



WHAT IS
THE BIBLE
AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

HUMAN WRITINGS OR DIVINE WORD?



STUDY GUIDE

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WHAT IS THE BIBLE AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

:: Introduction ::

"In a society that venerates science and rationalism, it is an increasingly hard pill to swallow that an eclectic assortment of ancient stories, poems, sermons, prophecies and letters, written and compiled over the course of 3,000 years, is somehow the sacred 'Word of God.'" (Barna Study)

:: 7 Critical Questions ::

1. What is the Bible?
2. Where did it come from and how was it written down and recorded?
3. Is there any proof that the Bible is a Divine Book?
4. Can I trust the Bible I have in my hands today?
5. How is it different from any other book?
6. Why should I read it?
7. How should I read it?

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." (Psalm 19:7-11)

"Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." (C.S. Lewis)

:: Question #1 - What is the Bible? ::

:: Critical Questions ::

What exactly is the Bible? What's the purpose of the Bible?

"The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is—what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used. After that has been discovered the temperance reformer may decide that the corkscrew was made for a bad purpose, and the communist may think the same about the cathedral. But such questions come later. The first thing is to understand the object before you: as long as you think the corkscrew was meant for opening tins or the cathedral for entertaining tourists you can say nothing to the purpose about them." (C.S. Lewis)

:: The Bible is NOT ::

:: The Bible IS ::

:: Revelation ::

- General:
- Specific:

:: Authority And Truth In An Age Of Skepticism ::

"In the world it is called Tolerance, but in hell it is called Despair, the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds

purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.”
(Dorothy Sayers)

“All merely human affirmations about God curl into a question mark. We cannot spy out the secrets of God by obtrusive curiosity. Not even theologians of a technological era, not even Americans with their skill in probing the surface of the moon, have any special radar for penetrating the mysteries of God’s being and ways. Apart from God’s initiative, God’s act, God’s revelation, no confident basis exists for God-talk. So from the start, we have to see that revelation is God’s communication to people of truth they need to know in order to properly relate to Him.” (Carl F.H. Henry)

:: Summary Statement :: The Bible is not a divine rulebook dropped from the sky. But it is the story of God’s plan to reveal Jesus as the Rescuer who comes to redeem us and invite us into relationship with Him while showing, shaping, and restoring us into a whole new way of being human.

:: Question #2 - Where Did It Come From and How Was It Written Down and Recorded? ::

:: Critical Questions ::

Is the Bible Human or Divine? Or did humans make it up? Is human language an adequate vehicle for divine revelation? How was it written down and recorded throughout the years?

:: Is the Bible Human or Divine? ::

:: Inspiration ::

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came

about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:16-21)

:: Inspiration Does NOT Mean ::

:: Inspiration Does Mean ::

:: Summary Statement :: God has spoken through human persons and human words to reveal Himself. We must embrace the tension of the Bible being both a human and a divine work.

:: How was the Bible written down and recorded throughout all the years? ::

"And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim...Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."" (Exodus 17:7-8,14)

- Facts and findings about Ebla:

"When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."" (Exodus 24:3-8)

"In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin." So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the LORD had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll." "Then they asked Baruch, "Tell us, how did you come to write all this? Did Jeremiah dictate it?" "Yes," Baruch replied, "he dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them in ink on the scroll." (Jeremiah 36:1-4, 17-18)

:: How were the Hebrew Scriptures (O.T.) Structured? ::

- Hebrew Scriptures: The TaNaK

:: How was the New Testament Written and Recorded? ::

"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-4)

"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

"So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter." (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

"I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles." (2 Peter 3:2)

"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:15-16)

*"The new testament was not self-consciously created by the church, either as a response to external stimuli or as a means to some end, but arose naturally and spontaneously from the inner life of early Christianity, above all in contexts of worship and instruction." (Henry Gamble, *The New Testament Canon in Recent Research*)*

:: Question #3 - Is There Any Proof That The Bible Is A Divine Book? ::

:: Critical Questions ::

How can we really know that this book is from God? Didn't a group of messed up humans like us write it and then others throughout history changed it to drive their own religious and political agendas? Isn't it just a bunch of good stories and teachings?

:: Internal Evidence ::

:: Prophecies Fulfilled ::

"We are told the exact time of [the King of Israel's] manifestation to his people, the exact place of his birth, the family of which he should be born, the condition of the family at the time of his birth (a condition entirely different from that existing at the time the prophecy was written, and contrary to all the probabilities in the case), the manner of his reception by his people (a reception entirely different from that which would naturally be expected), the fact, method, and details regarding his death, with the specific circumstances regarding his burial, his resurrection subsequent to his burial, and his victory subsequent to his resurrection. These predictions were fulfilled with the most minute precision in Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible contains prophecy concerning Jesus' birth. Micah said he would be born in Bethlehem, and hundreds of years later that's exactly where He was born. The Bible contains prophecies concerning His death. "More than twenty Old Testament predictions relating to events that would surround the death of Christ, words written centuries before His first advent, were fulfilled with precision within a twentyfour-hour period at the time of His crucifixion [alone]." (R.A. Torrey)

:: Historical Evidence ::

- Nuzi Tablets:
 - In 1925-31, about 4,000 clay tablets were excavated by archeologists from Harvard University. These tablets describe the life and activities of ordinary citizens of ancient Mesopotamia and corroborate the accuracy of Genesis.

- Siloam Tunnel Inscription:
 - *"As for the other events of Hezekiah's reign, all his achievements and how he made the pool and the tunnel by which he brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?" (2 Kings 20:20)*

- Monolith Inscription - This Assyrian stone inscription reads, *"Ahab the Israelite is the leader of the Army of Israel."*
 - *"In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel for twenty-two years." (1 Kings 16:29)*

- Khorsabad Annals of Sargon II (772-705 B.C.) - These are the Assyrian historical records that describe the fall of Israel's northern kingdom, Samaria, in 722 B.C. This harmonizes exactly

with 2 Kings 17:6.

- *"In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes."* (2 Kings 17:6)

"A telling example of the Bible's accuracy is the transliteration of the names of foreign kings in the Old Testament as compared to contemporary extra-biblical records such as monuments and tablets. The Bible is accurate in every detail in the 36 instances of comparison, a total of 183 syllables. To see how amazing this is, Manetho's ancient work on the dynasties of the Egyptian kings can be compared within 140 instances. He is right 49 times, only partially right 28 times and in the other 63 cases, not a single syllable is correct! The Bible's accuracy is shown not only in the original work, but in its copies as well." (Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*)

"The patriarchal age has been illumined in a manner unbelievable. We now have texts by the literal tens of thousands contemporaneous with the period of Israel's origins...And, as the early second millennium has emerged into the light of day, it has become clear that the patriarchal narratives, far from reflecting the circumstances of a later day, fit precisely into the age of which they purport to tell." He goes to affirm the ancient status of the patriarchal traditions, laying emphasis on the fact that no evidence had come to light contradicting any item in the patriarchal tradition." (John Bright, *History of Israel*)

"I take the view that Luke's history is unsurpassed in regard to its trustworthiness...I began with an attitude unfavorable to it...It was gradually borne upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth you may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment." (Sir William Ramsey)

"Any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd." (A.N. Sherwin-White)

*"After trying to shatter the historicity and validity of the Scripture, I came to the conclusion that it is historically trustworthy. If one discards the Bible as being unreliable, then one must discard almost all literature of antiquity. One problem I constantly face is the desire on the part of many to apply one standard or test to secular literature and another to the Bible. One must apply the same test, whether the literature under investigation is secular or religious. Having done this, I believe we can hold the Scriptures in our hands and say, 'The Bible is trustworthy and historically reliable.'" (Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask*)*

:: Archeological Evidence ::

"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference." (Nelson Glueck)

"Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history." (William Albright)

"There have been thousands—not hundreds—of archeological finds in the Middle East that support the picture presented in the biblical record." (Norman Geisler)

"The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries." (Sir Frederic Kenyon)

- Hittites -
 - *"Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west."* (Joshua 1:4)

- Moabite Stone -
 - *"But when the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and fought them until they fled. And the Israelites invaded the land and slaughtered the Moabites."* (2 Kings 3:24)

- Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser -
 - *"The time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years."* (2 Kings 10:36)

- Babylonian Chronicle -

:: Summary Statement :: Archaeology has only and constantly shown the Biblical record to be accurate. The historical reliability of the Bible is proven 100% by archaeological discoveries.

:: Scientific Evidence ::

"It is not too much to say that it was the rise of the science of archaeology that broke the deadlock between historians and the orthodox Christian. Little by little, one city after another, one civilization after another, one culture after another, whose memories were enshrined only in the Bible, were restored to their proper places in ancient history by the studies of archaeologists... Contemporary records of biblical events have been unearthed and the uniqueness of biblical revelation has been

emphasized by contrast and comparison to newly discovered religions of ancient peoples. Nowhere has archaeological discovery refuted the Bible as history.” (John Elder, Prophets, Idols and Diggers).

“After more than two centuries of facing the heaviest scientific guns that could be brought to bear, the Bible has survived -- and is perhaps the better for the siege. Even on the critics' own terms -- historical fact -- the Scriptures seem more acceptable now than they did when the rationalists began the attack.” (TIME Dec. 30, 1974)

:: Manuscript Evidence ::

- Big question: If we don't have the originals, what do we have?
- The Masoretic Text
- The Septuagint (LXX “Seventy”)
- Dead Sea Scrolls

:: Summary Statement :: As a divinely inspired work, the Bible is confirmed to be fully reliable as we look at internal, external, prophetic, historical, archeological, scientific and manuscript evidence. No discoveries in any professional field have been able to refute the reliability of the Bible. In fact, new finds and discoveries are being unearthed more and more frequently with the advantages of developing technology. And each of them continues to confirm the claim that the Bible is in fact the words of God and in it there is no deceit or inconsistency.

:: Question #4 - Can I Trust The Bible I Have In My Hands Today? ::

:: Critical Questions ::

Do we have the actual words of God inspired by the Spirit of God? How were the books of the Bible gathered and chosen? Why did some make it in and not others? What's the difference between the Catholic Bible with the extra books (Apocrypha) compared to the standard sixty-six books? Aren't there errors and contradictions? With all the different translations out there on the Scripture how do we know them to be accurate and true?

:: Canon ::

"The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. Newton did not create gravity but recognized it." (J.I. Packer, God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible)

:: Old Testament Canon ::

- Tablets of the Law were preserved in the ark (Ex. 25:16-21; 40:20; Deut. 10:5; 1 Kings 8:9)
 - *"There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt."* (1 Kings 8:9)

- The Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch) were placed alongside them as soon as Moses wrote them (Deut. 31:24-26).

- *"After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD: "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you." (Deuteronomy 31:24-26)*
- The Writings of the prophets were also added (1 Sam. 10:25; Josh. 24:25-26; Isaiah 8:20; 29:18; 34:16).

"We have but twenty-two [books] containing the history of all time, books that are justly believed in; and of these, five are the books of Moses, which comprise the law and earliest traditions from the creation of mankind down to his death. From the death of Moses to the reign of Artaxerxes, King of Persia, the successor of Xerxes, the prophets who succeeded Moses wrote the history of the events that occurred in their own time, in thirteen books. The remaining four documents comprise hymns to God and practical precepts to men. So there is a total of 39 books recognized as the Old Testament in a way that was final or complete. That's what I mean by "historic completion." These specific books were recognized by the Jewish people as the Word of God. People saw them as such. They stood on them as such, even when it cost them. Josephus writes: How firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any change in them, but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willing to die for them. For it is no new thing for our captives, many of them in numbers, and frequently in time, to be seen to endure racks and deaths of all kinds upon the theatres, that they may not be obliged to say one word against our laws, and the records that contain them. So Jewish people stood for those book as the Word of God." (Josephus, First century Jewish historian)

"There is no explicit or implicit statement in the Hebrew Scriptures which gives any reason to think that a council of any kind ever debated the establishment of a corpus of authoritative writings or acted to include a book in such a corpus. It appears, then, that public acclaim was the decisive factor; those books which earned it simply were recognized and transmitted to the next generation." (Philo)

:: Summary Statement :: The Church accepted the Hebrew Canon without question because Jesus did.

:: New Testament Canon ::

- Criteria for books recognized as Scripture:

"Was the writer of the book an apostle or did the writer of the book have immediate contact with the apostles? All but a few New Testament writers were eyewitnesses to the events they recorded. Though not eyewitnesses, Luke received his information from Paul and numerous eyewitnesses, while Mark received his information from Peter who was an eyewitness. James and Jude were closely associated with the apostles in Jerusalem and were probably Jesus' brothers, which would have also made them eyewitnesses." (Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine*)

"After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea." (Colossians 4:16)

"Astonishingly early, the great central core of the present New Testament was already being treated as the main authoritative source for Christians. There is little to suggest that there was any serious controversies about the four Gospels or the major letters of Paul." (John Barton, *The Spirit and the Letter: Studies in the Biblical Canon*)

"The New Testament did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect." (FF Bruce)

- Catalysts for finalizing the New Testament canon:

"The canon was never authorized or mandated by any general council of the ancient church, but rather rested upon the early and largely informal consensus of the church. In short, the church did not 'close' the canon because it never started it to begin with. The canon was inherited from the apostles." (Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisted*)

:: Summary Statement :: There never was any council that decided what was in or not in the Bible. The canon grew out of the Christian church's worship gatherings (remember Colossians 4:16). The New Testament writings established themselves; they were recognized by the church as having the attributes of canon. In other words, the books that possessed a clear distinction of divine inspiration were clearly chosen because they spoke for themselves.

:: Apocrypha ::

Summary Statement for apocrypha: The apocryphal books were never recognized or respected as Scripture by the devout Israelites (never part of the Hebrew TaNaK) and Jesus and the apostles never quote or treat them as having the same authority as the Old Testament Scriptures.

:: Errors and Contradictions ::

"Men do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself, but because it contradicts them." (Paul E. Hovey)

:: Summary Statement :: No, we do not have the original manuscripts and yes there are copying errors (variances) in the copies and translations we have in our hands today. But with more and more manuscripts being discovered and analyzed, we can be confident that the manuscripts compiled and compared today are 99.5% consistent. The variances that do exist have no impact in salvific or doctrinal issues. Thousands more manuscripts exist for the Bible than any other ancient writing. The earliest manuscripts are dated to within decades of the original autographs.

:: Question #5 - How Is It Different From Any Other Book? ::

:: Critical Questions ::

What makes the Bible the word of God over all the other holy books out there? Is the Bible the only book we need, or is it just one among many books that we need to look at in our lives?

:: The Bible Is Living And Active ::

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."
(Hebrews 4:12-16)

"They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32)

"Has it occurred to you that when God shaped his message in his Book, he did it with the conscious intention of speaking directly to you, on this very day?" (Howard Hendricks)

"If you're spiritually resurrected, as you read the Bible you will find the Bible is alive in you. It's at large in you. Have you ever tasted something so sweet that it electrifies your whole body and you just can't help but stuff it in? In the same way, the Bible becomes alive. It melts in your mouth. It dawns on you. It shines. It's 'alive and active, a two-edged sword,' Hebrews says. 'Is not my word like fire ... and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?' the Bible says, and it becomes alive in you." (Tim Keller)

"Now this power which is peculiar to Scripture is clear from the fact that of human writings, however artfully polished, there is none capable of affecting us at all comparably. Read Demosthenes or Cicero; read Plato, Aristotle and others of that tribe. They will, I admit, allure you, delight you, move you, enrapture you in wonderful measure. But betake yourself from them to this sacred reading. Then, in spite of yourself, so deeply will it affect you, so penetrate your heart, so fix itself in your very marrow, that compared with its deep impression, such vigor as the orators and philosophers have will nearly vanish. Consequently, it is easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavor, breathe something divine." (John Calvin)

:: The Bible Is Sufficient ::

"The Christian should never ask, 'Where is God's will for my life? What is God's will for my life?' If you're walking through a forest, when is the only time you need to ask where the path is? When you're off the path. As long as you're walking in the path, you don't have to ask where the path is." (Oswald Chambers)

"Our problem is not that we don't have what we need in the Bible, but that we don't have enough of the Bible in us, which we need!" (Jay Adams)

:: The Bible Is Inerrant ::

- Inerrancy Does NOT Mean:

:: The Bible Is Infallible ::

"So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)

"Holy Scripture... is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's promise, in all that it promises." (Chicago Statement)

:: Summary Statement :: Within the Bible is the words of life. God's words are not to be taken as anything less than the authoritative standard of truth by which the human life is to be lived. This statement is true for the Christian and non-Christians, as God is the Creator of all and Scripture is his very words. To believe or disbelieve the Bible is to believe or disbelieve God himself.

:: Question #6 - Why Should I Read It? ::

:: Critical Questions ::

Even if the Bible really is divine, why should I read it? What's the point of the Bible? What exactly does it do? How does it relate to me?

:: What Does The Bible Do? ::

"The World needs men and women who know the living Word of God, who are constant students of that Book, and who allow it to grip them so they grow to hate what God hates and to love what God loves." (Howard Hendricks)

"Indeed it may be no exaggeration to say that the ultimate purpose of biblical interpretation is to achieve right relationships: with God, with others and with oneself." (Kevin Vanhoozer)

The Truth of God's written Word is unparalleled in its capacity to change a human life. What ultimately accounts for the sort of transformation that we prize and that pleases God is the truth of Scripture inspired, illumined, and applied to the human soul. Good intentions, New Year's resolutions, promises, plans, personal discipline, and rigorous regimens designed to control and direct human choices only go so far. They rarely, if ever, effect a lasting and fruitful change in the soul. It is only when our thoughts are challenged and conformed to the principles of God's Word and our hearts are energized to make choices consistent with God's revealed will that a human being is transformed. This is the functional authority of Scripture in the life of a believer. Merely affirming that the Bible is inspired accomplishes very little. Asserting its authority isn't much better. The inspiration and authority of the Scriptures are of value to us only so far as we change our beliefs to conform to its principles and alter our behavior to coincide with its imperatives. The Bible is meant to govern our lives, to fashion our choices, to challenge our cherished traditions, and ultimately to make us look more like Jesus.

The question for each of us, then, is whether the Bible actually functions in this way. Do we submit to its dictates? Do we put our confidence in its promises? Do we stop living a certain way in response to its counsel? Do we embrace particular truths on its authority? Do we set aside traditional practices that conflict with its instruction? In other words, for the Bible to be of value to us it must actually function to shape how we think, feel, and act, as well as what we believe, value, and teach. (Joe Thorn, Note to Self)

:: Summary Statement ::

The Bible answers life's biggest questions of who God is, who we are, and where we come from while inviting us into a relationship of restoration, transforming us into a new way of being human.

:: Question #7 - How Should I Read It? ::

:: Critical Questions ::

What translation is the best? Which should I use? I don't understand the Bible. It's confusing to me. How should I read it? Where should I start? Should I read and take the Bible literally?

:: So What Translation Should I Use? ::

"Reading a work not in the original language is like kissing a woman through a veil." (Anne Michaels)

:: How NOT To Read The Bible ::

:: Interpretation: Where Does Meaning Come From? ::

- Question: When the Bible says something you disagree with, is *it* wrong or are *you* wrong?

:: Illumination: The Spirit Is Your Helper, Teacher, And Guide ::

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)

"...but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Corinthians 2:10-16)

"Nobody who has not the Spirit of God sees a jot of what is in the Scriptures. All men have their hearts darkened, so that, even when they can discuss and quote all that is in Scripture, they do not understand or really know any of it...The Spirit is needed for the understanding of all Scripture and every part of Scripture." (Martin Luther)

"Now please don't grab that phrase and go out and form a club. Don't do it! Just meditate. That is what we need. We are organized to death already. Let's just be plain Christians. Let's open our Bible, spread it out on the chair, and meditate on it. It will open itself to us, and the Spirit of God will come and brood over it. So be a Bible meditator. I challenge you: Try it for a month and see how it works. Put away questions and answers and the filling in of blank lines about Noah. Put all that cheap trash away and take a Bible, open it, get on your knees and say, 'Father, here I am. Begin to teach me.' He will begin to teach you, and He will teach you about Himself and about His own presence." (Tozer, A. Z. How to be Filled with the Holy Spirit)

"One of these days some simple soul will pick up the Book of God and read it, and believe it. The rest of us will be embarrassed. We have adopted the convenient theory that the Bible is a Book to be explained, whereas first and foremost, it is a Book to be believed and after that to be obeyed." (Leonard Ravenhill)

:: Where Do I Start? ::

{Resources and tools to start reading, studying, understanding, and applying the Bible are provided at the end of the study guide}

:: Outro ::

:: Recap And Summary ::

:: What Do You Believe About The Bible? What Do You Say It Is? ::

"Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." (C.S. Lewis)

:: Where Will You Begin? ::

:: Bible Reading and Studying Resources ::

Bibles, Commentaries, Devotionals, Maps, Dictionaries

- E-Sword: <http://www.e-sword.net/downloads.html>.
- Bible History: <http://bible-history.com/>
- Biblos: <http://www.biblos.com>
- Blue Letter Bible: <http://blueletterbible.org/index.html>
- Crosswalk: <http://www.crosswalk.com/>
- Study Light: <http://www.studylight.org/>
- Expository Bible Commentary: <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>
- Strategies for daily Bible reading: <http://gavinortlund.com/2015/10/12/5-strategies-for-daily-bible-reading/>

Bibles and Bible Verse Search

- Interlinear Bible: <http://www.studylight.org/isb/> (search verse; see original or Latin text)
- Parallel Bible: <http://www.studylight.org/par/> (search verse; compare two translations of choice)

History

- Bible History: <http://www.bible-history.com/>
- Josephus: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0146:book=1:section=1>

Maps

- Bible History: <http://www.bible-history.com/maps/>
- Biblos: <http://www.biblos.com>

Media and Ministries to the Christian Life

- DeMoss, Nancy Leigh-Revive Our Hearts: <http://www.reviveourhearts.com/>
- Dobson, James-Focus on the Family: <http://www.family.org/>
- McDowell, Josh: <http://www.josh.org/apologetics/>; and <http://www.josh.org/notes/notes.asp/>
- Moody Broadcasting Network: <http://www.mbn.org/>
- OnePlace: <http://www.oneplace.com/>
- Precept Ministries: <http://www.precept.org/newindex.html>
- Zacharias, Ravi: <http://www.gospelcom.net/rzim/>

Purchase Bibles, Books, Bible Study Software

- AMG Publishers: <http://www.amgpublishers.com/>
- Christian Books: <http://www.christianbook.com/>
- Dayspring E-Mail Cards: <http://www.dayspring.com/>
- Lifeway (formerly Moody Bible Institute Bookstore): <http://www.lifewaystores.com/lwstore>
- Precept Ministries: <http://secure.precept.org/preceptwebapps/estore/Estore.asp>
- Zondervan: <http://www.zondervan.com/>

My Personal Favorites:

- Bible Reading Plan with videos: <http://www.readscripture.org/>
- Narrative animations of the Biblical books and themes: <https://jointhebibleproject.com/>
- ESV Study Bible: <https://www.amazon.com/ESV-Study-Bible-Bibles>

:: Tools for Reading, Studying, and Understanding the Bible ::

- Inductive Study (Observation, Interpretation, Application):
 - **Observation** – Discover What It Says: As you read the Bible text, look carefully at what is said, and how it is said. Look for anything that stands out to you, questions you have, unclear words or phrases, repeated or emphasized words or phrases, comparisons and contrasts, if / then statements etc. As you make any type of observation, make note of it. The main purpose of observation is to dig in and see what the text is saying.
 - **Interpretation** – Discover What It Means: While observation leads to an accurate understanding of what the Bible says, interpretation goes a step further and helps you understand what it means. Context is king. Begin to work outward by considering each verse in light of surrounding verses, its book, and the entire scope of Scripture. Remember that Scripture is God-inspired and never contradicts other portions of Scripture. Instead, Scripture often helps to interpret Scripture. The primary purpose of interpretation is to filter the observations down to one interpretation of what the text means.
 - **Application** – Discover How It Works Out: What are the life lessons? What does the passage teach me? Mean to me? Require of me? Does this section of Scripture expose any error in my beliefs or in my behavior? While we believe there is one interpretation of God's Word, there are many applications of it. Once you understand what the Word of God teaches, you are then responsible before God to accept that truth and to live by it.
- SHAPE Reading:
 - S**cripture: Find passage and circle any words that catch your attention
 - H**ear: Stop and listen. What is the Spirit of God showing you today?
 - A**pply: Connect what you have heard God say through His Word to your life
 - P**ray: Ask for God's help to apply and help transform your thinking, believing, and living
 - E**xalt: Thank Him and praise Him for who He is
- Four questions to ask as your reading a section of Scripture – What does it say? What doesn't it say? What does it teach me about God? What does it teach me about myself?
- Put it in your own words – Choose a passage of Scripture and then read it verse by verse. Then open your journal and write each verse in your own words. How would you explain what you are reading to someone who has never read the Bible before? Too often we read past verses we really don't understand and don't take the time to get our minds around it. When we put it in our own words, it helps us better process and digest it.
- Praying Scripture – If there was only one thing I could teach a new believer who wants to grow and mature, I would teach them how to pray through Scripture. The Word and prayer is how we grow – hearing from God and getting to know Him, while enjoying His presence. How to pray Scripture? Choose a passage, verse, phrase, or even one word. Meditate on it by

reading it and then repeating it. Then pray it. If it's a promise ask God for the faith to believe in it. If it's praising the character of God, praise the character of God. If it's a request, ask God to make that true in your life. If it's an example or command ask God to help you grow and be obedient in that area. Pray God's Word for yourself and for others.

- Know Jesus as He really is - Choose a gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) and begin reading through it with your journal or laptop in front of you. Look for any and everything you can about who Jesus is: what he says, how he says it, what he is like, how he treats people, how he responds to questions etc. Write it down in your own words. Your goal is to get to know Jesus and be able to say, "This is what Jesus is like..."
- Put yourself in the story. Don't read it like a newspaper. Picture the scene. See it. Hear it. Touch it. Smell it. Taste it. Feel it. Imagine you are shooting a movie scene. What would it look like? Where and how would each character be standing? What would the sights, sounds, smells, and temperature be like? Think of being one of the characters in the story and read it from that perspective. Imagine being one of the friends who lowers the paralyzed man through the roof in front of Jesus. Now imagine being one of the religious teachers. Now imagine being the paralyzed man himself etc.
- Proverbs three columns - wise, foolish, and evil. Go through the book of Proverbs (all wisdom literature for that matter: Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, James) and make three columns or lists: the wise, the foolish, and the evil. Compile a list of how God describes each of these three types of people. And then ask yourself, "In what areas of my life am I wise, foolish, or evil? How about my friendships and relationships? Am I mostly around wise, foolish, or evil people?" The Bible shows that all people will fall into one of these three categories. Study the Bible with humility and teach-ability and you will grow into the wise person.
- Learn from the Spirit as your Helper and Teacher - Choose a book of the Bible to start reading through. Every day start reading where you left off and ask the Holy Spirit to stop you wherever you need to stop and be taught for that day. You may get 2 chapters in. You only get a verse in before He stops you. But the key is to approach with a humble, teachable heart and listen for what He has for you. When a phrase or line leaps out at you, ask why. Why is this grabbing my attention? What do I need to see here?
- Memorizing and Meditating - Make note of verses and passages that catch your attention in sermons, studies, or your personal reading. Then write them out on an index card to memorize word for word, line by line. Carry them with you throughout the day to continue to memorize and meditate on slowly. Chew on each word and pray over each word like a delicious meal that you want to touch every taste bud in your mind.

:: Recommended Resources for Further Reading and Research on the Reliability of the Bible ::

- Barrera, Julio Trebolle. *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible*.
- Breshears, Gerry. *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*.
- Bruce, F.F. *The Canon of Scripture*.
- Geisler, Norman. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*.
- Jobes, Karen. *Invitation to the Septuagint*.
- Mackie, Tim. <http://www.timmackie.com/bible-in-the-making/>.
- McDowell, Josh. <https://www.josh.org/resources/apologetics/videos/>.
- Platt, David. <http://www.radical.net/resources-secret-church/secret-church-17-scripture-and-authority-in-an-age-of-skepticism>.
- Sailhamer, John. *How We Got the Bible*.
- Wegner, Paul. *The Journey from Text to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*.
- Wright, N.T. *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus: Have We Missed the Truth about Christianity?*
- VanderKam, James. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*.