

What is the Bible?

The Bible pt. 1

9/24/2023

Day 1

What is the Bible? That's what we are going to be looking at this week. The quick answer is this; The Bible is a library of writings that are both divine *and* human, that together tell a unified story which leads us to Jesus.

This is part of a letter the apostle Paul wrote to a young preacher named Timothy.

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:14,15

According to these verses, what does Timothy "know"?

He knows the Scriptures, having learned them from infancy. He also knows those who taught it to him. Earlier, Paul had mentioned Timothy's mother and grandmother. Obviously he's talking about them.

How would Timothy be "convinced" of the truth of the Bible by knowing the people who taught it to him?

The Bible isn't just words and facts. It's the living word of God, and it's meant to be lived out. Within a family, people know each other very well, and so Timothy could see God's truth in the lives of Mom and Grandma. So he learned it in two ways.

How are the Scriptures described in verse 15?

What does that tell us? (The whole point is our relationship with Jesus. You can be a Bible brainiac, knowing every chapter and verse, but if you aren't trusting Jesus, you've missed the point.)

The question may arise with this passage: What Scriptures is Paul talking about? They didn't have the New Testament yet, did they? No, they didn't. While Paul's letters and an early form of a gospel might have been circulating, Paul was almost certainly talking about the Old Testament—which makes his statement about "faith in Christ Jesus" even more interesting. In the following century, however, Christians began to put the New Testament writings on par with the Old Testament Scriptures, believing that God "breathed" these words too.

What does "God-breathed" mean? Lets find out tomorrow.

Day 2

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

What does it mean that Scripture is “God-breathed”?

In the creation story of Genesis 2, God makes the first human out of the dust of the earth and breathes into him, giving him life. We might say that God breathed into the Scriptures as well. Obviously, when he made humans, he gave us great freedom to be ourselves. In the same way, it appears that he gave Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others the freedom to use their own creativity and their awareness of their world to write the books of the Bible, but that he “breathed” into it, so that this is not only *their* word, but the word of God.

Remember that the word for breath is the same as the word for spirit, so we might translate this verse as “All Scripture is Holy-Spirited.” The Spirit of God that blows through our lives, guiding us, also blows through Scripture, speaking to us through its pages.

According to this verse, what is Scripture “useful” for?

How does the Bible rebuke or correct us? Has that ever happened to you?

This isn't all that the Bible does. Note that it also teaches, trains, and equips. But sometimes it serves as that personal MRI, showing us what's wrong with our attitude, our behavior, our relationships, or whatever.

Day 3

Turn to Psalm 119. This is the longest chapter in the Bible, by the way, and it's all about God's Word. The Psalmist uses different words—law, statute, commands, etc.—but he's talking about the Scriptures.

- ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
- ¹⁰⁶ I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to keep your righteous rules.
- ¹⁰⁷ I am severely afflicted;
give me life, O Lord, according to your word!
- ¹⁰⁸ Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O Lord,
and teach me your rules.
- ¹⁰⁹ I hold my life in my hand continually,
but I do not forget your law.
- ¹¹⁰ The wicked have laid a snare for me,
but I do not stray from your precepts.
- ¹¹¹ Your testimonies are my heritage forever,
for they are the joy of my heart.
- ¹¹² I incline my heart to perform your statutes
forever, to the end.^[1]

How would you describe the situation of the Psalmist? Where is he coming from?

In what way is God's word a "light on our path"? What does that mean?

Have you ever experienced this? Has the Bible "illuminated" where you need to go—or how you need to live?

Of course this psalm was written long before streetlights. If you went walking after dark, you could easily stumble—unless you had some kind of torch to light your way. That's what he's talking about here. If he follows the teachings of Scripture, it will keep him from stumbling into the traps of his enemies. For us, the "snares" are the temptations we face. The Bible reminds us that it's foolish to put ourselves first, to feed our own desires, or to worship powerless gods.

What does verse 111 say about God's word (or his "statutes")? What does this mean?

They're a "heritage." This has the idea of "treasure," but it's also something that has been passed down to you, and that you pass on to others—much like Timothy received the word from his mother and grandmother and was teaching a church.

This verse also calls God's word "the joy of my heart." Too often we treat the Bible like a textbook—read the assigned verses each day. Or maybe it's a weapon to judge others with—pointing out all the things they're doing wrong. But what if we really rejoiced in the Bible?

What difference would that make?

Day 4

¹² *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.*

Hebrews 4:12

What does this say about God's word?

In what way is God's word "alive"? I mean, wasn't it written thousands of years ago?

What does that mean "dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow"?

The verse is poetic, imagining God's word as the sharpest sword ever. Just as a gladiator would slice the "joints and marrow" of an opponent, God's word strikes us at the "soul and spirit" level. The phrase "it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" is probably explaining the metaphor for us (since the word for "judges" has the sense of slicing or dividing).

So here's what the Bible does for us. It shows us what's right and wrong, good and bad, Spirit-inspired and driven by desires. This is the teaching-rebuking-correcting function that Paul told Timothy about.

Has the Bible ever helped you "divide" anything—or rather, to know the difference between one decision and another?

When people get serious about Bible study, sometimes they feel like surgeons, slicing through a chapter to see what each word means. But this verse tells us that the Bible is doing surgery on *us*. Be careful about manipulating Scripture to make it say what you want. We all need to open our souls to what God wants to do in us.

Some commentators might suggest certain differences between "soul" (our human nature?) and "spirit" (our Spirit-led nature) or even that joints and marrow have particular symbolism. Even if this works, it's not especially helpful to this discussion. Stick with the general meaning of the verse—that God's word pierces to our inner selves and helps us sort things out.

Day 5

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ 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. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ 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 1:22-25

According to verse 22, how can we “deceive” ourselves?

What’s deceptive about that?

What’s the mirror thing about?

If you look in the mirror and see something wrong with your appearance—a smudge on your cheek, a stain on your collar—you’ll do something to fix it. Same with the Bible. We “look into it,” and it tells us how we should live. If we don’t “do what it says,” we’re like the guy who sees a smudge but forgets to wash his face.

So how is the Bible like a mirror?

We’ve already seen this in the previous passages. The Bible rebukes, corrects, and trains us. It judges our thoughts and intentions. It’s not just an ancient book we study; it keeps telling us about ourselves. It teaches us, for instance, that we’re created by God in his own image. It also tells us we’ve fallen short of his ideal plans for us. In various passages, it describes the process of being tempted and the struggle to do the right thing. The descriptions are so perfect, it’s like God is inside our skin—and apparently he is. But God’s word also tells us how much he loves us and wants a relationship with us. It explains the work of God’s Spirit inside of us, empowering us to live better.

The Bible isn’t all about us—it’s about God—but we see ourselves in it.

Verse 25 mentions “the perfect law that gives freedom.” That seems like a contradiction. Doesn’t “law” tell us what to do? How is that “freedom”?

Our Creator knows the best way for us to live, and he keeps telling us—in the Bible—how things work out best for us, in this world and the next. We might think that freedom means doing whatever we want, but we soon find that many of our “free” choices end up enslaving us in various bad habits or addictions. God’s word shows us his way—a way that enables us to be everything he created us to be.