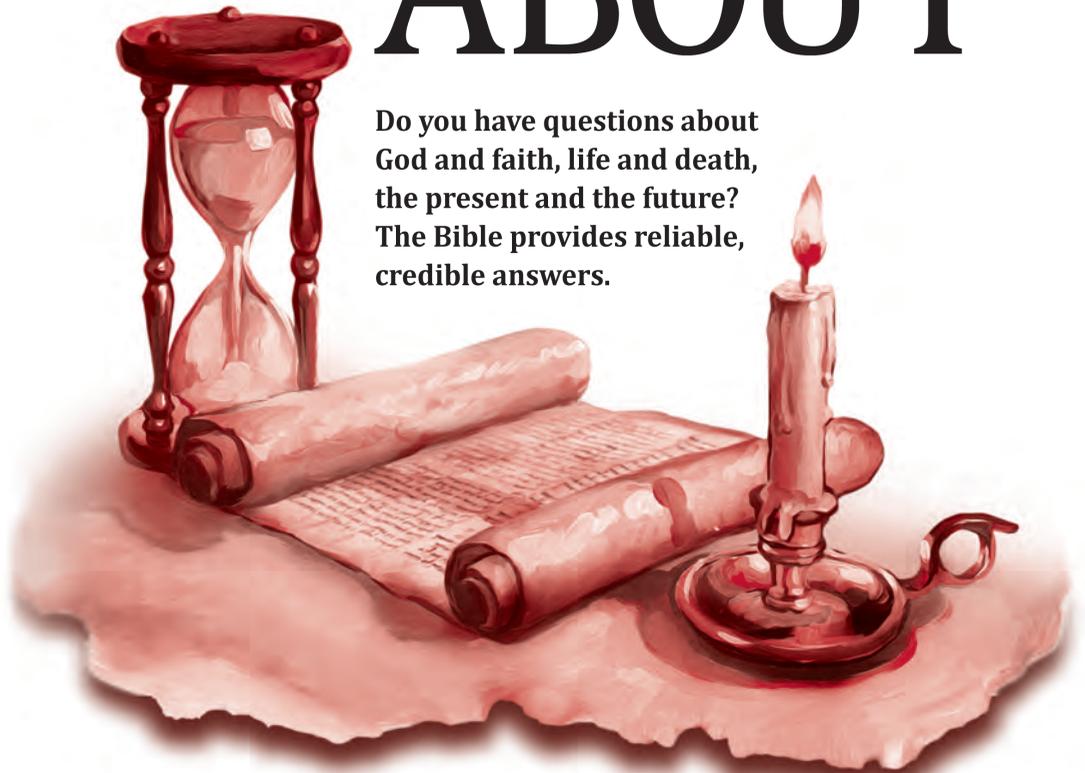


WHAT THE **BIBLE** SAYS ABOUT

Do you have questions about
God and faith, life and death,
the present and the future?
The Bible provides reliable,
credible answers.



MARK A. FINLEY



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What the Bible Says About Itself



The blazing Palestinian sun beat mercilessly down on a young Arab boy herding his few sheep in a remote area by the Dead Sea. It was just another ordinary day in his life. Each morning he led the sheep across the burning desert sands in search of a few morsels of food. He had no idea that this day would change the world.

When one of his sheep wandered away into a cave, he attempted to scare it out by throwing a stone into the cave. To his surprise, he heard the sound of breaking pottery. Thinking he had discovered some valuable hidden treasure, he raced home to tell his father. What they discovered in the cave that day was far more valuable than some ancient nobleman's riches. There, on the shores of the Dead Sea, in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. The clay jars in the cave did contain a treasure. They contained the oldest Bible manuscript in existence. These scrolls were written by the Qumran community approximately 150 years before Christ. These people were called "Essenes." They spent hours hand copying the Bible. To ensure accuracy, their copying laws were extremely strict. Some

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of the world's most outstanding Bible scholars and specialists in the ancient biblical languages have pored over these manuscripts for decades. These ancient scrolls eloquently testify to the accuracy and reliability of the Bible. They contain every book in the Old Testament.

Down through the millenniums, God's Word has been accurately passed from one generation to the next. From the Bible's first book, Genesis, to its last, Revelation, it answers our deepest questions and speaks to our heart's deepest needs. The Bible was written over a span of fifteen hundred years by more than forty authors. Many of these authors did not know one another. They lived in different places, spoke different languages, and were products of different cultures, yet each one, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, clearly presents God's eternal plan for the human race. There is no contradiction on these main themes of Scripture. There is an amazing unity of thought throughout the Bible. There is an incredible unity of purpose throughout the pages of Scripture. The Bible reflects the thoughts of a divine mind. In three thousand places, the Bible writers declare "and God said," "and the Lord spoke," or similar phrases. The Bible writers believed they were inspired by God, and the internal evidence within Scripture reveals that the messages are of divine origin. Discoveries in archaeology and the fulfillment of numerous biblical prophecies reveal the truthfulness of Scripture.

The main purpose of the Bible is to unfold God's eternal plan of salvation. The Bible contains history, but it is not primarily a history book. The Bible touches on science, but it is not a scientific textbook. The Bible provides insights into the human mind, but it is not a treatise on psychology. Although God's Word touches on a variety of disciplines, it is first and foremost a revelation of God's will revealing God's eternal truths to the human race. The Bible answers the three great questions of life: "Why am I here?" "Where did I come from?" and "What does the future hold?" It provides hope and courage for each of us.

You may have had questions for years about God and faith, life and death, the present and the future. The Bible provides reliable, credible answers. *What the Bible Says About* is especially designed to provide you with the answers you are looking for. This volume is organized in a very simple way. It takes a single topic and explores what the Bible has to say about that topic. You may have questions, such as:

- If God is so good, why is the world so bad?
- Why is there so much suffering in the world?
- How can I live forever?
- What do Revelation's prophecies mean?
- How can I know my sins are forgiven?
- What did Jesus say about signs of the end?
- What happens after we die?
- What does Bible prophecy predict about the end of the world?

Or you may have a host of other questions. You will find Bible answers here. In each chapter, you will discover your questions answered directly by the Bible. These are not the opinions of men, but answers directly from God's Word. If you have never studied the Bible before, you will be amazed at how clear and powerful it is. No other book has such life-changing power. No other book so satisfies the mind and transforms the heart.

As you begin this journey of discovery, why not offer a simple prayer and ask God to give you understanding of His Word? The One who inspired the Bible will inspire you as you read it. This first chapter is titled "What the Bible Says About Itself." In it we will discover how God communicated to the human race through His Word and how to understand the Bible for ourselves. So let's begin.

01

How did God communicate His plan for the entire world through the centuries?

Before Adam and Eve sinned, God communicated with them directly. But after sin, He revealed His will through the biblical prophets in visions and dreams and by the direct impressions of the Holy Spirit. God moved upon the prophets' minds, and they wrote down what He showed them in vision or the thoughts He impressed upon them. The Bible is the authoritative revelation of God's will. It is God speaking to us through His Word.

"Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 PETER 1:21).

"Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream" (NUMBERS 12:6, KJV).

"And Moses said: 'By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these

works, for I have not done them of my own will' " (NUMBERS 16:28).

The patriarch David said, "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 SAMUEL 23:2).

"He [the Lord God] spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began" (LUKE 1:70).

"Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (AMOS 3:7).

God spoke through His Holy Spirit and inspired the prophets to write down His messages. Although they recorded these messages in their own words, the message of the Bible comes directly from God. The Bible is God's Word.

02

Is the Bible really God's Word or is it merely a book written by men who were the product of their culture?

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 TIMOTHY 3:16).

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (HEBREWS 4:12).

"The Holy Scriptures . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 TIMOTHY 3:15).

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do

not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?' " (MARK 12:24).

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (ISAIAH 40:8).

Both the Old and New Testaments are inspired by God. The Old Testament consists of the first thirty-nine books of the Bible from Genesis to Malachi. It reveals God's plan for His people before Jesus' birth. The New Testament, the last twenty-seven books of the Bible (from Matthew to Revelation), reveals the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It especially describes God's instructions to His church today.

03

Can we really trust the Bible? Has it been changed through the centuries?

The great theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ. He is the great mountain peak of Scripture. All Scripture testifies of Jesus' love, grace, mercy, power, and desire to save us. He is the Bible's central figure.

"The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall *preserve* them from this generation forever" (PSALM 12:6, 7; EMPHASIS SUPPLIED).

"Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps [preserves] truth forever" (PSALM 146:6).

Jesus said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (JOHN 10:35).

Peter said, "This Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke" (ACTS 1:16).

"The Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God" (ROMANS 3:2, NIV).

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (**MATTHEW 24:35, NIV**).

The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible has preserved it throughout the

centuries. Recent archaeological and historical discoveries have further confirmed its accuracy and reliability. God’s Word is a safe, reliable guide.

04

What are God’s purposes in giving us the Bible?

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (**PSALM 119:105**).

“The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (**PSALM 119:130**).

“Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (**ROMANS 15:4**).

Paul told Timothy, “From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (**2 TIMOTHY 3:15**).

God’s Word is the clearest revelation of His eternal plan of salvation. Although nature, our conscience, and life’s circumstances reveal God’s workings, the Bible reveals His plans more clearly than any other source. It is God’s authoritative word to us.

05

Isn’t it easy to misunderstand the Bible? Are there keys to understanding and interpreting it correctly?

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (**2 PETER 1:20**).

“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it” (**DEUTERONOMY 4:2**).

“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (**DEUTERONOMY 12:32**).

“Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar” (**PROVERBS 30:6**).

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (**REVELATION 22:18, 19**).

To understand God’s Word, it is essential to listen to all of His teaching on a given subject. We avoid “private” interpretation by letting the Bible explain itself. The Bible

is its own interpreter. By allowing one passage of Scripture to explain another we discover God’s interpretation. We cannot pick and choose what sections or passages

of the Bible to accept or reject. If we want to understand the Bible, it is vital to approach it with honest hearts and minds willing to do what whatever God says.

06

Is truth a matter of personal opinion? What is the source of truth?

Praying to His Father, Jesus said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (JOHN 17:17).

“It is impossible for God to lie” (HEBREWS 6:18).

“The entirety of Your word is truth” (PSALM 119:160).

We live “in hope of eternal life which *God, who cannot lie*, promised before time began” (TITUS 1:2; EMPHASIS SUPPLIED).

“O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true” (2 SAMUEL 7:28).

“O LORD, . . . all Your commandments are truth” (PSALM 119:151).

07

What did Jesus declare about truth?

Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (JOHN 14:6).

house of worship and applied it to His ministry, His Jewish listeners were astonished, for they knew that this was the work of the promised Messiah—and that by reading this verse, Christ was thereby claiming to be the Messiah!

Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (JOHN 8:32).

From what did Jesus come to make us “free”? *From the shackles of sin and the prison house of false teachings.* The gospel prophet Isaiah predicted: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, *to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound*” (ISAIAH 61:1; EMPHASIS SUPPLIED).

“I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts” (PSALM 119:45).

“The Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:17).

LUKE 4:18-22 records that when the Lord Jesus read this verse from Isaiah in the

“Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day. . . . Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He

teaches sinners in the way. The humble He

guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way” (PSALM 25:4-9).

08

What attitude is essential in understanding Bible truth?

“If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (JOHN 7:17).

The Revised English Bible renders JOHN 7:17 as: “Whoever chooses to do the will of God will know whether my teaching comes from him or is merely my own” (EMPHASIS SUPPLIED).

Those who want to do God’s will “are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience” (LUKE 8:15).

Wouldn’t it be nice if these simple words could describe us—“He will teach us His

ways, and we shall walk in His paths” (MICAH 4:2)?

“The humble He guides in justice, and *the humble He teaches His way*. . . Who is *the man that fears the LORD*? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses” (PSALM 25:9, 12; EMPHASIS SUPPLIED).

An understanding of the Bible largely depends on a willingness to do whatever God requires. Bible study is not simply a mental exercise. It is a heart experience. If you are willing to do whatever God asks you in His Word, He will guide you into all truth.

09

Why do some people have difficulty discovering Bible truth?

Because our natures are fallen, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (JEREMIAH 17:9).

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (ISAIAH 53:6).

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (PROVERBS 16:25). This verse is repeated in the Bible in PROVERBS 14:12.

Some people who have a haughty, unreceptive attitude are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 TIMOTHY 3:7).

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts’ ” (HEBREWS 3:7, 8).

Understanding the Bible is difficult for some people because of their unwillingness to give up their own ideas. God invites us to seek His way, not our own. He invites

us to turn from the pride of our own understanding to humble acceptance of His revealed will in His Word.

It is very important to study the Bible for yourself. You can't rely on what others tell you. God invites you to go on a personal discovery of truth from His Word.

10 What method of Bible study is especially helpful to keep us from misunderstanding the Bible and falling into error?

“Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little” (ISAIAH 28:9, 10).

“These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 CORINTHIANS 2:13).

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them,

because they are spiritually discerned” (1 CORINTHIANS 2:14).

Paul testified, “My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 CORINTHIANS 2:4, 5).

Let's suppose you are putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Do you come to a conclusion regarding what the finished picture will look like without looking at the original picture? Certainly not! It's the same with God's Word. God invites us to study all the texts on a given subject before coming to a conclusion regarding what the Bible teaches on a particular topic.

11 Whom did Jesus promise to send to guide us into truth? What promises did He give to ensure that we will be led into His truth as we study the Bible with an open mind and sincere heart?

“When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears

He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (JOHN 16:13; EMPHASIS SUPPLIED).

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (JOHN 14:26).

As the Holy Spirit leads us in our Bible study, interpreting line upon line and text after text, we will know the truth of God. God has not left us alone in our pursuit of truth. He has promised the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

12 What is the main purpose for studying the Bible? Whom does the Bible reveal?

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (JOHN 5:39).

must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me’ ” (LUKE 24:27, 44).

“Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’ ” (JOHN 1:45).

The apostle Paul stood before King Agrippa, “saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (ACTS 26:22, 23).

“Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He [Christ] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. . . . Then He said to them, . . . ‘All things

13 As we study the precious promises of God’s Word, what impact will they have on our lives?

“His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 PETER 1:3, 4).

“We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:18).

“We may be partakers of His holiness” (HEBREWS 12:10).

The apostle Paul urges us to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (EPHESIANS 4:23, 24).

“As many as received Him [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name”
(JOHN 1:12).

The Scriptures testify or bear witness of Jesus. As we study the Bible, the power of the living Christ will transform us. Open your mind to God’s Word. Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you through the pages of

Scripture. Let God guide you in a deeper understanding of His truth. As you do, your life will be changed.

The most important directions in life involve getting from earth to heaven.