

The Bible, God's Message to Us

You hold in your hands an ancient book full of God's mystery and truth. Full of wonder and power.

In it you will read about two great lights, the greater one to rule the day and the lesser one to rule the night; trees that clap their hands; young lions that roar for their prey; creatures of the sea that can't be counted; stars that sing; man formed from the dust of the ground; storehouses of snow and hail . . . and the God who made them all.

In it you will read of a great flood, a dry path through the sea, bread that fell from heaven, a mighty shout and crumbling city walls, an army defeated with lanterns, a meal in the wilderness provided by birds, coins in a fish's mouth, blind people who could see again, a fierce storm made calm . . . and the God who did all these things.

You will read of a people chosen by God, given a promise of blessing and a law to follow, living in rebellion against their Creator, taken captive . . . punished but not forgotten or forsaken.

And you will read of a Redeemer, the only Son of God, promised by the prophets, born of Mary . . . the one who came to set the captives free, to save his people from their sinful, darkened hearts and sinful ways . . . who lives forever in heaven.

This ancient book is the Holy Bible. It is a unique, one-of-a-kind book. There is no other book like it, because this book was not written by man only, but also by God. The God who created the world and everything in it gave his message to the world. Everything that the Bible says is TRUE. It is God's only and final written Word to his people. It cannot be added to or subtracted from (**Revelation 22:18-19**).

The Bible was written by God and it was written about God. God is the most important person in the Bible. Of course the Bible is full of all sorts of people. Ordinary people like Ruth, Zacchaeus, and Bartimaeus. Kings like David and Saul and Nebuchadnezzar. Fishermen, prophets, tax collectors, and little children. David with his sling and Moses with his staff. A girl who watched her baby brother in the Nile and a boy with a lunch. But all these people are a part of **God's** story. They are in God's story to point to God; to show us God's greatness and worth.

So in every story we read in the Bible, we should ask:

What does this say about God?

You will never run out of things to learn about God. Every time you read the Bible, you can discover more about God. Look for him in these pages. It is his delight to show you who he is and what he is like.

But this book is also about you. You may not find your name in this book, but you will learn important things about yourself in this book. You are like the other people in the Bible. Like Adam and Eve, you were created in God's image. And like them you are unable to keep God's law. Like Israel, you grumble at the goodness of God, and try to find your joy apart from God. The darkened heart that Romans 1 talks about belongs to you. You are a sinner in need of a Savior.

Like the other people in the Bible, you also were meant to point to God. You were created to show his greatness and worth. He is the greatest treasure. Run to him, hang on to him and don't let go, and you will find your greatest joy and happiness.

Why the Bible Was Written

The Bible is an ancient book—It was written thousands of years ago. God used more than 40 men to write down his message to us. It took about 1500 years to write the Bible! Most ancient books have been destroyed or lost—but not the Bible. The God of the universe watches over his Word and keeps it safe.

Many people have tried to destroy God's Word. The scroll of the prophet Jeremiah was brought to King Jehoiakim. He was so angry that he cut up the scroll and burned the pieces. But God commanded Jeremiah to write another scroll. (You can read about this in Jeremiah 36.)

900 years later, Diocletian, an idol-worshipping Roman emperor, ordered that all Bibles be destroyed. He destroyed many copies of the Bible. But God protected other copies of his Word and Diocletian failed to wipe out the Bible.

800 years after Diocletian, Voltaire, a French writer who did not believe in God, predicted that the Bible would disappear within 100 years. Little did Voltaire know that 50 years after he died, his very own printing press would be used to print Bibles and his house would be used to store Bibles!

God watches over his Word because God wants people to know him. Through the Bible, God calls people to believe in him.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples,
which are not written in this book; but 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 20:30-31*

This precious book has been preserved so that you could know God. Usually, we guard precious things very carefully. We put money in the bank to keep it safe; jewels are kept in a safe and only used on special occasions; breakable glass figures are kept in a cabinet; and famous paintings are kept in a museum. Often we cannot touch these things.

But the precious Bible is to be used, not put on a shelf. It is for every day, not just for special days. God wants you to read his Word, study his Word, think hard about his Word, and treasure his Word in your heart. Unlike other precious things which you are not even allowed to touch, you may even write in your Bible. However, the Bible should always be treated with care and respect because it is God's message to us.

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. —*Psalms 1:1-2*

How to Read and Respond to the Bible

The Bible is a spiritual book intended to touch the soul. The Bible has the power to change hearts. This is what Hebrews 4:12 says about the Bible:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged
sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of
marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

God's living and active Word can touch the conscience and convict of sin, it can comfort the discouraged and heal the soul that is far from God. It is like a sword cutting out sinful habits that are deep in the soul, ideas that are false, and rebellion in the heart. The Bible is powerful!

But you can read the Bible with your mind only and walk away with just information. You may know a little more, but it hasn't changed you. You can also read the words but harden your heart against their convicting or healing power.

We are blind to the truth in God's Word. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we will read words but we won't see spiritual truth. We are unable to open our hearts to the power of the Word of God. We desperately need God's help.

PRAY

So like the psalmist, we must approach the Word of God with the prayer that God will open our minds and hearts:

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous
things out of your law. —*Psalm 119:18*

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and
observe it with my whole heart. —*Psalm 119:34*

MEDITATE

Reading God's Word is like eating a chocolate chip cookie really fast. It is good but it could be enjoyed much more. Meditating on God's Word is like eating a cookie slowly, savoring each bite, thinking about the taste and how chewy it is. It is VERY good!

Psalm 1:2 connects blessing with meditating on God's Word. You will get so much more out of the Bible if you **think** about what you read. Read a short section and then stop. THINK. Ask yourself questions about the passage. Questions like:

- ✦ Who is speaking? To whom is he speaking?
- ✦ What does this say about God?
- ✦ Is there a command to be obeyed or a promise to trust?
- ✦ What do the words mean?
- ✦ What is God saying?
- ✦ Does this passage give me any topics for prayer?
- ✦ What are the verses before and after this passage; do they help me understand this passage?

Ask questions that the passage suggests. Remember the Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? questions. For example:

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars. —*2 Chronicles 16:9*

Some of the questions you could ask about this verse are: What does this say about God? How does God give strong support to his children? What did Asa do that was foolish? Is there a consequence to foolishness? Why is there a consequence? Is there a promise to trust or a command to obey?

Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. —2 Timothy 2:7

APPLY

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS WORD! Remember as you read the Bible that **God is speaking to you**. The stories in the Bible tell about things that happened in the past but they are also intended to give understanding today. The promises God made to his children in the past are also for the children of God now. The wisdom of the Bible can help us make decisions in our own lives.

As you read, ask God what he is saying to you. For example, in applying 2 Chronicles 16:9 you might ask, "Where do I need God's support in my life? What does trusting in God's support mean? Is there anything in my life in which I am trusting in others more than I am trusting in God? Have I acted foolishly and do I need to repent?"

We should always RESPOND to the Word of God. Sometimes, our response may be recognizing an ACTION we need to take or an ATTITUDE or idea we need to change. It may be a prayer that comes from our hearts, a decision we make, or a sinful attitude or action we must confess. After discovering what God is asking of us in his Word, we must then go and DO it.

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. —James 1:25

What the Bible Says About Itself

THE BIBLE IS RIGHT AND TRUE

For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. —*Psalms* 33:4

Every word of God proves true. —*Proverbs* 30:5a

GOD WILL FULFILL EVERYTHING IN HIS WORD

“I am watching over my word to perform it.” —*Jeremiah* 1:12b

THE MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE IS FOR ALL PEOPLE

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.” —*Luke* 2:10b

GOD’S WORD IS POWERFUL

“... so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” —*Isaiah* 55:11

GOD’S WORD IS ETERNAL AND UNCHANGING

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. —*Isaiah* 40:8

Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever. —*Psalms* 119:152

GOD’S WORD IS THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. —*2 Timothy* 3:16

GOD’S WORD GIVES HOPE

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. —*Romans* 15:4

GOD’S WORD PROTECTS FROM SIN

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. —*Psalms* 119:11

GOD’S WORD GUIDES PEOPLE IN WHAT IS RIGHT

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. —*Psalms* 119:105

HEARING GOD’S WORD IS NECESSARY TO BE SAVED

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. —*Romans* 10:17

How to Use the Bible

The Bible is divided into two parts:

1 THE OLD TESTAMENT

- ✦ older
- ✦ longer (39 books)
- ✦ written before Jesus came
(Jesus, **the Messiah**, is coming!)

2 THE NEW TESTAMENT

- ✦ newer
- ✦ shorter (27 books)
- ✦ written after Jesus came
(**the Messiah** had come)

Each TESTAMENT is divided into many BOOKS. So the Bible is a book of many books! Every verse in the Bible has a **reference** that tells where you can find that verse; for example, Genesis 1:1. To find a verse in the Bible, first look for the book of the Bible. The name of the book of the Bible is written at the top of the page (See the sample in the box below.) Every book of the Bible is divided into CHAPTERS. The chapter numbers are the BIG numbers. (See the sample.) Every chapter is divided into VERSES. The verse numbers are written in little numbers. (See the sample.)

GENESIS 41:32		Name of the Bible book
Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams <div style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; border: 2px solid #0070c0; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">41</div>	After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile. ² And behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. ³ And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ And he fell asleep and	<div style="color: #0070c0; font-weight: bold;">Chapter Number</div> <div style="color: #0070c0; font-weight: bold;">Verse Number</div>

- Let's practice finding a verse in the Bible. Let's find **Genesis 41:2**. What is the name of the book of the Bible? Right. It is Genesis.
- What is the chapter number? Can you find the big chapter number **41** on the sample to the left?

- What is the verse number? Can you find the small verse number **2** on the sample above?
- Now read the verse. You just found and read **Genesis 41:2**!

It is very helpful to learn the books of the Bible in order. If you don't know them yet, you can look on the **Table of Contents page** at the front of your Bible. But start memorizing them in order, so that you can find verses more easily.

Try finding these verses for practice. If you have trouble, ask someone to help you. Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 121:1; Luke 19:26; Romans 8:28.

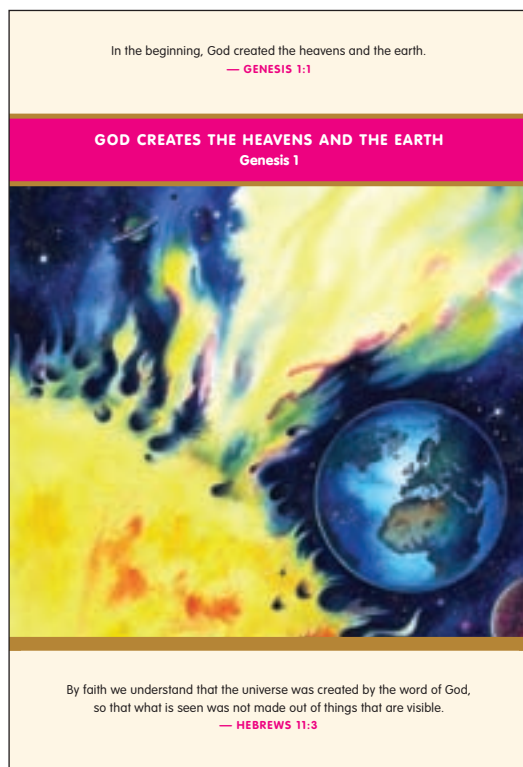
Even though the Bible is divided into two parts, the Bible is **ONE** story. The Bible is the story of God and his work in this world and with man. In the Old Testament the prophets told about the coming of Jesus and what he would do. The New Testament shows that the words of the prophets were true. For example, Jesus was born in Bethlehem just as the prophet Micah said he would be. Isaiah said that Jesus would be "wounded for our transgressions," and the New Testament tells how Jesus was crucified on a cross for our sins. Every word of God proves true!

About This Bible

The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. So your English Bible is a translation. A group of Bible scholars who knew these ancient languages very well studied each verse and wrote them in English for us. That is why there are different versions of the English Bible. This version is called the English Standard Version (ESV). There are some very good things about this version:

- ✦ It is **ACCURATE**. This means that the translators were very careful to choose English words that give a correct understanding of each verse.
- ✦ It is **READABLE**. This means that the sentences are put together in a way that makes the verse easier to understand and easier to read than some versions.
- ✦ It is **GOOD FOR ALL AGES**. This means that you can use this translation even when you are an adult. This is important because the wording you learn when you memorize verses will stay the same throughout your lifetime.

You probably already noticed something very unique about this Bible. It has pictures in it—lots of pictures! In fact, it has 214 pictures. The pictures are to help you understand what things were like in Bible times, to help you stop and meditate on the truth in the Bible, and to help you wonder about God and the way he works in this world. Study the diagram below to learn how to best use the pictures.



STEP 1: Read the top verse.

STEP 2: Study the picture carefully. Think about the verse and the picture.

STEP 3: Read the bottom verse. Think about why the bottom verse was included and what it says.

STEP 4: Read the title. What does it tell you about God? Find the verses in your Bible and read them. Then look at the picture and verses again.

Many times you will notice that there is an Old Testament verse and a New Testament verse on the same picture. This is to remind you that the two Testaments are one continuous story.

The Message of the Bible:

Turn to the BACK of your Bible. You will find many pages that will help you understand God's message in the Bible. These are not God's words. These are a person's words meant to help you understand God's Word. It is important to remember that these are human words, and this section is NOT part of the words of the Bible.

Ask your mom or dad or another adult to read these pages with you. Read slowly and think about what you are reading. Talk about it with the person who is reading with you. It will take you many days to read through these pages. When you get a little older, read them again.

If you study these pages well and understand them, you will have a good understanding of the message of the Bible. Then, as you read the Bible, you will be able to understand how different verses fit into the whole message of the Bible.

Bible Reading Plan:

2 Timothy 3:16 says, **"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."** So the whole Bible is important for us to read. But some parts are a little easier for children to understand than other parts. The Bible Reading Plan has a check-off list of sections of the Bible for you to read. When you finish a section, check it off. Take as much time as you need for each section. It does not need to be read in one sitting. Read carefully and thoughtfully. It will take you a while to read all the sections listed. Keep a bookmark in your Bible to mark where you are reading.

Memory Verses:

The best way to meditate on the Word of God "day and night" (see **Psalms 1:2**) is to have it memorized. It is very important to memorize when you are young, because children memorize easily. It is much harder to memorize when you are an adult. You might want to write your verses on a card and carry it with you or put it up where you will see it often.

Dictionary:

There will be words you do not understand as you read the Bible. There is a Dictionary of some of these words at the back of your Bible. When you read an unfamiliar word, see if it is in the Dictionary. For example, you may read the word "consecrate" in the Bible. Turn to the back of your Bible, find the Dictionary, and read what this word means.