

THE BIBLE GOD'S HOLY WORD

WHAT IS THE BIBLE

GOD'S SPECIAL BOOK

The Bible, the Word of God, is God's special book. It is a supernatural book.

The Bible is unique and unusual among all other books. It is one of the oldest books in the world, and yet it is the most modern.

The Bible speaks clearly to every age-group, into every society and to every individual.

Portions of the Bible were written almost 4,000 years ago, but it still tells us very important things for today, like:

Who is God?

Can I know God?...How?
Who am I?
Where did I come from?
What is my purpose?
And how do I fulfill it?
Is this life all there is?

KEY TO GOD'S PLAN

Many different people were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the Bible. Yet their writings are completely unified and consistent with each other. They all fit together beautifully, and point in the same direction.

The Bible includes history, science, law; biography, philosophy, prophecy; drama and romance; poetry and song.

The Bible is full of **the thoughts, plans and promises of God** for you and for the rest of mankind. We were given God's Word to help us understand Who

God is, what He is doing in the earth, and how we can be active in His Kingdom plan.

Though the Bible includes many things, it actually has only one main idea: **God's loving plan to bring mankind into a full relationship with Himself.** And the key to that plan is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

GOD HAS SHOWN HIMSELF

The Bible is the divinely inspired and infallible (never wrong) revelation of God to man. It is not merely the words of men written to other men. (For a more complete study on the inspiration, inerrancy and interpretation of the Bible, see Chapter Two of this article.)

Our God is a God Who delights in **making Himself known** to His creatures. He desires to reveal Himself to us.

God has not remained silent, like the idols or gods of other religions. **He is a God of love, Who communicates His love and purposes to His people.**

Man can reveal *his own* thoughts and ideas to someone else, but a mere man cannot know what another man is thinking. And man could never know what God is thinking, unless God were to reveal Himself to man. **Only God** can make Himself known to us, and reveal His thoughts to man.

“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:11 nkjv).

God speaks in order to reveal Himself. From the time of Genesis, and all throughout history, God has spoken to mankind and shown Himself to us.

SO MUCH MORE...

God's words are powerful. With only His word, the world and all that it contains was created. **“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Ps 33:6).**

Some people believe that the revelation of God through His creation (nature) is enough. They don't believe the Bible is God's Word, and think it is unnecessary for knowing God.

It is true that creation practically shouts of the majesty and awesome power of God; it is true that nature shows how incredibly wise and infinitely creative God is. A literal translation of Psalm 19:1 from Hebrew says, *"The heavens are actively engaged in declaring to their utmost the glory and handiwork of God."*

All of creation speaks of the worthiness of God. The Bible declares that the rocks and stones would worship Him if we did not! (See Luke 19:28-40.) That is how awesome and worthy He truly is!

But there is so much more to God than what nature or creation can show us.

What of His incredible love? His awesome Holiness? His marvelous Grace? His plan of Salvation for mankind?

Down through the ages, God has spoken through chosen men and women to make known His will. *"God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days **spoken to us by His Son...**"* (Heb 1:1,2 nkjv).

God's greatest revelation of love was in the Person of Jesus Christ, the "Word made flesh". *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And **the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...**"* (Jn 1:1-14).

The Bible is the revelation of God Himself to mankind. But is it "the Word of God"? And what does that phrase really mean?

MORE THAN A BOOK

The name "Bible" comes from the Greek word *biblios*, which means "the book".

But the Bible is more than just a book. Paul called it *“the holy scriptures”* (Rom 1:2), the *“sacred writings”* (2 Tim 3:15 RSV), and *“the oracles of God”* (Rom 3:2).

In many verses, the Bible is also called *“The Scriptures”*, meaning *“holy writings”* (Mt 22:29; Mk 12:24; Lk 24:27; Jn 5:39; Acts 17:11; Rom 1:2, and others).

TWO COVENANTS

The Bible is divided into two major sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The word *“testament”* was originally translated *“covenant”*. Both the Old Testament and New Testament represent **a covenant that God made with His people.**

There are 39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 books in the New Testament, for a total of 66 books in the Bible.

It is important to remember that the Old Testament Law, or Covenant, has now been superceded by the New *“Covenant”* (Testament) established by Christ (see Hebrews 8:6-10:18). The Old Covenant has not been cancelled out, but has been *“overwritten”* by the fulfillment of Christ’s work.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jesus said, *“These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me”* (Luke 24:44).

Based upon Jesus’ words, the Old Testament has commonly been divided into three major sections:

1. The Law

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

2. The Prophets

Former: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings

Latter: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; the Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

3. The Writings

Poetical: Psalms, Proverbs, Job

Five Rolls: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes

Historical: Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament is commonly divided into 5 sections:

1. **The Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)
2. **The Acts of the Apostles**
3. **The Epistles of Paul** (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon)
4. **The General Epistles** (Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude)
5. **The Book of Revelation**

CHAPTERS AND VERSES

It is important to remember that **the Bible was not originally divided into chapters and verses** as we have it today.

These features were added for convenience of reference only within the last 600 years.

These chapter and verse divisions are helpful for finding things, but they can be misleading as well.

Those who added these divisions in the Bible did the best they could to keep related passages together.

But sometimes the divisions can fall right in the middle of a subject being dealt with, and the reader may think that a new subject is being introduced.

It may even be necessary to ignore the chapter divisions as you read, in order to finish reading the subject being addressed.

An example of this can be found in Galatians 3:26-29. Those four verses would be better understood if they had been placed at the beginning of Galatians 4, instead of at the end of Galatians 3.

This is particularly true with the New Testament writings. The Epistles, for example, were written in the format, or style, of a **letter**, rather than an historical record (I & II Kings, I & II Samuel, etc.) or poem (Psalms, Proverbs, etc.).

MANY WRITERS

The Bible is one book, but it is made up of many books. These books were written by at least *40 different writers* who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. They lived over a period of more than *1,500 years*, spanning *60 generations*. The last writer died more than 1900 years ago. Many of the writers never met or spoke to each other. They lived in different parts of the world, over three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe.

Many of these writers lived hundreds of years apart. There was no way for them to communicate with each other about the basic concepts in the Bible.

They even wrote portions of the Scriptures in different languages, depending on where and when they lived. The books of the Bible were written in three different languages: Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic.

...BUT ONE TRUE AUTHOR

The Biblical writers had various occupations, and many different levels of society and education. They were kings and statesmen; soldiers and tax-collectors; theologians and scribes; doctors and butlers; shepherds and fishermen...and more.

The Bible was written by *various* writers, at *various* times, in *various* languages, from *various* places.

Yet the Bible is miraculously unified and consistent in its message; it is easy to see that the Bible had *one true Author* – God Himself.

If you assembled 20 writers from the **same** generation, the **same** time, the **same** country and the **same** language – and had them write about **one subject** – they would inevitably have many different opinions and conflicting ideas!

Yet the Bible manages to cover **many complicated and controversial subjects**, and still remain **a single, unified book**. This helps us to see that an all-knowing, all-loving and all-powerful God was truly **THE** source of its construction and purpose.

REACHING OUT TO ALL

There are 66 books in the Bible. The authors of 55 of the books have been well identified by tradition and historical study.

Scholars today are less certain as to who exactly wrote the following books: Judges; Ruth; 1 & 2 Samuel; 1 & 2 Kings; 1 & 2 Chronicles; Esther; Job; Hebrews.

However, we can be absolutely confident that these books of the Bible are inspired by the Holy Spirit. And that their contents are totally trustworthy as the Word of God. Ultimately, **God** is the true Author of each and every book in the Bible.

Some books of the Bible cover long periods of history, such as Genesis or 1 & 2 Kings. It is possible they are a collection of several writings by several authors, which were put together into one book by one individual chosen by God.

Psalms and Proverbs are good examples of multiple authors being inspired by the same Holy Spirit.

So then, the actual number of writers of the Scriptures could be well in excess of 40.

Most of the writers were Jews, and wrote from the context of the Jewish religion and culture. Even so, the words of the Bible reach out to people of **ALL** nations, **ALL** ages, **ALL** races, **ALL** social classes.

But who decided which of the many ancient writings should be included in the Bible, and how was that decided?

HOW WERE THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE CHOSEN?

Measuring Rod

We have seen how the Bible is truly the inspired Word of God. But it is important to not just accept this fact without a good understanding of how we have received the Bible in its current form.

The inspired collection of books in both the Old and New Testaments is called the **Canon of the Bible**.

This word comes from the Greek *kanon*, meaning a “measuring rod or reed”. This signifies a rule or standard to which certain books must “measure up” in order to be considered Holy Scripture.

“Canonization” is the process by which the church leaders gave their final approval and acceptance to the books considered for inclusion in the Scriptures.

It is important to note that **the Church or its leaders did not CREATE the Canon. They did not give the books divine authority or power.** It is the “God-breathed” origin (inspiration) of a book which gives it anointing and then determines its canonicity.

The early Church and its leaders merely SAW the worth in the books that came to be included in the Bible, and **RECOGNIZED the inspiration of God which the books already contained.** The Canon of Scripture was determined by God and then discovered by men.

The American scientist Benjamin Franklin, who lived in the 1700’s, did not invent electricity. He just **discovered it** and **recognized it** for what it was. In the same way, the people of the Church did not “invent” or create the Scriptures. They just **recognized** and **received** certain writings based on the obvious God-breathed inspiration of those writings.

Hundreds Bear Witness

There were many false books and writings produced at the same time Scripture was being written.

Church leaders carefully reviewed ancient writings, and rejected many of them. They wanted to be absolutely convinced that a book had divine origins before it was to become part of the Bible

It became necessary for the people of God to carefully establish a set of “guidelines” to help determine which writings should be part of the Bible.

These principles also helped assure that what was to be included in the Bible would not be decided by a select few. **Many hundreds, if not thousands, would have to “bear witness” that certain writings were of God.**

The following principles helped to guide the selection of what writings were to be included in the Canon of Scriptures.

Five Tests Of Authenticity

1. Divine Authority

Each book in the Bible possesses a **prophetic or divine pronouncement** and often contains the phrases “*Thus saith the Lord*” or “*The word of the Lord came to me.*”.

This divine authority was also shown in the telling of what God had done in the history of His people.

2. Prophetic Authorship

The Word of God is given to His people through Spirit-moved, God-appointed men known as prophets (Heb 1:1).

Books were considered for inclusion in the Bible **only if they were written by recognized prophets, apostles, or someone close to them.**

3. Authentic Truth

A book with heresy [...define...] or doctrinal errors was obviously not inspired by God, and was therefore rejected. If a writing contradicted previously accepted biblical revelation, it was also rejected as false.

God cannot lie: **No book given by God would contain falsehood or contradiction. Each book would agree with the other books God had inspired.**

The Bereans “*received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:11). They wisely made sure that what Paul was teaching **matched up with God’s previous revelation** in the Old Testament.

4. **Dynamic Power**

Though this is harder to determine, the books of the Bible must contain dynamic, life-changing power.

“For the Word of God is quick and powerful...” (Heb 4:12), and can be used *“for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (2 Tim 3:16).

Sound, God-breathed teaching builds up, edifies and liberates (2 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 1:23; John 8:32). **False teaching discourages, tears down and leads to bondage**; It will deceive people, and lead them astray from worshipping the One true God and His Son Jesus Christ.

5. **Wide Acceptance**

One more test was used to determine if a book was “God-breathed”: **Was it recognized in the churches? Was it accepted, collected, shared and used as God’s Word by God’s people?**

Communication was difficult, and transportation methods were slow in earlier times. Thus, it took many, many centuries to finalize the acceptance of all 66 books in the Canon of Scripture.

Of course, the people of God accepted many writings without delay, such as the writings of Moses and the Apostle Paul. But other writings had to endure much scrutiny and **withstand the test of time**.

HOW CAN WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS STILL ACCURATE?

Miraculous Preservation

The story of how our Bible came to us in the form we now have it, is a long one. It is filled with the miraculous events of God’s preservation of His precious Word.

It all begins with the original documents being penned by holy men of God “*as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2Peter 1:20-21; 2Tim 3:16).

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Not A Single Mistake

The Old Testament Scriptures were undoubtedly written and copied onto the skins of animals. Leather was far more available than paper when the Old Testament was written.

Rolls were made by sewing many animal skins together. The rolls could be as short as a few feet, or as long as 100 feet – or longer. These rolls were rolled onto one or two sticks.

The Jews who acted as the Scripture copyists had an **intense reverence** for the Scriptures. Because of this, they worked diligently with an almost fanatical discipline to be **absolutely accurate** in their copying of the Scriptures.

They had a very complicated system of cross-checking their work. **Every single letter, word and verse was counted!** They would even measure the spaces between words, and knew exactly how much space was needed to copy a full book.

Using such minute measurements, they would carefully check each new copy. If the letter or word count differed from the original, the copyists would search until the error was located and corrected. **If there was a single mistake, the entire page was destroyed!**

Complete And Undamaged

The scribes’ attention to detail was so successful that the accuracy and detail of the Old Testament has been protected and preserved. Though we do not have the original documents, **we can be assured of the accuracy of the copies we now have.**

These original documents no longer exist. The reason we do not have the remains of the originals is due to the reverence and care of the Jewish scribes. **Whenever a manuscript showed signs of age or was**

accidentally damaged, it had to be either buried or burned after a new, exact duplicate had been made.

This was done to protect the integrity of the copies made of each prior manuscript. Can you imagine having a copy of only half the Psalms because the copy you were reading was made from a damaged or incomplete original?! God has gone to great effort to preserve the Scriptures for us!

Strong Confidence

Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (see chapter 2 of this article), our oldest copies of the Hebrew text were dated around 900 A.D. These Dead Sea Scrolls documents, written on leather, are dated between 200 B.C. and 68 A.D. One of the scrolls is **a complete copy of Isaiah** – making this manuscript a thousand **years older** than any previous copy scholars possessed!

The most important part of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery is the similarity between those scrolls and the other copies already in existence.

The Dead Sea Scrolls conclusively and overwhelmingly demonstrate the extraordinary accuracy and precision of the Jewish scribes in their task of copying the Scriptures.

In comparing two copies of the same thing (the Scriptures) copied by two totally different groups of Jews a thousand years apart, ***we find no significant or important differences or contradictions.*** This gives us strong reason to be confident of the Bible's accuracy.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Overwhelming Evidence

All the New Testament books – written between 40 AD and 95 AD – were written on a kind of paper. This paper was made from **papyrus reeds** and was used as individual sheets or glued together to make rolls.

The manuscript evidence supporting the New Testament is **overwhelming**. The Bible, in fact, has **far more** documentary evidence for its accuracy and reliability than any other ancient writing.

The Word Stands Forever

Virgil, the most celebrated poet of ancient Rome, lived and wrote around the time of Christ, when the Roman Empire dominated the known world.

We have no originals of Virgil's work, and **fewer than two dozen copies** scholars, in fact, will accept as few as **ten** copies to verify that an ancient literary work is genuine. The oldest copy we do have of Virgil's work was not made until **over three centuries** after his death, when the sun was already setting on the glory days of Rome.

The earliest of the more than twenty-four **thousand** manuscript copies we have of the New Testament were made twenty or thirty years **within one generation** after the originals were written . . . ***within the lifetime of people who knew Jesus!***

Over 5400 of these copies are in Greek – the language in which the original New Testament was written. And when these copies are compared with each other, each copy matches the rest with an accuracy rate of very nearly 100%!

The text of the New Testament is more substantiated and verified ***than any other ancient document in existence!***

Praise God for His holy Word! *“The grass withers, the flower fades, but **the Word of our God stands forever.**”* (Is. 40:8)

THE BIBLE THROUGH THE AGES

Vulgate to Wycliffe

As stated earlier, the story of how we came to have our modern Bible is a long one. It is beyond the scope of this article to include all the details. However, the following is a brief overview of how we got the Bible we use today.

Up until 670 A.D. the only widely used Bible was in Latin; it was called the Vulgate. Jerome, in the 4th century, had translated it from the Hebrew and Greek texts.

After Jerome's time, many portions of Scripture were translated from Latin into Old English. Then, in 1382, the whole Bible was translated into English by John Wycliffe. After the **“Wycliffe Bible,”** many new English translations were made.

This created a great deal of discussion and argument among the English Christians as they debated which translation was best.

King James And Beyond

In 1604 King James I authorized the translation of a new Bible. A group of 47 scholars worked for six years, using the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of their day. After much painstaking work and strict attention to accuracy, the **King James Version** was published in 1611. This version went through several revisions in later years, primarily to update the English language used in it.

Today, we have many more, and much older, Greek and Hebrew manuscripts from which we can translate the Scriptures. But there is very little difference between the existing manuscripts, and those differences do not affect a single doctrinal issue or rule of faith!

There are many excellent translations that can be used; personal preference is the only deciding factor in what a person can choose. Four of the most accurate and reliable translations of the Bible are:

- **The King James versions** (KJV, 1611); poetic language, reliable translations, but some old English vocabulary which may be obsolete or have changed meaning.
- **The New King James Version** (NKJV, 1982); updates some of the older vocabulary of KJV, but still retains much of the majestic language style.
- **New American Standard Bible** (NASB, 1971); based on oldest manuscripts available, accuracy is excellent, readability good.
- **New International Version** (NIV, 1978); accuracy of this version is good, with a fresh contemporary style and language.

Translation or *Interpretation*?

There are important differences between a **translation** version of the Bible and a **paraphrase** version of the Bible.

Primarily, a **translation** version seeks to **literally** translate from the original Greek and Hebrew languages in which the Bible was written into another language the reader can understand. A **paraphrase** version frequently attempts to **explain or make commentary on** the passages of Scripture. A paraphrase is more an **interpretation** of Scripture than a literal translation.

As long as the Bible student keeps this important difference in mind, a paraphrase version can be used as an additional tool of study. Some good paraphrase versions are the Phillips Bible, the Living Bible and the Amplified Bible.

Study, Study, Study!

It is also extremely important to note that **several non-Christian cults promote their own “versions” of the Bible**. Some of these almost **seem** like the genuine holy Scriptures, but are **twisted by misinterpretation** or even outright untruths. Cults use these to support their peculiar doctrines, which are intended to deceive and trap the ignorant and undiscerning.

This is not a new problem. Cults existed even in the days of the original apostles. Many of the New Testament books were written to disprove the false doctrines of these groups.

The **best safeguard** for yourself and the flock you lead, is to **know the genuine Scriptures thoroughly!** The only way to do this is to **study, study, study** with a heart that is open to the Holy Spirit's illumination.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD OF GOD AGREE

This ministry of the Holy Spirit is an awesome and powerful thing. It is wonderful to see even today how the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are always in perfect agreement.

The Bible is prophetic. It reveals God's will through His Word and His works. It also reveals God's plans and predictions.

Today, through **the gift of prophecy**, the Holy Spirit still inspires men of God to speak the words and will of God to others.

However, **the written Word of God, the Bible, is already complete and nothing is to be added to it** (Deut 4:2; Prov 30:5,6; Rev 22:18).

Modern-day prophecies should not add to or change what is already complete in the Bible.

Since the Bible is the ultimate source of truth, **all other words and prophecies inspired by the Holy Spirit today must be compared to, or “judged” by, the Bible.**

The Holy Spirit has already inspired what is in the *written* Word of God, and **anything the Holy Spirit inspires today will agree with the Bible.**

The Scriptures clearly tell us to judge all prophecy. *“Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge”* (1 Cor 14:29). But how is this done? There is a final “court of appeal” by which all the manifestations or gifts operating in the Church can be judged. It is the written Word of God.

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word [i.e., the Bible], it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20).

Peter calls the Word of God *“a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as a light that shineth in a dark place”* (2 Pet 1:19).

The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Word of God, and His working through others today will always agree with what is already in the Bible.

THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT IN BALANCE

It is wonderful to experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit manifesting in meetings and ministry situations.

But it is equally wonderful and important to be **balanced** believers who also stand firmly on the foundations of the Bible. ***We can and should be both Spirit-filled AND Bible-based believers!***

There are many scripture verses that show the harmony between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God:

“The SPIRIT of the Lord spoke by me and His WORD was in my tongue” (2 Sam 23:2).

“I will pour out my SPIRIT unto you, I will make known my WORDS unto you” (Prov 1:23).

“The HOLY GHOST shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to SAY” (Lk 12:12).

“He...speaketh the WORDS of God: for God giveth not the SPIRIT by measure unto Him” (John 3:34).

“It is the SPIRIT that quickeneth...the WORDS that I speak...they are SPIRIT, and they are life” (John 6:63).

“SCRIPTURE must needs have been fulfilled, which the HOLY GHOST by the mouth of David spake” (Acts 1:16).

“They were all filled with the HOLY GHOST, and they spake the WORD of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

“After that ye heard the WORD of truth...ye were sealed with that HOLY SPIRIT of promise” (Eph 1:13).

“The sword of the SPIRIT, which is the WORD of God” (Eph 6:17).

(You can use your Bible concordance to find many other verses that show the harmony of the Word of God and the Spirit of God.)

The Holy Spirit was the inspiration for the writing of the Word of God, and His words and works will always agree with what is already in the Bible.

The Holy Spirit and the Bible are in complete unity. ***It is good and right to be people who fully embrace and live in the power of BOTH the Spirit and the Word!***

We have learned that the Bible is the revelation of God Himself to mankind. But is it “the Word of God”? And what does that phrase really mean?

Let us examine these questions and more in the next chapter.

THE BIBLE GOD'S HOLY WORD

IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

WORD OF GOD... OR WORDS OF MEN?

The Bible claims to be a unique book unlike any other. The Bible declares itself to be **the revelation of God and His Word** given to men. It claims to be more than just a book penned by human authors.

Some people find it difficult to believe that the Bible is actually God's Word. They wonder if it is accurate and reliable. They may question how much of it is actually from God.

When the term "the Word of God" is used, it does NOT mean that every word contained in the Bible is a word spoken by God. Sometimes the Scriptures are quoting the words of men, or angels, or even Satan. For instance, the Bible contains records of many sinful acts, but it does not **commend** any of these; it rather **condemns** them.

Scripture even records some of the lies of Satan (i.e., Gen. 3:4). But by including them in Scripture, it is not teaching us that these lies are true; rather, it guarantees that The Bible is **a true and accurate record of what occurred and what was said**. It does not mean that every word contained in the Bible was a word that God said with His mouth.

However, the Bible **is** the Word of God in the following way: **God, through the Holy Spirit, divinely inspired the writing of it**. He was the supernatural Overseer Who directed the Bible's design and the recording of its contents.

- But is it really the "Word of God"?
- Or is it the words of men with special religious insights?
- Are only **parts** of the Bible the Word of God – or is **all** of it God's holy Word?
- Can we really trust the Bible to be accurate and error free?

THREE FOUNDATION STONES

These questions and their answers are extremely important to any Christian leader. For either the Bible is **the** authoritative source for guiding our life and conduct, or it is merely a book of good suggestions which we can believe or not. Leaders must be convinced in their hearts of the authenticity and power of the Living Word of God.

In this section of the article, "The Bible – God's Holy Word," we will examine three important "**foundation stones**" of what the Bible teaches us about

itself. Having a correct understanding and a firm stance of correct belief regarding these three issues will determine much about your personal walk with Christ and your fruitfulness in ministry.

These three foundation stones are:

Doctrine of *Inspiration*;
Doctrine of *Inerrancy*;
Law of *Interpretation*.

Let's look at the Doctrine of Inspiration first.

A. THE BIBLE: WHERE DOES IT COME FROM? THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION

KEY WORD: *THEOPNEUSTOS*

The term “inspiration” as it is applied to Scripture comes from the Apostle Paul’s statement:

“*All scripture is given by inspiration of God...*” (II Tim. 3:16). Unfortunately, the English word “inspiration” used in this passage does not accurately reveal the meaning of the Greek word it translates. In fact it is somewhat misleading. The word “inspire” comes from the Latin word *inspiro* which means to “breathe in.” Without a proper understanding of this word, might incorrectly conclude that God breathed **into** the writings of men, giving them a certain power. This is **not** what the Scriptures teach, nor what the Holy Spirit wants us to understand.

The Greek word used here is *theopneustos* and is in a verb or action tense. The word is a combination of two Greek words, *theos*, “God” and *pneustos*, which is related to the verb meaning “to breathe or blow.” The meaning of the word *theopneustos* is, therefore, “**breathed out by God.**”

GOD-BREATHED WORDS – SPIRIT-MOVED MEAN

When the Holy Spirit spoke through the Apostle Paul and said, “*All scripture is given by inspiration*[breathed out by God],” he was telling us that God did **not** breathe a special power *into* the writing or thoughts of men;

instead, **God breathed out His words into the minds of men** to be written down.

A similar passage in I Corinthians 2:13 emphasizes the same point: **“These things we also speak, *not in words that man’s wisdom teaches, but that which the Holy Spirit teaches.*”**

The second significant passage on the divine inspiration of the Bible is II Peter 1:20-21, *“Know this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for **prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**”*

This verse helps us understand further that **none** of what was written in the Bible was the working or impulses of man. Instead, each writer was **moved by** (literally “borne along by” or “led by”) the Holy Spirit. But the writers of Scripture were not robots whose minds and hands were controlled by God. God created man with an intellect and a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. The Lord does not ignore how He designed mankind when He desires to speak through someone.

It is important to note that the Scripture writers certainly did NOT participate in any sort of “automatic” writing that was somehow magical. ***That kind of activity is NOT from the Holy Spirit!*** One should beware of any claims that such activity is from God.

Furthermore, according to II Timothy 3:16, the inspiration applies only to the writing, not the writers. ***It is the Bible that is inspired, not the writers.***

So if we combine II Timothy 3:16 and II Peter 1:20-21, we find that the Bible is **inspired** in the following way: **“Spirit-moved” men wrote “God-breathed” words.** Any of these “words of God” are divinely authoritative for developing a Christian faith and a Christian lifestyle.

TRUTH:GIVING IT. RECORDING IT. UNDERSTANDING IT

Two related and important concepts can help us more clearly understand what inspiration is, and what it is not. These two concepts are:

a) ***revelation*** and b) ***illumination***.

Revelation is that act of God through which He directly communicates truth **not known before** to the human mind – truth which could not have been known **in any other manner** except by revelation of God.

Illumination refers to **influence** and **help** given by the Holy Spirit, to all born-again believers, in order to help them **understand** the truths that have been revealed. **Inspiration** as defined by the Scriptures, does not deal with either of these activities.

How do Revelation, Inspiration and Illumination work together?

REVELATION: the **giving** of truth;

INSPIRATION: the **reception** and **recording** of that truth;

ILLUMINATION: the resulting **understanding** of the revealed, inspired truth.

Revelation of truth, as defined in the Scriptures, can be given only **by God to mankind**. It is a divine communication **from God to** man.

Inspiration is the means, or way, in which people chosen by God have **received** this divine communication and then **recorded** it so that others might be exposed to it.

Illumination of the mind and heart of man must then occur, so that man will **understand** what is being revealed by God. This illumination is given by the “*Spirit of truth*” (John 14:17) Who has been sent by God to “*teach us all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I [Jesus] said to you*” (John 14:26).

NEW REVELATIONS?

Are people getting “inspired” today?

It is true that we use words like “inspired” and “inspiration” to describe anything from a moving piece of music to a beautiful painting – or even a great athletic accomplishment. The music, painting, or other human endeavor may be secular or sacred, but unfortunately we use the same word.

But it is very important to understand that *NO human endeavor - including great sermons or wonderful Christian books - is “inspired” the way Scripture is.*

Furthermore, **no one** is receiving new revelation from God of heretofore unknown truth. ***The fullness of all God has to reveal to men about life and salvation through His Son is accomplished – it is FINISHED!*** There is no “new” revelation from God. (See Colossians 1:25-27; Galatians 4:3-5; II Timothy 1:8-10; Hebrews 1:1-3).

If people today claim to have a new revelation from God, it means one of two things: a) they have received **illumination** (a fresh understanding of an already revealed truth), or b) they have been **deceived** by a spirit other than God’s Holy Spirit.

We should not be quick to condemn or accuse others, but we must carefully *“test (discern) the spirits because many false prophets have gone out into the world”* (I John 4:1-3). Jesus Himself warned us that there would come many false prophets trying to lead astray the people of God (Matt 24:23-26).

A SOLEMN WARNING

We as leaders must be extremely careful in what we say – because every bit of counsel, every teaching and every sermon **must agree with the whole of Scripture**. We are not allowed to preach our own opinions and tell others that God says the same. Our preaching and teaching must be fully supported by the Word of God.

If we want to be anointed and used of God, **all that we do and say must clearly and correctly represent His Word** and be found throughout Scripture.

We are not given the freedom in Scripture to add or subtract from God’s word, under threat of judgment from God. Moses, speaking for God, tells the Israelites: *“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you”* (Deut 4:2).

Solomon wisely states, *“Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar”* (Prov 30:36).

And in the last book of the Bible, in the last chapter, in the final few verses, we are given a final, solemn warning: “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **if any one adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues** that are written in this book; **and if any one**

takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy City, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev 22:18-19).

Though this passage refers directly to the Book of Revelation, it is clear from this passage and others in Scripture that **God’s Word is sacred and must not be altered**. The “canon” of the Bible is complete and **CLOSED** with the 66 books of the holy Scriptures. Not one “jot” or “tittle” can be changed. For an excellent example of God’s judgment upon “taking away” from God’s Word, see Jeremiah 36:20-32.

And just as with adding to or subtracting from God’s holy Word, **if we “twist” Scripture to serve our own selfish desires, we will be risking God’s judgment and our own destruction** (II Peter 3:16-17).

As God has protected His holy Word in ages past, so He will guard it today!

BREATH OF LIFE

Scripture is inspired by God: This is one of the most important statements about the Bible. It means that **Scripture is the result of God’s own creative breath**.

The Bible is not words and ideas manipulated by man to try and tell the world about God. **God Himself, through the Holy Spirit, was the Author and Designer of the Scriptures** from beginning to end. He directly “breathed-out” its formation, to tell us about Himself and His plan for mankind.

As we have shown, this does not mean that the writers were “breathed INTO by God”; it means that the Bible was **breathed OUT by God**. The Word was produced by the creative breath of God.

Just as God breathed into Adam the “*breath of life*” (Gen 2:7), so He breathed into the Bible **the breath of His life-giving Spirit** (see John 6:63).

Therefore, because the Bible is God’s own “breath” or “utterance”, it is properly called “the Word of God”.

God’s Word to us is a precious life-giving source (John 6:63), and is living and powerful (ref.). We must treat the Word of God with a holy fear and respect, even as we seek to dig deeply into the depths of the truth it contains through diligent and careful study.

THE BIBLE: CAN WE TRUST IT? The Bible: THE DOCTRINE OF INERRANCY

In the previous section we discussed the foundational truth that God “breathed out” – inspired – the Holy Scriptures. Because the Bible comes from God – and is **not** the invention, opinions or ideas of men – we can therefore trust in its contents absolutely. Upon this premise we can study the Doctrine of Inerrancy.

TRUSTWORTHY AND ERROR-FREE

What does “**Inerrancy**” mean?

Inerrancy means this: In the original copies of each manuscript made by the Bible’s writers (those who received the “breathed-out” word from God) **there are no mistakes or errors.**

Some people use the word **infallible** instead of **inerrant**. **Infallible** means that the Bible is **completely trustworthy** regarding its fundamental message concerning salvation and man’s relationship to God. **Inerrant** means that the Bible is **free from error.**

WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS BOTH **INERRANT** (WITHOUT ERRORS) AND **INFALLIBLE** (TRUSTWORTHY).

To understand this better, we need to ask three questions concerning a statement of Scripture:

1) ***Is the writer reporting it as a TRUE statement – or only accurately recording a lie?***

For instance, we may truthfully and accurately record a statement that is not true. In Genesis, Moses accurately recorded Satan’s lie to Eve about eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: Satan said, “*You surely shall not die!*” (Gen 3:4); yet God had already said that such an act of disobedience was punishable by death (Gen. 3:3).

Inerrancy in this case is the **accurate and truthful reporting** of the deception Satan used on Eve.

2) *Is the writer speaking in literal scientific language – or using a popular figure of speech?*

Some might say that the biblical writers who spoke of “*the four corners of the earth*” (Isa 11:12) had a poor sense of geography; or that the phrase “*windows of heaven*” (Gen 7:11) reflected an inaccurate and fanciful view of the universe. However, when the language is understood in a symbolic or **figurative** sense – as it was intended – no confusion arises.

We often speak of the sun’s “rising” and “setting.” Scientifically, this is not **literally** true – since the earth moves, not the sun. But it is **figuratively** true – since the sun, as seen from earth, **appears** to rise and set. We do not charge our news agencies with error when they report the times for “sunrise” and “sunset”!

3) *Is the author speaking in approximate numbers – or does he mean to give an EXACT count?*

If there is a reasonable number given, there is no untruth involved. Our own daily speech is full of such numerical approximations. This is especially common when the exact number is not necessary to the main purpose of the account.

When dealing with the issue of inerrancy, it is important to keep in mind the writer’s **intended meaning, his reason for relating the information, and his use** of the language expressing Scriptural truth.

EVIDENCE OF INERRANCY FROM INSIDE THE BIBLE

Where does the Doctrine of Inerrancy come from? The answer is – the Scriptures themselves! Let’s look at what the Bible says regarding its own accuracy.

1. **The Testimony of the Scriptures**

a. The Old Testament. In the Old Testament we encounter the phrase “*thus saith the Lord*” and others like it over 3,800 times! The Old Testament writers were absolutely convinced they were speaking the Word of God! The Psalmist declares that the “*Law of the Lord is perfect ... the testimony of the Lord is sure*”. **This is a direct reference to the absolute trustworthiness of the Scripture.** And again, “*The entirety of Thy Word is*

truth” (Ps. 119:160), “All His precepts are true” (Ps. 111:7). The writer of Proverbs similarly states, “Every word of God is tested” (Prov. 30:5).

King David declares, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (II Sam. 23:2). Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the other prophets all record similar statements.

b. The New Testament. The writers of the New Testament also testify to the fact that God was speaking to them. Both the Gospels and the Epistles contain many instances of Scripture validating its own trustworthiness (See Luke 1:70, Hebrews 4:12, Romans 7:12, James 4:5).

When we take all of these statements from Scripture together in light of the Bible’s teaching on the Doctrine of Inspiration, **we must** conclude that the BIBLE TEACHES ITS OWN INERRANCY. Such a conclusion is in complete agreement with the claims of the writers of Scripture to be speaking and writing God’s Word.

But one of the greatest testimonies to the inerrancy of Scripture is next.

2. The Testimony of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, as God the Son, bore witness to the **fully divine authority and trustworthiness** of the Scriptures. *He specifically confirmed the Old Testament as a whole when He said, “These are the words I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me”* (Lk 24:44). In His confrontation with the Pharisees, He also declared that “*Scripture cannot be broken*” (John 10:35). His teaching was based on **the truthfulness and reliability of Scripture**. He declares that, “*For assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot [the smallest letter in Hebrew] or one tittle [the smallest stroke in a Hebrew letter] will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled*” (Matt 5:18).

Specifically, Jesus referred to many Old Testament historical events and persons. By referring to these in His teachings, Jesus puts His stamp of approval upon them, affirming that they are **completely trustworthy**. The following is a list of these references from the Gospel accounts:

- Creation and marriage – Matthew 19:5
- The Flood and Noah’s ark – Luke 17:26, 27

- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah – Luke 17:28,29
- The destruction of Tyre and Sidon – Matthew 11:21,22
- Circumcision – John 7:22
- The Passover – Matthew 26:2
- The Law – John 7:19
- The Commandments – Matthew 19:7-9
- The Jewish law of divorce – Matthew 19:7-9
- The fact of the burning bush – Mark 12:26
- The type of Jonah and the great fish – Matthew 12:40
- The repentance of Ninevah – Matthew 12:41
- The glory of Solomon – Matthew 6:29
- The wisdom of Solomon – Matthew 12:42
- The Feast of Tabernacles – John 7
- David eating the shewbread – Matthew 12:3
- The priests profaning the Sabbath – Matthew 12:5
- The heavens shut up in Elijah's day – Luke 4:25
- The story of Naaman the leper – Luke 4:27
- The record of the brazen serpent – John 3:14,15
- The murder of Abel and Zacharias – Matthew 23:35
- The mission of Messiah – Luke 4:16-21
- The mission of John the Baptist – Matthew 17:10-13
- The mission of Elijah – Matthew 17:10-13
- Daniel and his great prophecy – Matthew 24:15

3. The Testimony of Prophecy.

The fact of **fulfilled prophecy** in Scripture is a powerful testimony to the Bible's inerrancy. **No unconditional prophecy given in Scripture about events** – even events up to the present day – **has gone unfulfilled!** Many of these **predictive prophecies** were given hundreds – even **thousands** – of years in advance!

Some Bible scholars have concluded that a total of 333 prophecies concerning the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ have been fulfilled. The probability of that many predictions concerning a single individual coming true by chance is calculated at **1 out of 83 billion!** The chance of one person fulfilling only **eight** prophecies relating to God is incredibly slim. This would be like covering the entire country of Zimbabwe two feet deep with coins, then telling a blind-folded person to pick up a specially marked coin on his very first try. Imagine the phenomenal miracle of Jesus' life, death and resurrection fulfilling over 300 prophecies. Truly, the Bible is Authored by God alone, Who knows the end from the beginning (Revelation 1:17-18).

Most prophecies concerning Christ were given hundreds of years (some over a thousand) before His birth — and yet ALL were fulfilled! Other prophecies — such as the education and communication explosion (Daniel 12:4), and the restoration of Israel as a nation (Is 61:4) — are being fulfilled in our times.

There are some other religious writings that claim divine authorship, but **none** contain predictive prophecies. Clearly, the prophecies contained in God's Holy Word are not of human authorship. **Only the God who knows the future and directs the course of human events can give — and then ensure fulfillment of — such specific prophecies.**

EVIDENCE OF INERRANCY FROM OUTSIDE THE BIBLE

Because the Bible contains much historical data, its accuracy can be verified. There are two types of evidence that can be used to verify the Bible's accuracy:

1. a) The evidence of archeology; and
2. b) The evidence of ancient written documents.

EVIDENCE FROM ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

It is important to note that ***no archaeological finding has ever proved a Bible reference wrong.*** In fact, ***well over 25,000*** sites have been located and documented that ***confirm the accuracy and trustworthiness of the Scriptural accounts*** of events, people groups, chronologies, etc.

Archaeological research continues today; many archeologists actually use texts from the Bible to help locate historical sites!

EVIDENCE FROM ANCIENT DOCUMENTS

Several decades ago, a young shepherd boy discovered several large urns filled with ancient documents. These documents became known as the **Dead Sea Scrolls**. Among them were several manuscripts of both the Old and New Testaments. They were in excellent condition. And when they were compared with the *thousands* of already existing manuscripts, ***no important differences were found!*** What made this discovery so significant was the fact that the manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls were ***1000 years older*** than any other complete manuscripts for both the Old and New Testament already in possession.

Simply put, **there is more ancient written evidence for the Bible than for any other secular classic.** The Bible is the best documented book from ancient times. It can be easily said that the Bible is the most completely trustworthy and reliable of any book or writings from antiquity. **The Bible has remained *unchanged and dependably accurate* for thousands of years!**

TRUTH WITHOUT ERROR

These evidences from archaeology and ancient documents give indirect yet substantial verification of the Scripture's claim for Divine inspiration. Certainly, the confirmation of the Bible's accuracy in these **factual** matters lends credibility to its claims regarding **spiritual** matters.

Regarding the doctrine of inerrancy and biblical trustworthiness, it must be remembered **Who** we are dealing with when it comes to a discussion of truth. ***Whatever God speaks is the truth without error.*** This is true because He is preeminently *"the God of truth"* (Is. 65:16) Who *"cannot lie"* (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Therefore, since God is true (John 3:3, 17:3), His Word is also truth (John 17:17) and a **completely trustworthy guide** for our **faith** (belief in God) and **practice** (life and behavior).

C. THE BIBLE: HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND IT? THE LAWS OF INTERPRETATION

HIGHEST PRIORITY

So far in Chapter 2, we have discussed and established the following points:

1) **All** Scripture has been given to us by God Himself (**God-breathed**) and is not the invention or opinion of men . . .

Therefore . . .

2) The Word of God, the Bible, is **free from error**, in whole and in part (**inerrant**) and is conclusively and **totally trustworthy** for all that we need to know for salvation and the Christian life (**infallible**).

Since these two foundational principles are true, we must approach the Bible – and its application in our ministries and our personal lives – with a proper perspective.

God has made great effort to give us His Word over the centuries. And certainly He has given it to us for a particular purpose that is very important to Him and for us. Therefore, the **study**, the **proper understanding**, and **correct application** of His Word to our lives and those to whom we minister must be of highest priority to us.

MAKE THE EFFORT!

Imagine if you had an important letter from someone you loved very much, and it was sent to you at great pain and sacrifice. Even if that letter was written in another language, you would make great effort to understand what was written in it, wouldn't you?

How much **greater** effort should you make, then, to understand the Bible – the very Word of God, with all its life-giving truth for your life!

Unfortunately, many people interpret the Bible in many different ways. This has caused phenomenal heartache and confusion to thousands of people. ***We must not interpret Scripture just to suit our own opinions or ideas!***

KEEP TO THE ROAD

Scripture commands that we as leaders in the Body of Christ must “*be diligent to present [ourselves] approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (II Tim. 2:15). The phrase “*rightly*

dividing” is used for the Greek word **orthotornounta**, which literally means “cutting straight”. This word was used to describe a furrow being plowed in a field, or a road that was being built.

Paul’s idea in this passage is that a truly dedicated “*worker*” (from the Greek word **ergon** – “toil”, “effort”) must be accurate and clear in his presentation of God’s Word to God’s people. **God’s leader must keep to the “road” of living according to God’s Word, and help others do the same through his teaching and example.** To “*divide*” the Word does not mean to cut it into pieces. It means to discern the truths and principles he finds there, apply them in his own life, and then give it faithfully to others.

STUDY... AND APPLY!

- But how can we be sure we are “*rightly*” interpreting Scripture?
- How can we avoid the misinterpretations of Scripture that have led to heresies and cults?
- How can we truly understand the Scripture, apply it to our lives, and teach others to do the same?

In this section we will discuss how to **Interpret the Bible**. This is known as **hermeneutics** – the **science of interpretation**.

Studying the various doctrines about the Word of God has only a **little** value – **unless** this study leads us to **practically applying** the truths of Scripture to our daily lives. Then we can begin to experience the awesome power and anointing that saturates God’s Word!

In order for us to **properly** understand and apply the Word of God to our lives, we must focus on three important essentials:

1. We must **approach the Scripture for what it is** – the Word of Almighty God that speaks authoritatively and sufficiently to **all** of life.
2. We must **develop a Biblical style of hearing** – which means to **heed** and **obey**.
3. We must **establish practical principles** by which we can carefully interpret the Scriptures.

Let us now look at these points in more detail.

RESPECTING GOD'S WORD

1. The *Authority* of the Bible.

All of us look to some final authority when we make decisions about how we will live. That final “authority” we feel we must please may be personal feelings, the opinions of others, or even our own experiences. But we all yield to someone or something as an authoritative source telling us how to conduct our lives.

God knows that we need objective, clear and relatively easy-to-understand guidelines and truths to help us know how to live on earth. **Because we are finite** (limited in intelligence, power, lifespan), **we humans cannot be the source of ultimate truth**. Our wisdom is insufficient; our scientific learning and technological achievements have only gotten us into more trouble. Our fleshly desires lead us into conflict and often get in the way of making right decisions.

Therefore, God has given us His Word – the Bible – which is the final and ultimate authority over all people of all times. It is the final Law and the only absolute truth that we can properly live by.

Over and over again the Lord of the universe speaks to us through His Word, giving us His **objective revelation** as to *Who God is* and *what His will is for us*. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, the Scriptures make claim to that place of authority as the revealed and inspired Word of God. (For further study see Isaiah 1:2, 8:20; Jeremiah 11:3; Ps. 119:120; Matthew 5:17-20; II Peter 3:2).

Jesus Himself accepted the full authority of the Scriptures. He quoted them frequently throughout His ministry – which shows He had a great respect for the Scriptures as **the authoritative voice of His heavenly Father**. This also meant He was very familiar with the Word of God! Our Savior also guided *His life in obedience to the Word of God*, thereby living a life pleasing to God.

Our own Christian walk **must be filled** with a similar acknowledgement of, and respect for, the absolute authority of the Scriptures. The Bible is the **only** set of unchanging truths that can teach us how to know God and live for Him.

This recognition of the divine source of Scripture with all of its authority is vitally important. For through it we will grow in that **healthy, awesome**

respect which the Scriptures call the “*fear of the Lord*”. Such “*fear*” is the “*beginning of wisdom*” (Psalms 111:10) and is a “*fountain of life*” (Prov. 14:27). **Truly, there can be no fear of the Lord which does not include a profound respect for and obedience to His Word.** God’s Word is the “lamp unto our feet and the light unto our path” (ref.) that shows us how to walk in this life.

2. The *Sufficiency* of the Bible

The Bible does not contain **all** knowledge in the universe. But it **does** contain **everything humans need to know** regarding salvation, life and godliness.

Paul tells Timothy that Scripture is not only inspired by God, but is also “**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**” (II Tim 3:16-17).

Specifically, the Scriptures contain all we need to know to come to Christ in salvation and to live a fruitful and effective Christian life. The Scriptures reveal the Creator God of the universe, His desire to know us, and His will for every living person. Within the Scriptures, we can find time-proven and divinely- authored answers to every human question, and provision for every human need.

Search the Scriptures! For it is in them that you will discover truth, life, hope, freedom and joy! When we look deeply into God’s holy Word, we will discover **a mirror reflecting the state of our own soul** (James 1:23-25). But we will also see **the resurrected Savior** Who shed His blood on Calvary for you and me! And if you look closely you will see the eyes of **your heavenly Father** looking back at you. For He is watching over you with tender love and infinite care for your every need, and reveals His great love for you through His Word.

Truly, the Bible is an amazing Book worthy of a respectful approach. But **we do not worship the Bible** – we worship THE Word of God, Jesus, Who gave it to us, and our Father God, Who gave us Jesus Christ!

HEARING GOD’S WORD

Hearing something may seem like an easy thing to do. But how many times do we hear something ***without really listening*** to what we are hearing?

Sometimes we treat our children that way. Even our spouses! Shamefully, we may treat God and His Word the same way.

My wife and I have served in large and small churches in a variety of pastoral roles for the past 24 years and now are serving World MAP. Many times I would observe people not really *listening* to the Word when it was read, or used in counseling. They would hear words being spoken, but were not letting the Truth bring conviction or change in their hearts.

When they ignored God's Word, they did so to their own destruction.

We found that it was often people who were very familiar with the things of God and the truths of Scripture that had the most resistant hearts. As a young pastor long ago, I was tempted to be condemning towards these “lukewarm” Christians. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit dealt with me and showed me where I, too, was not really heeding the voice of God in an area of my life. Then a great insight took hold of me:

What if the people of my flock were “hard of hearing” because I was also?!
When this realization came through to me, I repented immediately and things began to change.

We as leaders can be the most easily deceived into thinking that being **familiar** with the Scriptures and being able to teach them is enough. We may become very excited about the illumination the Holy Spirit gives us, and teach the Truth with great zeal. But if the Truth does not change our own hearts and behavior, we have missed the most important lesson of all. Sometimes leaders are the ones who need a “hearing check-up”!

Jesus said, ***“Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you, and to you who hear more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him”*** (Mark 4:24-25).

Jesus is revealing a principle of spiritual growth. When we hear (take heed, receive) the Word and put it into practice (obey), our capacity for more knowledge and understanding will increase. **Those who are hardened in their hearts and indifferent to the Word will eventually stop growing spiritually and lose whatever capability for spiritual understanding they once had.**

“Hearing” the Word of God in the biblical sense means that we **heed** His Word, **attend** to it, **learn** it and **put it into practice**. As Paul told Timothy: *“give attention to reading [the Scriptures] ... to doctrine. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. **Continue in them**, for in so doing you will save both yourself and those who hear you”* (I Tim 4:13, 15-16). Hearing the Word also means that we **obey its principles** by **putting them into practice**. We especially need to live according to the Word in our relationships with others. The Word will teach us the ways to related as:

- people to God
- husband and wife
- children to parents
- the pastor and his church
- citizens and rulers
- even our actions and attitudes towards those who hate and persecute us.

We are truly **hearing** God when His words are more important to us than our happiness, comfort, and personal desires. And we can **obey joyfully** because we can trust the one Who wrote it; for He knows far better than we do the path to true joy.

INTERPRETING GOD’S WORD

Many people feel that the Bible is too difficult to understand. Many times in history, the church leadership denied people access to the Bible because they thought it would confuse them. Thus, the interpretation of the Scriptures was reserved for only the very educated theologians of the church.

But God has **never** intended His Word for only a select few! He wants **every** person to **know** and **understand** the Scriptures.

Being able to understand the original languages the Bible was written in, as well as having a knowledge of the culture of biblical times, is helpful. **But neither are essential, because the basic truths of salvation and our walk with our Lord and Savior can be understood by all.** And this is support by the Scriptures themselves.

For instance, Scripture tells us that the people themselves had the responsibility to judge prophetic utterances (I Cor. 14:29). And this they were to do on the basis of the truth they had received (Deut. 13:1-5; Gal 1:89; Acts 17:10-12). God's Word was given to **all** peoples of **all** times.

Therefore, in this section we will look at *ten key principles for studying and interpreting* the holy Scriptures.

1. **Study your Bible *thematically*.**

Choose a topic or a word in the Bible and look up every reference you can find using that word or idea. For instance, the word "redeem" is used many times in Scripture. If you have a concordance (or a copy of The Shepherd's Staff) look up the Scriptures that use the words "redeem," "redemption," "redeemer," etc. Seeing the many times and places a word is used in the Bible will give you a larger understanding of a biblical theme or word.

2. **Let Scripture Interpret Scripture.**

Individual passages of Scripture do not exist in isolation from other passages of Scriptures; they are part of **the whole revelation** of God. Therefore, **each passage of Scripture must be interpreted in relation to the truth of the whole Bible**. Though the Bible was written over many centuries, it is still a **unified, harmonious book**. This is because it was authored by only One Author – the Holy Spirit of truth.

For instance, the "*mark of the beast*" mentioned in Revelation 13:16-18 is subject to a great deal of speculation as to what it might be. Some think it will be a computer chip placed in our hand or forehead. Others describe it as a tattoo.

But when we look at the whole of Scripture, we see that when "forehead" is mentioned, it often represents our will and our thinking. "Hand" in the Bible often represents our work or activities. To receive the "*mark*" is not something that can happen accidentally, or because we are ignorant of it. To receive the "mark" we would have to worship the beast (Rev. 13:15) by a willful choice made in our minds and shown in our actions. The choice will be clear enough that everyone will see it for what it is.

The "*mark of the beast*" is more than a technological device. It will involve the loyalty and allegiance that we give to the Antichrist, or instead reserve only for

God. We do not know exactly what the “*mark*” will be – but the whole of Scripture helps us see that believers will be not taken by surprise.

3. Look at the *surrounding verses*.

When studying a particular verse of Scripture, it is very important to look at the verses just before it and just after it. This often helps answer such questions as:

- Who is being spoken to?
- What larger issues or situations are being addressed?
- Is this verse more clearly explained by the other verses around it?

It is dangerous to pull a verse, or a phrase from a verse, away from where the Holy Spirit put it and apply it to another situation. This can lead to a serious misinterpretation of the verse being studied.

There is a funny story about a young person looking for a “word from God.” He sat down with his Bible and began to flip the pages. When he stopped flipping pages, he put his finger on the page and read whatever his finger happened to be pointing to. The first time, he read “*Judas departed and went out and hanged himself*” (Matt 27:5).

The young man was startled by this “word,” so he tried it again. This time his finger landed on “*Go, and do thou likewise*” (Luke 10:37)!

The young man was now frightened, and thought he would try it just once more. So he flipped many pages (but not in Matthew or Luke!). And when he stopped, his finger pointed to John 13:27 which said: “*whatever that thou doest, do quickly.*”

The young man threw down his Bible and ran out of his room screaming.

We can laugh at this silly story, but there is a serious point here. Satan is a religious spirit and has had thousands of years of exposure to both the Scriptures and human nature. ***Satan knows how to twist Scripture***, and wants to play upon our human ignorance and selfish desires. He tried it with Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1-6) and succeeded in bringing about the Fall of mankind. He also tried it with Jesus (Matt 4:1-11) – and fortunately he was defeated!

We need to know our Bible! We need to use it correctly, and not mix or match verses to suit our own desires.

4. Look for *repetition* in Scripture.

When God says the same thing over and over, it means that it is very important and worthy of our attention. Most often the *infrequently mentioned* in Scripture should yield to, or be interpreted by, the *most frequently mentioned*.

For instance, in the passage in I Corinthians 15:29 Paul states: Paul states, “Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then were they baptized for the dead?”

What could Paul have meant?!

This is the only place in the whole Bible where baptism for the dead is mentioned. There are a variety of interpretations that could be discussed, but we do not have the space to do so here.

Let it suffice to say that **we should not take a single isolated Scripture with an uncertain meaning and build an entire doctrine out of it.** Paul’s discussion in I Corinthians 15 is about the validity of the physical resurrection of the dead – not about an unclear baptismal ritual. Many scriptures give us a clear sense of direction about the Believers’ baptism in water (see Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:35-38; Romans 6:3-6; etc.). These scriptures, plus others, provide a solid basis for a born-again person to be baptized.

5. Look for *clarity* in Scripture.

Sometimes we encounter a passage of Scripture that is difficult to understand. For example, justification by faith is a clearly repeated theme in Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. However, when you read James 2:14-26, it may *seem* that James is telling us we are not justified by faith alone, but need “works” also in order to be justified.

James, however, is not setting works against faith; rather, he is showing us **two kinds of faith**. One kind is a **dead faith** that is merely an empty claim or acceptance of a creed (even the devils “believe” — James 1:19)! The other kind is a **saving faith** that produces an **obedient** life out of love for the Savior.

Our “works” show the genuineness of what we profess to believe; they are the **fruit of our faith** (see James 2:17,19,26; John 15:1-8,16; Romans 6). Scripture emphasizes over and over that true faith is **not** religious deeds done in order to earn salvation without a born-again heart. **But true faith results in good deeds** to the glory of God the Father (Matt 5:16).

6. Use a literal interpretation.

God did not inspire the writers of the Bible to write in some cryptic mysterious language. Nor are the events recorded in Scripture just stories that have some deeper, mysterious meaning. Rather, the Doctrine of Inspiration teaches us that God used **natural human language** to communicate His **supernatural** truth, and that we have an accurate historical record of real events that actually occurred.

a) Concerning Language. The goal of interpretation is the “plain meaning” understood by the original recipients of the teaching, prophecy, etc. We should interpret a passage in harmony with its meaning in the time of the author. This means we must pay close attention to **the meanings of words** and **how the words are used**. Ordinary language uses words in a variety of ways. This is also true in the Bible. We must sometimes differentiate between a **literal** or a **figurative** use of language. This was discussed under “The Doctrine of Inerrancy.”

b) Concerning Historical Events. Likewise, the historical events recorded in Scripture were also actual events that occurred. These events took place in our world, experienced by real people living at that time.

In seeking a literal interpretation of Scripture, we must not leave out the **supernatural!**

Just because the Bible records events that have not occurred in recent human experience does not mean they are not true. The great worldwide Flood of Noah’s time, the confusion of languages at Babel, the plagues on Egypt at the time of Exodus, the virgin birth of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead – all these are miracles that the Bible records with truth and accuracy!

If God is Who He says He is, then any or all of the miraculous events of the Bible are not beyond His ability to bring to reality, for *“Is anything too difficult for the Lord?”* (Gen 18:14).

7. Biblical “Types” and “shadows” should remain consistent.

A “type” or “shadow” is a person, object or event that is prophetically symbolic of someone or something yet to come. This biblical “foreshadowing” is similar to, or has characteristics of that person or event.

For instance, the Passover lamb of Exodus 11 and 12 is a “type” or foreshadowing of Christ. The redemptive and protective role of the blood of that Passover lamb **prophetically displays** the redemptive role Christ would fulfill when He died for the sins of the world. The Old Testament **type** – Passover lamb – **foreshadows** the New Testament **fulfillment** – Christ, the Lamb of God.

Another example is the Old Testament laws of God, which are described in Hebrews 10:1 as only *“having a **shadow** of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.”*

Because of what Christ has done, there is no more need for continual animal sacrifices for sin. What Christ has done is the “once for all” sacrifice for sin and is sufficient for the salvation of all people everywhere for all times who receive Him (John 3:16; Heb 9:11-12, 23-28, 10:10; 1 Pet 3:18).

These Old Testament types are not complete in and of themselves. God purposely intended it to be this way, for these types only **foreshadow** what was to be **completely fulfilled** in the New Covenant established by Christ. It is important for us to not try to interpret every tiny detail of the “type”, but keep to a more general interpretation. Remember also that types should be used only to **illustrate** a doctrine – not invent one!

8. Is an Old Testament type given new meaning in the New Testament?

God’s dealings with His people changed throughout history as His plans for mankind unfolded. The Mosaic Law with its many regulations was given to Israel **to prepare them for God’s Son to come**. Galatians 3:24-25 says, *“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor”* (see also Romans 7:6). It would be wrong to insist that the **specific regulations** designed for the good of **Israel at a particular time in history** be imposed upon Christians today.

An example of this would be the dietary laws of Israel. They may actually be beneficial to a person's health, but to insist that they are God's law for all time would be a serious misinterpretation. Paul states in Colossians 2:20-23 that the regulations about what we eat cannot save us, and that **only justification by faith in Christ is sufficient for salvation**. (Also see Acts 10:9-16; 1 Cor 8:8, 10:3.)

Another example is the set of Mosaic laws regarding the necessity of regular animal sacrifices in order for forgiveness to be given by God. In the book of Hebrews, chapters 9 and 10, we are shown **the absolute supremacy of Christ's sacrifice** over the *"blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer... how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the Living God?"* (Heb. 9:13-14)

It is very important to understand that God in history was **progressively revealing** His plan of salvation. The ultimate result of this predetermined plan of God was the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son.

This does not mean that the eternal principles of the Old Testament are done away with. Rather, these principles of the Old Testament have been **built upon**, to lead us to God's most important revelation – His Son Jesus Christ. The Old Testament "type" of the **repeated** sacrifice of lambs is given new meaning in the **once-for-all** sacrifice of the Lamb of God – Jesus Christ. Let us rejoice in all the Biblical record preserved for us, for "all these things happened to them as examples and they were written for our instruction." (See I Cor. 10:1-11)

9. Understand the *cultural and historical* context.

It is helpful to have some knowledge of the various customs of biblical times and their relation to spiritual truth. Such knowledge can help us sort out a **temporary cultural expression** from the **eternal truth** that God is speaking to us.

An excellent example of this is when Paul requires women in the Corinthian church to wear veils. His statements occur in I Corinthians 11. In the Corinthian culture, a woman who appeared bareheaded in public was considered to be immoral. Uncovered hair or a shaved head could symbolize an immoral or unclean condition (Num 5:18; Lev 14:8-9) in the Jewish culture.

However, the **essence** of Paul's statements does not concern a **temporary cultural expression** like a veil or head-covering. Rather, it concerns a women's **inner submissive attitude**, especially to her husband.

Understanding the **cultural and historical setting** of a Scripture passage – i.e., **to whom** was it written, and **when** – can help us avoid confusion. However, our goal in studying the Bible is not **just** to gain a knowledge of the cultural and historical background. Our greatest priority should be to discover **what God is saying** through a particular text. For this to take place, we must be constantly seeking the guidance and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit.

10. **Prioritize the Bible's Purpose**

It is essential to remember that the Bible is **not** primarily a record of the history of Israel and the early church. The Bible is first and foremost a **witness to divine revelation**, a witness that points beyond itself to a supernatural reality. This means that the eyes of our understanding must be opened by God's grace through the Holy Spirit.

It is very difficult to find something if you don't know what you are looking for! This is especially true when studying the Bible. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to **keep in mind the main purpose of the Bible**.

Simply put, the main purpose of God's Word is to **teach** us. That means that the **"teaching" portions of the Scriptures** (the Law, the prophets, Psalms, Proverbs, the New Testament) **should be the primary focus of our studies**.

Can we learn a great deal from the historic books? Of course! And we should study them as well. The historic books are indeed inspired, and they accurately report historic events. But the historic books, by themselves, are not the foundation upon which to build doctrine. **Rather, the historic events recorded in the Scriptures should confirm and illustrate the doctrines in the teaching portions of Scripture.**

We find an excellent example of this in God's covenant promises of blessing and cursing, as recorded in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. God promises to bless the Israelites abundantly, **overwhelmingly if they will obey His laws and statutes**. But He also promises to **judge** them if they **disobey** and are disloyal to God!

If we keep in mind these two teaching chapters from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, we can read Kings and Chronicles – and the prophetic books as well – with a much deeper understanding. (See I Kings 9:1-9; II Chronicles as:1-2; Daniel 9:1-19, as just a few examples.)

The Bible is **not** a random collection of various stories, teachings, events and sayings. It is a **unified whole** dealing with **one problem** – man’s sin and separation from God; and offering **one solution** – salvation through Christ and restoration of relationship to God!

We hope that, having read this chapter, you have received a greater insight into the **trustworthiness of Scripture**. We hope you have gained not only a deeper appreciation for God’s Word – but also a growing skill in “*rightly dividing the Word of Truth*”. We hope that you will appreciate the tremendous power and blessing contained in the Living Word of God! And we hope that you will teach others the same.

THE BIBLE GOD'S HOLY WORD

READING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT IS WORTH

TO GIVE US HIMSELF

People read the Bible for a variety of reasons. Some read it looking for information about God or about themselves. People will read it looking for facts about history or about how to live successfully. They can find all these things in the Bible, but this is **not** the primary reason why God gave us His Word.

When we read the Bible as God intended, we will not see just words on a page. We **will** see the great and almighty God stooping low to look us in the eye or whisper in our ear.

God’s chief purpose in giving us the Bible was not to give us information – but to give us *Himself!*

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION

Unfortunately, many Christians ignore, or take lightly, this incredible eternal revelation called “The Bible”. Too many leaders become so busy with the demands of ministry that they neglect this precious resource. Others are simply slothful or undisciplined.

Some believers, however, have never received **practical instruction** on how to read and study the Bible for all it’s worth. This chapter will focus on how to practically develop a **solid life-changing Bible-reading habit**.

WHY SHOULD WE READ THE BIBLE?

A. THE SCRIPTURES EXHORT US TO DO SO.

Joshua is told by God, *“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but **you shall meditate in it day and night**, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success”* (Joshua 1:8).

The Psalmist declared, *“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you”* (Ps 119:11).

The great prophet Isaiah exhorted us to *“Search from the book of the Lord and read”* (Is 34:16).

Paul tells Timothy, *“Till I come, **give attention to reading** [the Scriptures], to exhortation, to doctrine . . . Meditate on these things: give yourself entirely to them”* (I Tim 4:13,15).

And again Paul exhorts Timothy, *“**Study** to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (II Tim 2:15 KJV).

To the church at Colossae, Paul writes, *“**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom**”* (Col 3:16).

And Luke, in writing the book of Acts, commended the Berean Jews for being *“more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they **received the word** with all readiness, and **searched the Scriptures daily** to find out whether these things were so”* (Acts 17:11).

Since God is a God who desires to reveal Himself, He has not remained silent. From creation, all down through history, God has revealed Himself by speaking. **All** of God's great purposes and plans for mankind are revealed **only** in the written Word, "The Bible".

But there is a second great reason why we should study the Bible:

B. THE BIBLE IS A TREASURE-STORE OF WEALTH FOR OUR DAILY NEEDS

If we devote ourselves to a **consistent, daily study of God's Word**, we will reap a tremendous harvest. This harvest will be **multifold**. We will see it at a personal level, in our family, and then in the fruitfulness of the ministry God has entrusted to us.

Many benefits are guaranteed to be ours if only we will **keep on sowing the Word of God into our lives** (see Galatians 6:2-9). Listed below are just of the blessings the Word of God brings to our lives.

1. **The Word secures our salvation.** *"Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim 4:16).*
2. **It is a necessary part of spiritual growth.** *"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2).*
3. **It provides spiritual cleansing.** The Word of God has a washing effect that purifies our thoughts, emotions, attitudes, motives and desires (see Hebrews 4:12). Paul describes the Church being cleansed and sanctified by the **"washing of water by the Word"** (Eph 5:26). Jesus pointed to a personal cleansing when He said, *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).*
4. **The Word imparts spiritual freedom and liberty.** *"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).* This freedom breaks the yoke of emotional, mental and spiritual bondage.
5. **It establishes a warning safeguard against sin.** *"Your Word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11).*
6. **The Word works with the power of God to transform us.** *"As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that*

through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (II Pet 1:3-4).

7. **It is a building block of faith.** *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 10:17). God’s Word stimulates, promotes and strengthens our faith.*
8. **It gives wisdom and understanding.** *“The entrance of Your word gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Ps 119:130; also see Proverbs 6:23).*
9. **The Word instructs and exhorts us.** *“Now all these things [the events of the Old Testament] happened to them as **examples** and they were **written for our admonition**, upon whom the ends of ages have come. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall” (I Cor 10:11-12). We can learn from the example of others in the Word the blessing of obedience to God, or the consequences of selfish, sinful choices.*
10. **God’s Word strengthens and edifies us.** *“Strengthen me according to Your Word” (Ps 119:28). “And now, brethren, I commend you to God and the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up [edify]” (Acts 20:32).*
11. **It equips us.** *“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**” (II Tim 3:16-17). Do you ever feel you do not “have what it takes” to be effective for God? Then **fill** yourself with God’s Word, and let it help make you ready (equip you) for anything God would have you do.*
12. **It is an effectual weapon of spiritual warfare.** *“And take . . . the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the Word of God” (Eph 6:17; see also how Jesus battled Satan and his temptations in Matthew 4:1-11). The best way to battle against sin, temptation or demonic activity is with the **truth** found in the holy Scriptures and with the Name of Jesus.*
13. **It causes us to be approved.** *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim 2:15). The Greek word for “approved” is *dokimos*. It describes anything which has been **tested**, thus **purified**, and made **fit for service**.*
14. **The Word gives comfort in times of testing.** *“This is my comfort in my affliction, for your word has given me life” (Ps 119:50). Even when it is the Word of the Lord doing the testing, we can be comforted – for **it is God who is at work in us**. “Until the time that his [Joseph] word came to pass, the Word of the Lord tested him” (Ps 105:19).*

15. **It imparts the peace of God.** *“Great peace have those who love your law and nothing causes them to stumble”* (Ps 119:165). From God’s Word we gain assurance, security and confidence.
16. **The Word imparts hope and comfort.** *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Rom 15:4).
17. **It reveals divine guidance and direction.** *“Your word is a **lamp to my feet** and a **light to my path**”* (Ps 119:105). And, *“**direct my steps** by your word and let no iniquity have dominion over me”* (Ps 119:130). Scriptures give a clarity of understanding, a discernment for walking through life, an assurance of the paths of righteousness.
18. **The Word imparts practical answers to life’s challenges.** *“So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for **I trust in your word**”* (Ps 119:42; see also Luke 12:11,12; I Peter 3:15; John 14:26).
19. **It gives us assurance of physical healing.** *“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree . . . by whose stripes you were healed”* (I Peter 2:24). And, *“**He sent His Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions**”* (Ps 107:20).
20. **The Word imparts stability in our lives.** The parable of the man who built his house on the rock, as opposed to the man who built his house on the sand, clearly shows the stabilizing power of the Word (Luke 6:47-49; see also Psalms 1:1-3).

These are just a few of the many benefits that can be found in the “treasure-store” of God’s Word. These benefits are meant to be experienced in everyday life – and **will** be, if we surrender to the Lordship of Christ, know His Word, and obey His word as *doers*, not just hearers (James XXX).

Remember, God has given us His Word so that we can know Him. His Word is Truth, and should not be changed or added to. God’s Word is full of promises and benefits, and those will remain until they have accomplished **every purpose for which they were sent** (see Isaiah 55:10).

We can trust in the Word of God, because it is backed up with the almighty power and unmatched authority of God Himself. What He has said, He will do! (Ref...).

SOME PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDY

Being very familiar with the contents of the Bible is a worthwhile objective. However, our highest priority should be to systematically **study the Scriptures for the purpose of applying its power and truth to our everyday lives.**

In the following section is a checklist of helpful steps. If you review these steps closely, **and put them into action**, you will insure a rewarding and life-changing experience with the Word of God.

1. **Establish a consistent daily reading of God's Word.** Without this first and most basic step, you will never truly develop a healthy and profitable Bible reading pattern. As mentioned above, the Bereans wisely "*searched the Scriptures daily*" (Acts 17:11).

Scripture tells us that we should be "*redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" (Eph. 5:16). A daily feeding (reading) on God's Word is a very important part of redeeming each day, along with our personal worship and prayer time.

Being "too busy" to read God's Word is a trap laid by the devil, and is meant to starve us to death spiritually (or at least weaken us so much that we are more easily defeated by sin and temptation). All of us need to drink fluids and eat food daily to sustain our physical bodies. It is **no different** when it comes to reading God's Word – we need its nourishment to sustain us **spiritually!** In reading daily, set aside a specific time and place to read. It should be a place free from distractions like T.V. or radio. Pick out a specific and regular time of day. The morning is usually the best time, before distractions start and our mind gets cluttered with activities. Also read your Bible even when you don't feel like it. It's when we don't **want** to read the Bible that we most need to read.

2. **Pray for "illumination".** We need the anointing of the Holy Spirit to understand the Scriptures (I Cor. 2: 10-14). Pray, which is simply talking with God, **while** you read His Word. Invite the presence of the Holy Spirit to meet with you and be with you during your reading time.

God knows what a Scripture means, and He wants to help you understand it. We get into trouble and can have wrong interpretations if we use only our human reasoning. If something doesn't make sense to you, mark it in your Bible and ask God to give you illumination as to its meaning. You will discover over time that **He will answer your request.**

3. **Meditate upon what you read.** God commends the man whose *“delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law he meditates day and night”* (Ps 1:2). Take time to stop and reflect upon what you are reading.

The word “meditate” actually means to “chew the cud”. When cows chew a mouthful of grass, it is then swallowed. Their stomach is made in such a way that a cow will bring the grass back up, chew it some more and again swallow it. We should not hastily “gulp down” the eternal Word of God without allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal insights to us. We should think on what we have read throughout our day, and allow the Holy Spirit to bring it back to our minds over and over again.

4. **Make your study a “personal” one.** It is so tempting for us as leaders to study the Scriptures only for our next sermon or Bible teaching. God wants His Word to get deeply into our soul and spirit. He wants His Word to transform us from the inside out. **If the shepherd (you) is not feeding himself, he will never adequately feed his sheep (your church or Bible study group).** When we are personally convicted, touched and transformed by the Word, the anointing will truly flow through our sermons.
5. **Develop “comprehension aids”.** Keep a journal notebook of the insights and lessons God speaks to you through His Word, and write each one down. This not only helps reinforce what you have learned, but will be a rich resource for you to refer back to.

Make a “subject concordance” for Scriptures that you read. As you come across Scriptures relating to a particular subject (such as “fear”, “sexual temptation”, “greed”, “worship”), write them down in a notebook. You will soon fill pages with “golden nuggets” of God’s truths!

Don’t hesitate to mark special passages in your Bible. Underline meaningful words you are thematically studying. Make notes in the margin about insights God gives you about a particular passage. Your Bible is a precious **tool** – and it is a tool that God wants you to be familiar with through **using** it!

If you have The Shepherd’s Staff, a concordance, or a Bible handbook, use them to study the Bible. If the version of the Bible you read has study-helps, use them! These study aids can provide a wealth of insights that will enrich your study of God’s Word.

6. **Set realistic goals for your Bible reading.** Most of us would love to read through the New Testament every week, but that would be difficult to say the least! Sometimes we “sabotage” ourselves by trying to fulfill a goal that is set far too high. When we fail to reach that goal, we get discouraged.

The goal of reading a certain number of chapters every day is the wrong goal. Our goal should be to meet with God **in** and **through** His Word. We should desire a **quality** reading instead of a **quantity** reading. But do not develop the bad habit of skipping around in your reading. That will lead to an inconsistent and undisciplined style that will take away from a solid understanding of the Scriptures.

We should read a book of the Bible ***all the way through to the end*** before moving on to another book.

A balanced reading schedule might be to read at least a chapter from the Old Testament and a chapter from the New Testament every day. Reading one chapter from the book of Proverbs every day would be a good addition.

Proverbs has 31 chapters, just as many months have 31 days. So you could read the **first** chapter on the **first** day of the month, the **second** chapter on the **second** day, etc. Proverbs is the kind of book that can be read over and over again – even twelve times per year – and you will always get something new from it.

7. **Keep your Bible study plan simple.** This is very important, especially at first, while you are trying to establish a good and consistent habit-pattern of daily Bible reading. We should use a schedule that is easy to follow and keep track of. Even if you miss a day, don't give up; just simply start again where you left off in your reading schedule.
8. **Memorize the Scriptures.** “Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (Ref). An important part of any good Bible study plan is Scripture memorization. The truth of the Word dwelling within our hearts can keep us from deception and sin.

There are many helps for memorizing Bible verses. A passage can be written on a card or paper and carried with you to read over and over again. Also, sing the scriptures. A Bible passage set to music will be long remembered.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK WHILE STUDYING THE BIBLE

Here are two simple types of Bible study methods that can help us think correctly about the Scripture we are reading. These studies also give the Holy Spirit maximum opportunity to speak to us using the light of God's Word: *"For the commandment is a lamp; and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life"* (Prov 6:23).

THE SEVEN-QUESTION BIBLE STUDY

1. **What** is happening? (or the ideas expressed or results)
2. **Who** is it happening to? (the people involved)
3. **Where** is it happening? (location, situation)
4. **When** is it happening? (historical setting)
5. **Why** is it happening? (the causes, the reasons for it)
6. **How** is it happening? (the process, the flow of events)
7. How can I **apply** it? (how it relates to me and my situation)

THE EIGHT-QUESTION BIBLE STUDY

1. Is there a **command** for me to obey?
2. Is there a **sin** for me to avoid?
3. Is there an **example** for me to follow?
4. Is there a **promise** I am to claim?
5. Is there an **idea, principle** or **word** I should study further?
6. Is there a **truth** being taught about God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit?
7. Is there something for me to **pray** about? — If so, then stop and pray!

Using either or both of these study methods can greatly assist us in opening our *understanding to the profound truths of Scripture*.

We must remember that one of the **primary purposes of Bible study is to change our lives**, not just increase our knowledge! You haven't truly studied the Bible until you have applied it to yourself! Scripture tells us that God wants us to be *"doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (James 1:21 kjv), or as the NIV puts it, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. **Do what it says.**"

Therefore, make the **application of truth** one of your main goals in studying the Bible.

IN YOUR HANDS...

Our hope is that as you have read this article, you have gained a greatly deepened appreciation for this miraculous “Book of books” we call the Bible.

We have seen that the Bible is truly **THE** Word of God, substantiated by overwhelming proof. We have learned that God’s plan for mankind throughout the ages is revealed only in the holy Scriptures. We have discussed who wrote the Scriptures and how it was done, and then how it was all gathered into ONE Bible. From there we have looked at how to practically develop a meaningful and life-changing method of studying God’s Word. The Bible is a vast storehouse of inexhaustible riches already given to us by God. It is **the only source of truth** in our world that can lead us into an intimate and saving relationship with the God of the Universe. The Word of God is **eternal** and has outlasted, and will outlast, every effort of man to compete with it.

The sacred text, which God has preserved through His supervision of the copying, collecting and transmitting for over 3500 years, has now been placed in your hands. Countless thousands have suffered at great cost to themselves just to preserve our Bible. Even today, millions are tortured, enslaved and abused – even killed – for having a copy of the Bible. Yet they cannot be stopped, for **only one Book** has the answers to mankind’s deepest questions – **THE BIBLE!**

If you are reading this article, you undoubtedly own a Bible, maybe more than one. Then may we “*stir up your pure minds by way of reminder*”: take your Bible and **read it! study it! apply it! . . . BELIEVE IT!**