

THE BIBLE

How to Read & Understand It



These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31

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Written by Jane L. Fryar



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The mission of CTA is to glorify God
by providing purposeful products that
lift up and encourage the body of Christ—
because we love him!



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WHAT IS THE BIBLE?



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WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The Bible is the story of God’s love—his love for YOU in Jesus Christ, the Savior he sent.

The Bible is not so much a book, as it is a whole library. This library includes history, poetry, sermons, stories, letters from famous people, and more. The Holy Spirit inspired more than 40 authors who wrote over a span of about 1,500 years. These authors came from many different backgrounds:

- ◆ Moses really was “prince of Egypt”—before he became a shepherd.
- ◆ Ezekiel was a priest.
- ◆ Daniel was advisor to the rulers of three successive world empires.
- ◆ Matthew collected taxes for the Roman Empire.
- ◆ Peter was a fisherman.
- ◆ Paul made tents.
- ◆ Luke was a physician.

In light of all these differences—in culture, training, and experience, the writings produced by the Bible’s authors show remarkable consistency. Each book points in just one direction—toward the cross and empty tomb of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

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

- ◆ The Old Testament was written in the centuries before the birth of Christ—primarily in the Hebrew language. These books are also called “The Hebrew Scriptures.”
- ◆ The New Testament was written in the 50 years or so after Jesus’ death and resurrection. All the New Testament authors wrote in the language of the marketplace in that day—Greek.



Here is what the Bible says about itself, its authority, and its usefulness:

The sacred writings . . . are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:15–17 NRSV

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

One more detail—a practical one. The original authors did not include chapter numbers or verses as they wrote. This system developed over time to make specific content easier to find.

Genesis 3:15 means:

- ◆ The first word names the book—Genesis, in this example.
- ◆ The first number names the chapter of the book—3 in this example.
- ◆ The last number, the one after the colon, names the verse(s)—15 in this example.

TO THINK ABOUT

- Since Jesus is, from start to finish, the hero of God’s story, how will that impact the way we understand and use what we read in the Bible?
- The Bible’s human authors come from many different backgrounds and from many different centuries. Yet, the message of the Holy Scriptures is unified and consistent. What implications do you draw from this?
- Slowly re-read 2 Timothy 3:14–17 (on page 5), noting each word. What insights do you gain? What questions do you have?

HOW CAN I KNOW WHAT THE BIBLE MEANS?



[Jesus said,] “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.” John 5:39

HOW CAN I KNOW WHAT THE BIBLE MEANS?

Maybe you learned this song back in Sunday school: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” As our Lord answered his worst critics, he called attention to this same truth. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day knew a lot about God. Jesus himself notes that they searched the Scriptures as though their lives depended on it—their eternal lives!

Admirable as this was, they missed the main point! The Scriptures “bear witness about me,” Jesus says. When we read the Bible, it tells us of God’s love in Christ. We read with the intent of knowing Jesus better, of deepening our relationship with him!

The Christian Scriptures differ from other “holy books” chiefly in the fact that the Bible focuses on what *God has done* for us in Christ, not on what we *can do* to win God’s approval. Sadly, though, like the



scribes of the first century, many today see the Bible only as a book of rules, a system of morality. Others read, hoping to discover the secret to a life free from sickness, debt, and sorrow.

But the Scriptures focus on Jesus! The Bible shows us our sin. Then, it leads us to the cross of our Savior, to true repentance and faith in Christ. This is THE key to understanding the Bible.

BIBLE STUDY TOOLS AT A GLANCE

Concordance—uses key words to find verses quickly; several complete concordances are available online

Bible handbook—provides the background, setting, themes, and key ideas for each Bible book; often includes maps and other helps

Bible dictionary—a dictionary that specializes in biblical terms

Bible commentary—provides background and interpretation of the biblical text, verse by verse or chapter by chapter; quality and biases vary widely; several classic commentaries are available online