

730 How Can I Know the Bible?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

The Bible contains the most precious book in all the world, but sadly many people do not know what it says. How can I get more out of my Bible? How can I know the will of God? Today we're asking the question, "How Can I Know the Bible?" In all of the history of the world, no book has been more loved and studied than the Bible—it remains the best seller of all time and yet often it is left unread. The Bible is unique: 66 Books written by about 40 men over a space of 1500 years. It was written in many different places in the known world of ancient times. Not all authors were Jews; Luke was a Gentile. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. Part of Daniel was written in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek. Yet there is an amazing unity and harmony throughout. The Bible is a book that men have hated, because it spoke out against sin—those who are evil hate what is good. But the Bible is still the most desired book in the world!

An unknown writer said, "This Book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding; its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Follow its precepts and it will lead you to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to a resurrected life in Christ; yes, to glory itself, for eternity.

The Bible can do so many wonderful things in your life, if you let it. It gives understanding. Psalm 119:130 says, "The unfolding of Thy words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." The Bible is the only book that tells us where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going after we die. No other book can give such hope and insight into our very existence. This is one reason the Bible is so valuable. The Bible also protects us from making bad decisions and getting ourselves into trouble. The Bible keeps from sin. Psalm 119:9-11 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

The Bible also sets us apart and makes us holy. In John 17:17 Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying, "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth." When people live what they have learned from God's Word, they live a holy life, not like the people of this world. Their hearts and minds are centered upon what is good and right, not on what hurts and stains. God's word has lifted people up everywhere it has ever gone. The Bible gives wisdom and understanding; it develops common sense. It teaches people how to get along and to forgive. Wherever the Bible has gone, peace follows; and wherever the Bible is absent, life is filled with hopelessness and violence.

According to John Richard Green in *A Short History of the English People*: "No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England during the years which parted the middle of the reign of Elizabeth from the Long Parliament. England became a people of the book, and that book was the Bible. It was read at churches and read at home, and everywhere its words, as they fell on ears which custom had not deadened, kindled a startling enthusiasm. As a mere literary monument, the English version of the Bible remains the noblest example of the English tongue. But far greater was the effect of the Bible on the character of the people. Elizabeth

might silence or tune the pulpits, but it was impossible for her to silence or turned the great preachers of justice and mercy and truth who spoke from the Book. The whole temper of the nation felt the change. A new moral and religious impulse spread through every class." My friend, that is the power of the Bible!

Christians often speak of being born again. We are not born again through some miraculous event, or through a prayer, or through some feeling, but through the Word of God. Peter said in 1 Pet. 1:22-23, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God." When people hear the gospel preached, believe it and obey it, they become a child of God. Obeying the gospel means that one has repented of his sins, confessed the name of Jesus, and has been baptized in water. Paul said in Galatians 3:26-27, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." By faith in the Gospel and in baptism we are born of water and the Spirit and become children of God.

If the Bible is all this and more, one has to wonder why people don't study their Bibles more. The most obvious answer is that they are just too busy with other things. How sad that people study for almost every aspect of their careers on earth but do not take the time to prepare for their eternal home! Anyone who is too busy to read the Bible is simply too busy. Someone estimated that it takes 71 hours to read the whole Bible aloud. That is just twelve minutes a day. A former park ranger at Yellowstone National Park tells the story of a ranger leading a group of hikers to a fire lookout. The ranger was so intent on telling the hikers about the flowers and animals that he considered the messages on his two-way radio distracting, so he switched it off. Nearing the tower, the ranger was met by a nearly breathless lookout, which asked why he hadn't responded to the messages on his radio. A grizzly bear had been seen stalking the group, and the authorities were trying to warn them of the danger. Any time we turn out the messages God has sent us, we put at peril not only ourselves, but also those around us. How important it is that we never turn off God's saving communication!

Many people do not read anything much. They listen to the radio or watch television, but you won't find them reading a newspaper or the Bible. They can read, but they have not wanted to. If you would rather hear the Word, then there are numerous audio Bibles available. I have known some visually impaired Christians who love to listen to God's word and play their tapes or CDs continually. In the early church, there were few copies of the Scriptures available, because books were so expensive. Early churches had readers, who took great time in publicly reading the Scripture. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13, "Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching." Imagine how much Bible you could learn simply by listening every morning on your drive to work. Learning the teaching of Scripture is not hard if you have a plan. Many have never taken the time to plan their study, and they have missed out on hearing and reading God's promises. Don't miss out, my friend.

Read your Bible again and again. If you wish to know the Book, you must make it part of your daily life. One sweet nonagenarian I know has read the Bible through every year for many years and has finished it 44 times. There are 929 chapters in the Old Testament and 260 chapters in the New Testament, a total of 1,189 chapters. By reading four chapters per day, one can easily read through the entire Bible in a year. *Use the many helps available.*

Bible dictionaries, handbooks, and commentaries can help students understand the contextual setting of each book. When people understand who is speaking, the cultural and historical context, and what the purpose of a passage is, the Bible comes alive and is far more meaningful. One of the blessings of reading the Bible is in getting to know God. He will become more your Father in heaven and less a mystery, if you will take up your Bible every day.

Meditate on the Word. Some read the Bible hurriedly or to reach a goal. The best students linger over the Scriptures, treasuring it up in their hearts (Psalm 119:11). They are like trees planted by the waters; they prosper in all they do. David said in Psalm 1: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

Take all that the Scriptures teach on any subject. All the truth on any one subject is not usually in one passage. There is a difference between a true statement and the whole truth of a matter. John 5:24 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Some read this passage and conclude people saved by faith alone and once a person is saved, he is always saved. While it is true that we are saved by faith, that is not the whole truth. The Scriptures distinguish between faith alone, which is dead, and an obedient, active faith that is alive in James 2:14-26. Faith apart from repentance or baptism will not save any more than repentance or baptism without faith. Jesus expects us to be obedient as well as believe. Hebrews 5:8-9 says, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation."

Read a different version of the Bible than the one you are used to. Some people don't read the Bible much because they say they can't understand it. I have to admit that some of the older English versions use some difficult words. We are blessed, however. There are a number of newer translations that can be extremely insightful to the seasoned student. Some newer translations are much easier to read and are actually based on older manuscripts of the original language. Since scholars have found many new papyri and the Dead Sea Scrolls in recent years, our understanding of the Bible is much improved. My favorite translations are the New American Standard

Version and the English Standard Version. You may want to get a copy and see for yourself.

Determine to do God's will. Jesus said, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (John 7:17). The Bible confirms its own value and authority best by being practiced. Faithful Christians will find time and again in the practice of life that God's promises and teachings are true. I heard of a man who would put the letters "T" and "P" in the margin of his Bible. Someone who picked up his Bible asked him what those letters meant. He replied, "The 'T' stands for 'tried.' That means I tried what the Bible says. And the 'P' stands for 'proved.' That means the Bible proved itself true to me." The best Bible is the one that you read, believe, love, practice, and share. I can't think of one good reason not to read the Bible everyday. Don't let a day pass you by.

The most important thing I can do in response to reading the Bible is apply the message to my life. We ought to bring the message of the Bible home by responding to the passage with our hearts and lives. Here are some questions we can ask the Scriptures that will help us apply them to our lives: Does this command something I'm not doing? Does this suggest a change in my behavior? Does this reflect a spirit or an attitude I'm not showing in my life? Does this confirm a belief I already hold? Does this suggest further study or a change in my beliefs? Have I accepted this promise and trusted God to fulfill it? Have I seen this promise fulfilled in my life? How would it change matters if everyone obeyed this command? What would Jesus do in my place? I have always believed I have *failed to bring home a passage if I have applied the truths of the Scripture to everyone else and neglected to apply them to myself.* Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites because they saw the speck in other people's eyes but could not see the log that is in their own eyes. James said in James 1:22-25, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." I hope that you will take the need to have God's Word living in your life seriously. I also hope that you will take seriously the need to become a Christian and to attend church regularly. To become a Christian, I urge you to believe the gospel. Believe that Jesus is the Christ who died for your sins and is the living Lord who arose again from the dead. I urge you to repent of your sins, give every one of them up and turn to a holy life. I urge you to confess the name of Jesus and be baptized in water so that your sins will be forgiven. Live the Christian life and find out just how wonderful it can be to serve the living God!

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Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org