

The Word of God

(John 1: 1-14)

What is the Bible?

The Bible is the basis of our faith.

The New Testament is a record of Jesus' life and teachings. It also shows us the acts of the early church and provides spiritual guidance for those who follow Christ.

The Old Testament provides historical accounts and prophecies (of which there are hundreds which Jesus fulfilled). The Old Testament can also guide us spiritually: Psalms and Proverbs are very inspirational. It is important to understand that we are still a part of the religion of the Old Testament. Jesus did not start a new religion, He brought the New Covenant. He was the Messiah of the Jews (and a Jew Himself), though many rejected Him including most of the dogmatic religious leaders of the Jews. God has not changed. We still worship the same God that was in the Old Testament, but our relationship with Him has changed through Jesus and the New Covenant.

If you are just beginning to read the Bible, I cannot recommend starting with the Old Testament. This seems to be our first inclination, but I personally (and many) have found it to be difficult and confusing at first, and therefore discouraging. I soon gave up and felt the Bible was too hard to understand. Try reading all or at least one of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and Acts. This is a good place to start (after this, continue through the New Testament).

Is the Bible accurate?

The Bible we use today is the same collection of texts used by the early church. In addition to the evidence recorded in the Scriptures we have historical accounts, some recorded by non-Christians, which provide insight on the writings distributed and accepted by the church of the first century. We have thousands of manuscripts in Hebrew and Greek. There *are* some minor differences in some of these texts, including word-choices and sentence structure, as well as omissions or missing parts in some. The important thing is: the ideas have not been shifted by any of these differences, and by comparing all the versions available, scholars have been able to determine how the original text was worded. Now, there is always room for error while translating to English or other languages, which is why we have quite a few English translations, some of which have been found to have errors over the years. However, the generally accepted Bible's we use today are quite accurate, and any errors or differences they may contain do not change the message. It can be useful to compare different editions when there is question or doubt about the interpretation of a particular passage. Bible scholars often refer to the original Greek or Hebrew texts for a better understanding. We can be quite certain that the messages of the Bible we read are accurate and essentially the same as those used by the early church.

What about human error? We know that men wrote the Bible, and men are fallible.

Let's allow the Bible to give us its own answer.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Furthermore, much the same idea, **2 Peter 1:20-21** says "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation (*origin*), for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit."

What if the "Scripture" they refer to only applies to the Holy Scriptures of the Jews? (This would be what we know as the Old Testament)

2 Peter 3:14-18 reads "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

These words from Peter allude to the fact that these writings were written as inspired Scripture. Again, outside historical evidence also shows us that the letters and writings were distributed and intended for Scripture in the early times of the church.

It is important and essential for our relationship with God to always be growing spiritually towards Him and seeking His will.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*."

If we let ourselves get in a place where we are comfortable and stop progressing, this is when we are really put to the test, and if we are not fully relying on God, it will be extremely hard not to give in to temptation, and we will fall.

2 Peter 1:5-10 "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Peter reminds and encourages us to grow always, in knowledge and in spirit. Remember Jesus told

Peter he was going to deny Him, but Peter said there was no way, and that he was willing to die for Jesus. When it came down to that very thing, Peter gave in and he fell, because he thought that he was in an okay place. Jesus told His disciples to pray that they would not enter into temptation, but apparently Peter did not, and he gave into temptation. At the time of this writing, Peter is about to be killed. He has another chance to stand up for Jesus, and this time he does, because he understands the importance of continual growth.

How can the Bible help us grow closer to God?

The Bible is a guide to us as Christians, covering everything necessary for salvation through Jesus Christ, for ourselves and others. We learn by it the life and teachings of Jesus, who we are called to follow. It is His example that we follow, which is shown in the Bible, and this can be useful for our worldview, our attitude, and our daily life. We must be familiar with the Bible and the teachings of Jesus, so we can be certain that we are following Christ, and not our own path.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Always seek the will of God. And commit to doing it. God's will for you can be revealed through the Bible (His word) and through prayer. Read and pray **all** the time, and ask God to show His will.

2 Timothy 3:14-18 "But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

This tells us exactly what the Scriptures are for, and we need to use them accordingly. The Bible is for all believers, the man (or woman) of God. We must understand our faith completely, and be prepared to do the work of the Lord. Everyone who follows Christ should be familiar with the Bible, not just those who have been called to be a preacher or a missionary.

I encourage everyone to start reading the Bible regularly, if you don't already. If you read with all humility towards God, you *will* grow closer to God, in faith and in knowledge.

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