

CHAPTER 8 : THE BIBLE

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in Righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.
(2Timothy 3 16-17)

A. What We Believe About The Bible

We believe that it is perfectly reasonable and logical to accept that the God of Creation would choose to communicate with man (His creature), and that man, created in the image of God, would be able to understand and respond to that communication in some way.

The Bible is the “meta-narrative” to life.

Examples of ways in which God has communicated to man:

- Creation (Ps 19:1-4, Ro 1:18-20).
- Conscience (Ro 1:32, Ro 2:14-15).
- Jesus (Jn 14:7-9, Heb 1:3a).
- The Bible (2Ti 3:15-17, 2Pe 1:20-21).

To us the Bible is of extreme importance since it is the surest, clearest and most detailed account of God's revelation to us concerning His character, salvation plan and other truth. In the words of Nigel Day-Lewis, “The Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible and inerrant record of all God's revelation to mankind, and is our final authority in all matters of life and doctrine. It contains everything we need to know for salvation, and nothing can or must ever be subtracted from or added to it.” The Bible is divinely inspired and therefore infallible and inerrant. (See, for example, books by Ravi Zacharias, Josh McDowell and Charles Colson.)

Because the Bible is God's inspired and perfect revelation to man, we must give it the highest possible authority in our lives (remember the above quote, “... our final authority in all matters of life and doctrine”).

Writings, prophetic utterances or spiritual leading that contradict the Bible can't possibly be of God since it differs from God's unchanging truth.

Since the Bible has absolute authority in the Christian's life, it follows that we should give priority to studying it as much as we can, so that we may access the thoughts, the emotions and even the very heart of God.

B. The Structure Of The Bible

The Bible is a library of 66 books, not always arranged chronologically (as we might expect) but sometimes according to literary style. Thus the poetic and prophetic books of the Old Testament fit into the context of the history books. The Epistles often are contextualised by the book of Acts (New Testament history).

Below is a brief outline of the basic structure of the Bible, giving the total number of books by literary category.

<u>Literary Category</u>	<u>Names of Books</u>	<u>Total</u>
	Genesis-Deuteronomy	5
History	Joshua-Esther	12
Poetry	Job-Song of Songs	5
Prophecy	Isaiah-Malachi	17
Old Testament Total		39
<u>Literary Category</u>	<u>Names of Books</u>	<u>Total</u>
Gospels	Matthew-John	4
History	Acts	1
Letters	Romans-Jude	21
Prophecy	Revelation	1
New Testament Total		27

The Bible did not just fall out of heaven as is. It was progressively pieced together over a period of about 2,000 years, and contributions of over 40 authors are included. The books of the Bible were all individually scrutinised and verified by various committees and councils to ensure authenticity and inspiration.

C. Ten Reasons Why We Should Study The Bible

C.1. It Shows Us God

There is no easier, better or surer way of getting to know God than through His word. He has revealed His attributes clearly throughout the Bible and only by reading it will we find out what He is really like.

C.2. It Renews Our Minds

We live in a sin-sick world which is constantly squeezing its sinful values into our minds. Our thoughts determine our actions and therefore it is necessary to ensure that we keep filling our minds with God's thoughts. The only way to find God's thoughts is by reading His word (2Pe 3:1).

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Ro 12:1-2)

C.3. It Is An Aid In Spiritual Warfare

God's word is described as the sword of the Spirit. Thus it is a weapon of warfare against the devil. We need to learn to use it the way Jesus did when He was tempted in the desert. See Eph 6:17 and Mt 4:1-11.

C.4. It Is A Foundation For Life

Behind God's word is His faithfulness. If we live our lives in obedience to God's word, we will never succumb to the storms of difficult and trying times because God's faithfulness to His word will uphold us. The key is not only to hear God's word, but to put it into practice. See Mt 7:24-27 and Jas 1:23-25.

C.5. It Equips Us For Good Works

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph 2:10)

God has prepared good works for us to do, but unless we are equipped and prepared for them we won't fulfill them as we are supposed to.

By reading and studying God's word we become equipped to fulfill God's purposes. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2Ti 3:16-17)

C.6. It Shows Us Ourselves And Reveals Our Sin

When we read the Word, we see the standard of living that God has set and we also become painfully aware of the areas in which we fall short. It's like looking into a mirror to find our appearance is not presentable. This enables us to change and adjust our lives so that we can become the people God desires and also live the lives that God wants us to live (Heb 4:12).

James said, in Jas 1:21-25, "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."

C.7. It Purifies Our Lives From Sin

Having been made aware of sin in our lives, there is no better way to get rid of it than to see what God has to say about the particular sin involved, and then put God's word into action. In this way we will learn to hate sin passionately (just as God does) and as a result our lives will be purified. See Jn 15:3, Jn 17:17 and Eph 5:26.

C.8. It Prevents Us From Sinning

Not only does God's word reveal our sin and purify us from sin, it also helps prevent us from sinning. If we are fully loaded with God's word and get confronted with temptation we will be far more likely to emerge victorious (1Jn 2:1). Ps 119:9 puts it this way, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word."

C.9. It Enables Us To Preach And Teach

When we know the word of God and that what we are preaching and teaching is founded on the word of God then we are able to speak with confidence and authority because we know that God's faithfulness is backing us (2Ti 3:16-17, 2Ti 4:2). 1Pe 4:11a states, "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God."

C.10. It Builds Faith

Because God is faithful, we know that His word is true. God can never fail to keep his promises. Thus by reading God's word we gain greater assurance and confidence to trust in Him. Ro 10:17 says, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

D. How We Should Approach The Bible

A wrong approach to reading the Bible can discourage the greatest enthusiasts. However, a correct approach can greatly enhance any individual's Bible study times and avoid unnecessary discouragement. Some helpful hints follow.

D.1. Read Book By Book

- Select the book that you desire to read.
- Establish the historical setting of the book. When you understand the political, cultural and spiritual context in which the book was written you will be able to understand the contents of the book much more easily because you can begin to identify with the author and recipients. (We highly recommended the ESV Study Bible ITCC Bible Survey.)
- Read the book through systematically, rather than reading selected portions or jumping back and forth at random. In this way you are able to follow the author's train of thought and it will help prevent you from using verses out of their context or making them say things which the author never intended.
- Remember that neither the chapter and verse numbering system nor the paragraph headings were inspired by the Holy Spirit—they were simply added in for the sake of easy reference—and sometimes the thought that the author wants to communicate can be hijacked if we stop reading at the end of a chapter or paragraph. It is best to look for a clear indication in the text that a particular thought has run its course and that a new one is about to be developed before you stop reading.

D.2. Textual Studies

It is important to note that the Holy Spirit anointed the authors of the Bible as they wrote in their native languages (Old Testament: Hebrew and Aramaic, New Testament: Greek) and that the English translations that we have today cannot always communicate the full richness of the thoughts expressed in the original languages. It is sometimes helpful, therefore, to access the original languages. There are simple, practical books to assist the reader: it is not necessary to learn ancient Greek.

The value of conducting a textual study is that we are enabled to “mine out” the richness of God’s revelation by taking any portion of Scripture (usually quite short) and, with the use of the Strong’s Concordance, Vine’s Expository Dictionary and other helps, accessing each important word and finding out what the full meaning of the original word is. This gives one a much clearer understanding of what the author wanted to say.

D.3. Topical Studies

The value of a topical study is that you are able to gather together all the scriptures relating to any topic you choose. When you have read everything that the Bible has to say about a particular topic or theme, you will have a much clearer idea of what God thinks and feels about it.

The modus operandi is simple: choose a topic or theme and look up the word(s) in the concordance. The complete concordance gives an exhaustive list of all the scriptures that contain the word. You can then read each scripture in the Bible, placing it in its context and making notes of any important points or new themes that develop. Finally, you might want to arrange the material in a logical order and file it for easy reference.

D.4. Devotional Reading

It can be very enriching to take a short portion of Scripture and read it through slowly, thoughtfully and prayerfully. With this approach, the main objective is to take the scripture and apply it in your life.

The main questions you need to ask yourself from the text are:

- What can I learn about God?
- What can I learn about myself?
- What does the text require of me?
- Where am I falling short?
- How can I apply it in my life?

D.5. Hermeneutics (How To Interpret The Bible)

Bible scholars have agreed on several “laws” or “guiding principles” which help the serious Bible scholar to interpret the Bible correctly. This is quite a vast topic which requires much time to study thoroughly since there are many “laws.”

One principle or “law” is worthy of mention, namely the law of simple meaning. This means that you accept that the Bible means exactly what it says (that it is literal) unless there is a clear indication in the text which tells you otherwise. Some desperately try to spiritualise every text and eventually end up in disastrous error.

E. Summary

The Bible is the inspired and authoritative revelation from God about Himself. It is our only infallible guide to knowing God, understanding ourselves and living a God-glorifying life. Every Christian should devote regular time to reading and studying God’s word.