

What Should We Know About the Bible?

*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: **the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. **This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.***
Ephesians 4:11, 12 NLT: (Emphasis added is mine).

This study is one of a five part series of teachings regarding the foundational work of the fivefold ministry as given in the Ephesians reference presented above. It is the work of the five-fold ministry, as executed by the various members of the body of Jesus, to build up the other believers into a complete maturity in **Christ**. Each of these ministries is related to a foundational area of study for the disciple. This first study will introduce the disciple to some important concepts and ideas that they will find helpful when considering the study of teachers as the portion of the five-fold ministry concerning the foundational basis of the Jewish Torah to our faith and the effects that biblical teachings have on the lives of disciples.

It is interesting to note that some believers believe that the relevant portion of the Bible is the New Testament or as some people refer to it as the Apostolic Writings. Other believers in the **GOD** of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, believe that the Tanakh or the Old Testament is the relevant portion of the Bible. The truth is that the Bible is a collection of writings that individually express a portion of the plan of restoration for our world. Collectively they paint the entire picture of **GOD's** plan for our lives. It is important that we see the Bible as a continuing revelation of **GOD's** plan for us.

The Bible starts with the first five books, which are referred to as the Torah by Hebraic reference or the Pentateuch by Greek reference. The Torah is important because it was the record of **GOD's** initial dealings with mankind. We see the accounts of Creation, the accounts of the flood in the days of Noah, and the relationship of **GOD** with the Hebrew patriarchs. Then we encounter the stirring accounts of the deliverance of the Hebrew people as they are set free of the oppression by their Egyptian masters. It was during this journey to the Promised Land that the most significant event of the ancient world occurred. This event was the giving of the Instructions for Righteous Living, which is referred to as the Torah by Jewish usage and is referred to as the 'Law' by Greco-Roman usage.

These instructions formed the basis for the rest of the writings that comprise the Bible and to ignore their influence is to get a false impression of what the Bible is all about. The following portions of the Bible, which included the historical accounts of the people of Israel, the poetic writings that express the nature of our relationship with the **Father**, and finally to complete the writings of the Tanakh, are the prophetic writings that were **GOD's** comments on the manner that the people of Israel fulfilled their covenant responsibilities regarding the Torah instructions for righteous living. These writings comprise what the Jewish people refer to as the Scriptures.

Then we have the accounts of **Jesus** as he came to Earth to fulfill the purposes of the **Father**. The Gospels accounts relate the words and events of the earthly ministry of **Jesus**. What is important to remember is that **Jesus** had to fulfill the requirements of the Torah instructions or else He would have been disqualified as being the **Messiah**. This was the situation that prompted **Jesus** to express the following reference, Matthew 5:17, 18 NLT:

Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.

The 'Law' or Torah instructions thus became the foundation for the teachings of **Jesus** and the writers of the New Testament. An example of this foundation is found in a response that **Jesus** gave when asked by a religious leader regarding the greatest commandment. **Jesus** gives the following response, Matthew 22:36-40 NLT:

"Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

Jesus is telling us that the entire Bible is designed to be a revelation of how mankind is to love **GOD** with all their being and how to express that divine love towards the rest of humanity. So rather than segment the Bible into relevant parts for study, it is incumbent on the Bible student to study the entire Bible to understand how to fulfill these two great commandments in their lives.

To reinforce the concept of a continuation revelation one must realize that the beginning of the Bible describes **GOD's** wonderful creation and the end of the Bible describes the wonderful restoration of the world and coming glory of **GOD** descending to the Earth in the New Jerusalem. In between these two great feats, is the recorded history of the fall of mankind and the consistent efforts of **GOD** to reconcile mankind back to Himself. Within these accounts, you will find examples of things that you are going through and you will be able to witness how other people dealt with these issues. It can be very helpful to realize that you are not the only person that has struggled in that area. Also you will see the love of the **Father** and His great mercy poured out to mankind from the Genesis accounts all the way through the Book of Revelation.

Now that you know what the Bible is, it will be helpful to understand how the Bible was written. In the beginning, mankind passed down their information in oral form. It wasn't until the time of Moses that these accounts were written into the books of the Torah. The following references will verify the authorship of Moses:

- 🕯 **Exodus 24:4 NLT:** *Then Moses carefully wrote down all the LORD's instructions. Early the next morning Moses got up and built an altar at the foot of the mountain. He also set up twelve pillars, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.*
- 🕯 **Numbers 33:2 NLT:** *At the LORD's direction, Moses kept a written record of their progress. These are the stages of their march, identified by the different places where they stopped along the way.*
- 🕯 **Deuteronomy 31:9 NLT:** *So Moses wrote this entire body of instruction in a book and gave it to the priests, who carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant, and to the elders of Israel.*

Following the time of Moses, we see the history of **GOD's** dealings with the people of Israel as written by the holy men of Israel. We see the poetic writings of the Psalms, the Book of Job, and the Song of Songs. The wise Solomon gave us the wisdom writings of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The mighty prophets give us their instructions as the **Spirit of God** moved on them and they were able to speak these holy words to the people of Israel.

Throughout all of these writings, we see the efforts of mortal men putting into words, the concepts and revelations of the infinite being we know as **GOD** or as the Hebrews would refer to Him as **HaShem**, the **Name**. The ways of **GOD** are beyond our comprehension so mere words would never be able to convey the fullness of the nature of **GOD**. This is where the **Holy Spirit** is so necessary. Just as the Holy Spirit moved upon the waters in **Genesis 1:2**, the Spirit would move upon these writers as they

would compile the inspiration that was in their hearts down in written form. Thus it is important to understand that the letter of the writings can never and will never be able to convey the full meaning that **GOD** intended. This is why mankind over the years has missed the intent of **GOD** for they study the letter of the 'Law' but they miss the spirit or intent of the words. This is why Jesus remarked in John 5:39 NLT:

You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me!

Jesus was instructing the people to not look so hard at studying every nuance of the words but rather to look for the one that gives those words meaning. In other words this was what the **Lord** was trying to teach us when He gave these words. **Jesus** came to show us in the flesh what these words meant. The Apostle Paul expanded on these words when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:6 CJB:

He has even made us competent to be workers serving a New Covenant, the essence of which is not a written text but the Spirit. For the written text brings death, but the Spirit gives life.

What Paul is trying to tell us that while the written text is important as a guideline pointing us towards the truth, the real agent of revelation and understanding of the Word of **GOD** is the **Holy Spirit**. **Jesus** understood this need by sending us the **Spirit** to teach us, as is noted in the following scriptures:

- ☞ **John 14:16 CJB:** *and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another comforting Counselor like me, the Spirit of Truth, to be with you forever.*
- ☞ **John 15:26 NLT:** *But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about Me.*
- ☞ **John 16:13 NLT:** *When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own but will tell you what He has heard. He will tell you about the future.*

The question will naturally arise at this point regarding how does the **Holy Spirit** do this? The answer is that we don't actually know how, but He does it. We know this by experience. We need to understand that that **GOD** does not expect us to understand everything that is written in the Bible at one time. Understanding the Bible is a life long pursuit. The more you learn, the more you learn that there is more to learn – it is a never ending pursuit. But there are those moments when the **Holy Spirit** knows that you are ready, when He will give you understanding of a certain passage that may have eluded you for years. Or you may have understanding a certain passage one way and then the **Holy Spirit** will give you a different perspective on it.

I tell my students that as a teacher, I can not give them truth. I can guide their way and show them where to look but until the **Holy Spirit** reveals it to them, they have only learned information and not truth. Truth can only be realized through the work of the **Holy Spirit**. This is one reason why there is such a division in the body of **Christ** concerning doctrinal issues. People learn information that they think is truth but it is only information. All truth will bring people closer to **GOD** and it will promote unity among the body, rather than dissention. Paul described this situation when he commented on an issue regarding food sacrificed to idols, 1 Corinthians 8:1 CJB:

Now about food sacrificed to idols: we know that, as you say, "We all have knowledge." Yes, that is so, but "knowledge" puffs a person up with pride; whereas love builds up.

It is the mere learning of knowledge and not the mastering of revealed truth that causes so much dissension within the body of believers. If we were to walk in love, we would realize that some people are in the learning the information stage and they may not have the revealed truth yet. We need to love them by giving them time to develop and to nurture them by giving them guidance, not doctrinal arguments. Others that have received truth through the **Holy Spirit** may see an aspect of the truth that is different than how you see it. We must walk in love to promote unity of **Spirit** and not conformity of thought.

An ancient sage once said that the Torah is like a 70 facet jewel. One may look at it from one facet and the light will refract a certain way but when you turn the jewel, the light will refract differently from another facet. The Word of the infinite **GOD** is like that. Our minds are so limited, that we can only capture a minute portion of His truth. This is why **GOD** will use different people to see different things in the Word, but collectively, we can realize more of His infinite Truth. Paul describes our struggle to capture this truth in 1 Corinthians 13:12 NLT:

Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

One of the problems caused by our partial understanding is the issue of conflicting doctrines. Doctrines are formalized teachings that represent a shared belief among a group of believers. These doctrines start out as a general teaching that someone put together as a study of the Bible. Then as the teaching gains acceptance it matures into a doctrine and if its gains enough acceptance it becomes dogma or the essential belief of the group. Some dogma is necessary as it refers to the nature of the

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; as well to the various elements of salvation. Beyond these core elements of dogma there is great room for a variety of doctrines. One such example is the doctrine of Baptism. One group believes in the doctrine of infant baptism and another believes in adult immersion. Both groups can love the **LORD** but they have a difference of opinion regarding this issue. The correct manner in which to operate as a loving body of Christ is to agree to disagree, but then show love to each other.

The issue of doctrine is important for it can often be a discouragement to people that desire to study the Bible, when they see others arguing doctrinal points. The best hope for the Bible student is to realize that we are responsible for seeking our own truth and not the hand-me-down truth that others have learned. The basis for this personal seeking is found in 2 Peter 1:20, 21 NLT:

Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

Just as the prophets spoke with the individual inspiration of the **Holy Spirit**, we can gain truth from those words by our inspiration by the **Holy Spirit**. In other words, as we read these inspired words, the same **Holy Spirit** that motivated the writing of these words, will come to us to activate our understanding of the words. This is what Paul meant when he said that the Spirit gives 'life.' Our understanding of the truths of the Bible is what gives our own spirit life. We grow spiritually as we continue to appropriate **GOD's** truth into our life. This is the reason why getting embattled over doctrines can be so harmful, for we stop gaining truth and we succumb to the prideful wisdom of mankind. The **Holy Spirit** is my teacher not human beings. Human beings are to be guides but all truth must be gathered from **GOD**.

Now how do we accomplish this gathering of truth? We have included in this teaching a number of questions and answers to assist the student in their Bible studies:

- 🕯 **Where do I start to study?** The best place to start studying the Bible is in the beginning where God started to reveal His plans for mankind. Take time to read through the entire Bible so that you can understand the whole picture. It is alright to focus on favorite sections but one needs to see the whole picture to avoid doctrinal bias. Don't worry if you don't understand everything at first. Continue reading and some of it will make sense later.
- 🕯 **What If I don't understand what I am reading?** It is alright if you don't understand everything at first. It may take several readings to gain some sense of what the words mean. Try to see the bigger picture by reading

around the puzzling text. Then think about the text and pray for understanding. The **Holy Spirit** can often teach us better if we think quietly before **GOD**. If you still remain puzzled after this quiet contemplation, then seek other resources for some help or ask another person for their understanding. Remember that their understanding is only a guideline and it is not truth until you feel the **Holy Spirit** confirm the truth in you.

🏆 **What resources should I use?** One of the best tools you can use is a concordance that lists all of the available references that relate to the word or topic that you are studying. There are concordances in hardcopy or you could use a number Bible software programs to electronically search for your references. Word studies or topical studies, which list references for a topic, are an excellent way for the beginning student to learn about the Bible. Bible dictionaries or encyclopedias are a great way to learn about the people, places and the customs of these people. Understanding the historical environment is very important in understanding how the Bible will relate to our life. The more advanced students may wish to use original language study helps to understand the words that were used in the Greek or Hebrew that the passages were originally written in. The original language study can bring new understanding to references since it is often difficult to convey the full meaning of a word in another language.

🏆 **How do I know if the Holy Spirit has revealed something to me?** This is a difficult question to answer for the results are very subjective and the **Spirit** may work differently with diverse people. There does seem to be two common levels on which the **Spirit** will move. One is a move of an introductory level where the **Holy Spirit** is leading us to a place of understanding. You may find yourself drawn to read a certain passage or a certain passage will keep coming to your mind. These things are the prompting of the **Holy Spirit**. The real payoff occurs when suddenly the light goes off in your head and you know that you know what it means. Such moments are very precious and dear. A lot of people become discouraged by the hard work that is involved in Bible study but when you get one of these moments you know that the work was well worth it. Often this moment will have life changing consequences. Remember this reference, Hebrew 11:6 NLT, emphasis added is mine: *And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to Him must believe that God exists and that He rewards those who sincerely (diligently) seek Him.*

🏆 **How much should I read?** This is a trick question, for you could never read too much of the Bible. When I first was introduced to the Bible, I was instructed to read it during every possible moment that I could. I used to carry around a pocket New Testament so I could pull it out and read it when I was

riding in a car or I was standing in a line. I know that it was the constant reading of the word that salvaged my mind from years of drug abuse and it built a foundation that was to see me through many a hard time. It is recommended that you should endeavor to read through the Bible at least once a year. There are many programs, some on the internet, which will set a schedule for you to read through the entire Bible in year. If you will maintain the schedule, you will find it easy to accomplish this goal. The Jewish people read through the Torah on a planned schedule every year. The advantage being that it will build a solid foundation of understanding of the ways of **GOD**. It is amazing to find that no matter how many times you read through the same passages, something new will emerge from the reading.

🌾 **What do I do with the knowledge that I have gain?** This question is perhaps one of the most important questions on the list. It does little good to learn knowledge if we will not apply it to our lives. Paul warns us about the situation where people will be ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth, 2 Timothy 3:17. It is in the application of the knowledge to our everyday life circumstance, which reveals the truth of the Word of **GOD** in our life. When the Word tells us to act in a certain manner then we need to apply that instruction to our life to confirm the truth that was revealed to us. This is how we witness the truth of **GOD's** word to the people around us. A person that refuses to apply the word is described in **James 1:23-25 NLT**: *For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*

🌾 **What if someone disagrees with what I believe?** You will come across this situation many times in your faith walk. We must remember that it is not our job to make everybody conform to our way of thinking or is it our responsibility to conform to the thinking of others. It is however our responsibility to walk in love to one another. We have the privilege of sharing what we believe and we should be bold enough to do so. But if the other party disagrees with what we have stated then we need to leave it at that point. Don't be tempted to argue your point for that will not be helpful, but stand your ground politely. If someone asks why you believe that way, then give a loving and gentle response. Remember it is not our responsible to make people believe what we believe, but it is our responsible to walk in love towards them, even if they reject us.

In conclusion, we need to look at the issue of the accuracy and reliability of the Scriptures. There have been attacks regarding the reliability of the Bible. Some scholars have taken the method of study called Higher Critical Analysis, where they dissect every verse of the Bible to distort the traditional view of authorship. All this approach does is to attack the words of the Bible but it does not address the Spirit behind those words. We must be honest when assessing the Bible to realize that it was written by mortal men that wrote to the best of their ability the complex and perplexing aspects of the revelations that they were given. There were many times that words would never suffice to describe the situation. One such situation was when Isaiah stood before the throne of the **LORD** in a vision, Isaiah 6:1-5 NLT:

It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of His robe filled the Temple. Attending Him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with His glory!" Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke. Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies."

What can one say after witnessing such a magnificent sight? It is foolish therefore to get hung up on analyzing each and every word. What is more constructive is to measure the accuracy of the information that the Bible relates. The Bible very accurately describes the sinful nature of mankind. We can read the accounts of the people of the past and see ourselves in those lives. No other religious writing depicts this wanton character of mankind so accurately or describes our need for salvation so greatly.

We can look at the instructions for righteous living found in the Torah or the words of life spoken by **Jesus**, to see how their application would affect the world around us. What would happen in the world, if every single person would follow the Ten Commandments? The world would be transformed into a paradise. So it would seem that words of the Bible, though limited by man's capacity, can still convey spiritual truth regarding righteous living to us today. In the same manner, we can realize the timelessness of the Scriptures. What was true then is true now. The human heart was evil then and it is still evil today. If it wasn't for the holy plan of restoration that is related in the Bible, there would be no hope for mankind.

So I would advise the student to not be bothered by the criticisms leveled against the Bible, but rather embrace these words with eagerness and anticipation. There has never been an attack that has successfully discredited the Bible. For many years the liberal theologians criticized the historical accuracy of the Bible. Now with modern archeology uncovering the many name and places mentioned in the Bible, that criticism is no longer valid. People have pointed to linguistic contradictions that seemed to pop up in the Bible but when the culture of the people is understood properly, these criticisms disappear.

Then there is the issue of prophesy. How could the writers of the Bible so accurately predict the events that would occur without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? The prophet Daniel very accurately detailed the successive Gentile empires that would affect the land of Israel. Daniel accurately described the various battles that would ensue after the break up of Alexander's empire. Isaiah accurately predicted hundreds of years before fact, the name of the Persia king, Cyrus, who would assist Israel in the future. The entire exile and return of Israel was predicted by the various prophets, not to mention the prophecies of the restoration of Israel in the end times that is happening before our eyes.

We can look at the many prophecies that accurately predicted the coming of the **Messiah, Jesus** or **Yeshua HaMashiach** as referred to in the Hebrew. We can rely on the words of **Jesus** regarding the future when He so accurately described the destruction of Jerusalem some forty years later. It is because the Bible has been so reliable in the past that we can confidently embrace the Bible as our pattern for life.

This idea of accepting the Bible brings us to the final point. All of us have tried living life by our own idea and ways. Some of us experienced more disasters than others, but all of us fell short of living a righteous life before **GOD**. Having tried the other ways, it would benefit the Bible student greatly to fully embrace the teachings found in the Bible as a pattern for their everyday life. The concepts of love and loving behavior are so far above the norm for the people of the planet but the funny thing is that it works. The people of the Old Testament understood the power of the grace of **GOD** to help them in their time of distress. We, of the New Testament times, are still experiencing that great grace being applied to our lives. We need therefore to apply these lessons that we learn to the lives of others. I will leave you with this reference from the writings of Paul to emphasize the importance of Bible study, 2 Timothy 2:15 NLT:

Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive His approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.