

## Culture and the Bible

They tell us that the Bible is the Word of God - a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path. They tell us that we shall find in it the knowledge of God, and of His will for our lives. We believe them; rightly, for what they say is true. So we take our Bibles and start to read them. We read steadily and thoughtfully, for we are in earnest; we really do want to know God. But as we read, we get more and more puzzled. Though fascinated, we are not being fed. Our reading is not helping us; it leaves us bewildered and, if the truth be told, somewhat depressed. We find ourselves wondering whether Bible-reading is worth going on with.

What is our trouble? Well, basically it is this. Our Bible reading takes us into what, for us, is quite a new world - namely, the Near Eastern world as it was thousands of years ago, primitive and barbaric, agricultural and unmechanised. It is in that world that the action of the Bible story is played out. In that world, we meet Abraham, and Moses, and David, and the rest, and watch God dealing with them. We hear the prophets denouncing idolatry and threatening judgment upon sin. We see the Man of Galilee, doing miracles, arguing with the Jews, dying for sinners, rising from death and ascending to heaven. We read letters from Christian teachers directed against strange errors which, so far as we know, do not now exist. It is all intensely interesting, but it all seems very far away. It all belongs to *that* world, not to *this* world. We feel that we are, so to speak, on the outside of the Bible world, looking in. We are mere spectators, and that is all. Our unspoken thought is - 'Yes, God did all that then, and very wonderful it was for the people involved, but how does it touch us now? We don't live in the same world. How can the record of God's words and deeds in

Bible times, the record of His dealings with Abraham and Moses and David and the rest, help us, who have to live in the space age?' We cannot see how the two worlds link up, and hence again and again we find ourselves feeling that the things we read about in the Bible can have no application for us. And when, as so often, these things are in themselves thrilling and glorious, our sense of being excluded from them depresses us considerably.

Most Bible-readers have known this feeling. Not all know how to counter it. Some Christians seem to resign themselves to following afar off, believing the Bible record, indeed, but neither seeking nor expecting for themselves such intimacy and direct dealing with God as the men of the Bible knew. Such an attitude, all too common today, is in effect a confession of failure to see a way through this problem.

But how can this sense of the remoteness from us of the biblical experience of God be overcome? Many things might be said, but the crucial point is surely this. The sense of remoteness is an illusion which springs from seeking the link between our situation and that of the various Bible characters in the wrong place. It is true that in terms of space, time, and culture, they, and the historical epoch to which they belonged, are a very long way away from us. But the link between them and us is not found at that level. The link is God Himself. For the God with whom they had to do is the same God with whom we have to do. We could sharpen the point by saying, *exactly* the same God; for God does not change in the least particular. Thus it appears that the truth on which we must dwell in order to dispel this feeling that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the position of men in Bible times and our own, is the truth of God's *immutability*.

J.I Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 67-68