bible was, of course, first written in Hebrew and Greek, but we thank God for a good translation. Many children will have read of how William Tyndale spent hours turning the Bible into English. He said he wanted the most ignorant ploughboy to be able to understand the Bible as much as a learned man. How wonderful to think of the love of this man, hidden away year after year in an attic, working day and night that we might have our English Bible! And at last he was caught, strangled, and burned. It is one thing to be a famous preacher with hundreds listening, and another to be shut away in secret, wearily translating.

We thank God for our Bible in English. We think of the days when a farmer gave a whole cart-load of hay to buy one page of the Bible!

The Bible

We have heard of some people who would fight until death for the fact that the Bible is true. But they never read it!

A little girl had a Bible given to her. She wrote at the front:

Divine Instructor! gracious Lord!
Be Thou for ever near;
Teach me to love Thy sacred Word,
And find the Saviour there.

And she did find the Saviour there. May we read it, and love it, and, above all, find the Lord Jesus there.

That is a good prayer in reading the Bible: 'Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law' (Psalm 119: 18).

Suggested Bible readings

Psalm 19.

Any part or all of Psalm 119

CHAPTER 3

CREATION

Everything was created by God. A little boy was once asked if he knew what ‘to create’ means. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘to make something out of nothing.’ It was a good answer.

If a man is making a table, what does he need? Wood, nails, glue, tools. If a woman is making a cake, what does she need? Flour, sugar, butter, eggs, a cooker. God made everything out of nothing. That is creation.

It was an easy thing for God to create all things. He did it simply by speaking. The Bible tells us, ‘He spoke, and it was done.’ So in the book of Genesis (‘the book of beginnings’) we keep reading: ‘And God said, Let there be . . . And it was so.’

God created everything in six days.

1. Light.
2. Air and clouds.
3. Dry land and things that grow.
4. Sun, moon, and stars.
5. Sea creatures and birds.
6. Land animals and man.

It happened immediately when God commanded. And there were no mistakes; there was no need to have a number of tries. Everything was perfect.

The seventh day God rested. That is why He gave the Sabbath day (one day in seven) as a day of rest in which we cease from work and play. Why do we now keep Sunday instead of Saturday? Because it is the day when Jesus rose from the dead and in the days of the Apostles

Creation

the day was changed from the seventh to the first. The important thing from the beginning was one day in seven.

As most children know, some people do not believe that God created the world. They think it just happened. A famous German mathematician, Athanasius Kircher, once had such a person come to see him. He placed a beautiful globe of the world in a corner of the room so that his visitor could not help seeing it. Very soon the visitor asked: 'Where did you get that beautiful globe? Whoever made it?'

'No one,' said Kircher, 'it just happened.'

The other man, of course, was amazed at this answer and just stared at him.

'Well,' said the famous mathematician, 'you are amazed if someone suggests this little globe just happened, and yet how can you think such a thing of this great and beautiful world?'

At school you may be taught that man was not created but that he came from animals. This is known as Evolution. The Bible clearly tells us that God created Adam from the dust of the ground, and Eve from Adam's side. We cannot, of course, in a little book like this try to answer all the attacks on the Bible account of creation, but we just mention a few things:

1. Evolution is just a theory; it has never been proved. Many famous scientists are (and have been) Christians and believe fully in the Bible account of creation.

2. The Bible is not a science book, and we agree that a lot more could be said. But there is no mistake. There is nothing contrary to true science. A true scientist's work is to observe, to write about what has been observed, and to make deductions from that. It is the place of the historian

Bible Doctrines – Simply Explained

to write what has taken place. No scientist was there to observe creation. But God was.

3. We do not see evolution taking place now. Better-quality horses may be bred, but we do not see a horse changing into a cow, or a pig into a sheep.

People in all ages, in all cultures, in different countries have been able to understand the beautiful account of creation. Even little children can understand it. How great God is! How beautiful the world He has made! How kind a Creator!

And how wonderful that we can speak to this great Creator in prayer! This great God loves His people. Sometimes on a very starry night they look up with amazement at the heavens: ‘When I consider the heavens, which Thou hast made, the moon and stars, the work of Thy fingers, what is man?...’ And they feel, ‘This great God is my Saviour and my Friend.’

Suggested Bible readings

Genesis 1.

Genesis 2.

Psalm 8.

Psalm 33: 1-9.

CHAPTER 4

MAN

The story has often been told of the clock that just would not go. 'Leave it a few days, and see what happens,' was suggested. But still the clock would not go. 'It needs oiling well'—so this was tried; but still the clock would not go. All kinds of things were tried: 'Give it a good shake'; 'Put it in a different place', etc. At last it was taken to the shop where it was bought. 'We shall have to send it back to the makers,' they said. It came back from the makers with just one comment: 'IT NEEDS A NEW INSIDE. THE SPRING IS BROKEN.'

What a picture of man! We read of dreadful things—crime, murder, violence, burglary, etc., and all kinds of ways are used to try to stop them—education, more schools, more police, remand homes, detention centres—but man remains as bad as ever! Why? Because he is wrong at heart; his mind, and will, and affections, and understanding are completely wrong. He is a sinner.

The Bible word is that man is *fallen*. He was not always as he is. God made man perfect. He made him out of the dust of the earth. He gave him a soul. He made him different from all the animals. In the Garden of Eden we see man unfallen and happy, peaceful, enjoying union with his Maker.

Then the Fall. A little boy, when asked what the Fall meant, gave a good but simple answer: 'Adam fell from good to bad.' We all fell in Adam; Adam is the 'head of us all'. You remember when Goliath and David

fought, Goliath said, ‘Don’t let the two armies fight. You choose a man to fight for you; I will fight for the Philistines.’ David was the ‘head’ of the Israelites (the Israelites were ‘in him’); Goliath was the ‘head’ of the Philistines (all the Philistines were ‘in him’). David won, so all Israel won; Goliath lost, so all the Philistines lost. We were in Adam; we fought, we lost, we fell. So ‘sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned’. This is the doctrine of ‘original sin’.

We are born into this world as sinners, our hearts are depraved, and so as we grow up we sin in word, thought, and deed. We do not love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. ‘Sin is the transgression of God’s law.’ God has given us a good, holy law—the Ten Commandments. We break them. We are guilty. We deserve eternal punishment.

Because we have sinned we must die (and after death there is the judgement). ‘The wages of sin is death.’ Some years ago plans were drawn up for a beautiful new town—an ideal town.

‘But where is the police station?’ a visitor asked.

With a smile he was answered, ‘There will be no need for any police in this lovely environment.’

‘But there is no church,’ persisted the visitor.

Again a smile: ‘No one will want to go to church when the time comes for the town to be built.’

The visitor, however, did not give up. ‘Why is there no cemetery?’

Silence! No answer to this question!

Man

We can do nothing to save ourselves. We cannot deliver ourselves. We are helpless and guilty. We are like the clock—we need a new inside. The story is told of the little black boy who fell into a pit. Night, with all the dangers of wild beasts, drew nearer, and he could not get out. He trembled with fear. A crowd of natives gathered round. One told him he was a foolish boy to fall in. Another said he was very naughty to be playing near the hole. A third told him to get out as he got in (which he could not). Another threw him a stick to hold, but the stick broke. Of all things, someone even lectured him that when he did get out, he must never fall in again! And the night grew nearer—until at length a very strong, kind native went right down into the pit himself, picked him up, and lifted him out.

Our need is so great we need the Lord Jesus to do *everything* for us.

Some of you will have heard the story of ‘The Little Highland Maid’. A well-known Scottish minister was conducting worship in the house where he was staying. He asked if all were present. ‘Yes,’ they said, ‘apart from a little maid. She is in the kitchen. She will not understand. She cannot read or write.’

The minister insisted that the little girl was brought. When he asked her questions, it was clear that she did not know the first thing about religion. Before he left, the minister taught her to pray this prayer: ‘LORD, SHOW ME MYSELF.’

Later, when the minister again visited that home, he found the maid in great trouble and distress. Asking the cause, he found she was burdened with a sense of her sin and guilt before a holy God. Her prayer had been

Bible Doctrines – Simply Explained

answered. Now he talked to her about the Lord Jesus, and left her with another prayer: ‘LORD, SHOW ME THYSELF.’

Not until many years after did the two meet again. It was a gracious young lady, rejoicing in God’s salvation, who introduced herself to the minister, and told him how the second prayer had been answered, and Jesus made precious to her as her Saviour.

Suggested Bible readings

Genesis 3.

Romans 1: 18-32.

Romans 3: 9-20, 23.