

The Bible – The Word of God

by Mike Bull

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A BOOK LIKE NO OTHER

Though the Bible is an old book, it repeatedly moves people to action. Men and women throughout the world read it, and change their lives!


What motivates these many people? Why is the Bible such a powerful book? How does such a book create happiness and contentment in so many lives? This booklet will answer these questions, as well as covering the following topics:

 *Where did the Bible come from?*

 *When was it written?*

 *Is the Bible believable?*

 *What is the Bible's content?*

 *Why was it written?*

A COLLECTION OF WRITINGS

The Bible is composed of two sections: First the holy writings of ancient Israel, known as the Old Testament, and second the holy Christian writings, known as the New Testament.

Although many men wrote the Bible during a long period of time, the message is consistent throughout. The reason for this amazing harmony is because the one living God inspired these writers. In other words, God gave them the words to write and speak. Therefore, the Bible is unique, in that it is the only writing to mankind from the one true God.

Though the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, the message of the Bible is for everyone, educated or uneducated, rich and poor. There is no “*respect of persons*” with God (see Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9). The good news in this book is for all nations and languages. (see Galatians 3:28-29; Jeremiah 9:23-24).

BOOKS, CHAPTERS, AND VERSES

There are 66 books in the Bible. Some are short and can be read in a few minutes, others are much longer. For convenience, the books of the Bible have been divided into numbered chapters (usually about a page) and verses (one or two sentences).

Passages of the Bible are referred to by book, chapter and verse. For example, Isaiah 45:6 means the book of Isaiah, chapter 45 verse 6. If you have a Bible, you can look a verse up by referring to the table of contents at the beginning of most copies. You are encouraged to look up the Bible passages contained in this booklet.

WHEN AND WHERE?

The Old Testament, was written over a period of about a thousand years. The writing began about 3,500 years ago, and was completed about 2,400 years ago.

Although most of the Old Testament writers were Jewish, many of them were separated by large distances. Some of them wrote from where Israel is today. Others wrote in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, though in those days the names of some of the countries were different.

The New Testament was written during a much shorter period of less than one century, just under 2,000 years ago. This section was also written predominantly by Jewish authors. Some of the authors were in Israel, though others wrote from what is today Turkey, Greece and Italy.

Many of those who wrote the Bible were not authors by profession, but were shepherds, kings, doctors, farmers, fishermen and others. These men were called apart by God to speak and to write down his message.

MYTH OR TRUTH?

There are many old books in the world. How can we tell if the Bible is myth or truth?

There are several important reasons why confidence can be placed in the message of this book.

First of all, the Bible is an accurate history book. Its description of kings and events can often be verified independently by other ancient histories. In addition many places mentioned in the Bible have been rediscovered in modern times by archaeology, where teams of people have dug into the earth and uncovered old cities of Bible times. Such teams of people have always verified the Bible descriptions of these cities, both their location, and other clues.

Again, the Bible is believable as truth because it makes bold predictions about future events, which are always accurate.

For example, just like today, there were many nations in Bible times. One of these nations was Edom, the descendants of Esau. God, who caused the Bible to be written, predicted with certainty that this nation would not survive, but would become extinct in the earth, so that they would no longer be a people. The Bible confidently says in the book of Obadiah:

“there shall be no survivor to the house of Esau; for the LORD has spoken”.
(Obadiah 1:18)

In contrast, the God of the Bible specifically said to the Jews:

“I am with you, says the LORD, to save you: though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a full end of you: but I will correct you in measure, and will not leave you altogether unpunished.” (Jeremiah 30:11)

These are not the predictions of men. If we were to pick which nations of today would exist one or two thousand years from now, it would be difficult to predict. We can have confidence in the Bible as the word of God because of this and many more prophecies about the future.

Another reason to believe that the Bible is truth and not myth is because its books agree and harmonise. Even though parts of the Bible were written in many different places and at different times, its message is in agreement with the truth about God, rather than endless contradictions.

The Bible is not a mysterious book, only for a select few, but is about mysteries revealed by God to those who are willing to read its messages. (see Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 1:9; Colossians 1:26-27).

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE CONTAIN?

The Bible tells about God. It shows his character and his greatness as well as his creative power and his immortality. It reveals God's interest in mankind as his children, and his longing for their love and obedience. It confirms that he is the only God:

“I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me” (Isaiah 45:5).

FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE END OF THE BIBLE WE READ THE HISTORY OF GOD'S RELATIONS WITH THE EARTH.

THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD

The first book of the Bible is called *Genesis*. It tells how God created every plant and animal species. He also created the conditions that ensured plants and animals would multiply on the earth.

God made two people, a man named Adam and a woman named Eve. They were separate and different from the animals because God made them in his likeness.

THE ORIGIN OF EVIL, SUFFERING AND DEATH

The Bible explains that Adam and Eve lived in a garden paradise that God had prepared for them. They had plants and fruit trees for food, but were not allowed to eat of one special tree in the middle of the garden. God told them that the consequences of eating this tree would be death.

The first people on earth therefore had a choice of whether to obey God's instructions, or to disobey. God did not force them to obey, but gave them the freedom either to love him, and act upon his rules, or to go their own way.

There was a creature in the garden that was more clever than any of the other animals – a snake. God had given this snake the ability to speak. Looking at the tree that God had

forbidden, the snake told Eve that the fruit would be good for Eve to eat, and that she would not die if she did eat it. Eve chose to listen and ate of the fruit of this tree. Adam also ate of the fruit.

Adam and Eve were punished, true to God's warning. They became mortal – dying creatures. Ever since, this man has been subject to death. God also brought suffering upon them: the woman would have pain during child bearing, and would be subject to her husband. The man would have to sweat, working hard to produce enough to eat for his family.

The snake too was punished, because it had lied when it said that Adam and Eve would not die if they ate of the tree. The snake from then on was cursed by God; to crawl in the dust. And God put hatred between mankind and the serpent.

REMORSE AND FORGIVENESS

The Bible teaches about God's truth and mercy. Truth, in that his word is truth, and mercy, in that he loves men and women, and wants them to be sorry when they have not done what is right. God will forgive us when we sincerely repent, and ask for his forgiveness.

Before the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, broke God's rule, they were naked in the garden, and were not ashamed. After they disobeyed, they became aware of their nakedness and felt shame. God provided animal skins as a covering for Adam and Eve. The death of this animal was the first death in the Bible. It showed that just as God provided the covering of skins, so he would one day provide a covering for sin.

A NEW HOPE

God's plan for the earth was not cancelled just because the first man and woman disobeyed him. He promised that a child would come who would crush the snake. Throughout the Bible, the snake came to stand for sin, and the impulses within all people to disobey God. However, it was not until about four thousand years later that the promised child - Jesus - was born.

A NEW START

Adam and Eve had children, and their children also had children, until there were many people in the world. Some tried their best to obey God, but most were very evil, and after several hundred years, there was only one family left that obeyed God.

God was sad and angry because people were so wicked, and he decided that there was going to be a fresh start, and that all of the wickedness of the world would be destroyed. The father of the only good family was named Noah. God told Noah of his plan to destroy the living things on earth with a flood. He told Noah to build a very large boat, large enough for his family, and the many animals that God also wanted to save. (see Genesis 6)

God sent the flood, and destroyed everyone except Noah and his family. They were saved because they had built the boat as God told them. Because they believed God and acted on what he said, they were saved. (see Genesis 7-9)

After the flood, the population of the earth grew again. At first the people lived in one place and spoke one language. They built a large tower in order to make a name for themselves, but God was not pleased with this, and confused the languages of the different families of people. In the following confusion, families left, and populated different regions of the world, and nations were started, some of which can still be traced today. (see Genesis 10).

A NATION SEPARATED FOR GOD’S PURPOSE

Some time later, God chose to call a man and make his descendants into a special nation. His plan was also that the promised saviour would one day be born to this nation.

The man he chose was named Abraham, who lived in the ancient city of Ur, which was located in what is now known as Iraq. God told Abraham to move away from his relatives to a new land that he would show him.

Abraham crossed over the Euphrates River. He was therefore called a “Hebrew” or “someone who crosses over”, and became the father of the Hebrew nation, or the Jews. God brought him to a land called Canaan, since people called Canaanites were then the inhabitants.

Although Abraham was old, God promised that he and his children would inherit the land, and that his descendants would some day be as numerous as the stars in the sky. God also promised that because of Abraham, all families of the earth would be blessed. Abraham never did inherit the land, but God will raise Abraham from the dead to receive it at a future time – a message of hope that the Bible repeats many times for other faithful believers. (see Hebrews 11).

Abraham had a son named Isaac as well as other descendants that grew into great nations. Isaac had a son named Jacob, whom God called “Israel”. God’s purpose was to be shown in the descendants of Jacob – Israel.

The descendants of Jacob - Israel - lived as wandering shepherds in the land of Canaan. Then, when there was a severe famine, they settled in the land of Egypt. After some years, the Egyptians made them slaves, but God sent a man named Moses to deliver them from slavery.

The story of Moses is found in the second book of the Bible, *Exodus*. God sent plagues on Egypt, forcing the king to let the people of Israel go free. Moses led them through the desert back to the land of Canaan. God gave them special laws in the books of *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy*, which showed Israel how they were to live. After Moses died, Joshua led Israel into the land, to defeat the Canaanites. The book of *Joshua* tells how God was with Israel, and gave them the land as He had promised.

The next book, *Judges*, tells how Israel lived in their land and were ruled by judges who tried to keep them worshipping God, though they often worshipped idols, which made God angry.

In *1 Samuel* and *2 Samuel* we read how the people of Israel asked for a king who could lead them into battle like kings of the other nations. The first king, Saul, started off fairly well, but ended up disobeying God, and was rejected. God called the next king, whose name was David, “*a man after God’s own heart*” (Acts 13:32). This king, and his son Solomon, made Israel into a great nation. A great temple for God was build, and people came to pay tribute from all around, and to see God’s glory in his kingdom on earth. David was also a musician and the *Psalms* contain many of his songs.

Sadly, the kings that followed were not all as good, and after Solomon the nation was split into northern and southern kingdoms. We read about these years in *1 Kings* and *2 Kings*.

Not one king from the northern kingdom of Israel was ever good, even though God sent many prophets to tell them of his ways - for example *Ezekiel*, *Hosea* and *Amos*. Eventually the northern kingdom was taken into captivity by the armies of Assyria.

Some of the kings in the southern kingdom of Judah were good, but others were evil. God sent many prophets to this kingdom too, such as *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah* and *Micah*. Eventually, Judah too was taken into captivity as slaves by the armies of Babylon.

Later, in the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, these Jews returned from Babylon to the land of Israel. Back in Jerusalem, God’s temple was rebuilt, though without the splendour of the old temple built by king Solomon.

THE PROMISED SAVIOUR

The Persians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans ruled over the land of Israel. There was no Jewish king in Jerusalem. God had foretold (Ezekiel 21:27) that no king would come until a time of His choosing.

For many generations, the prophets had promised Israel a saviour - a king who would fulfil the promises to Abraham. This saviour was also given the title of “Messiah” or “Christ”, two words which both mean “anointed”. This was because God had anointed him to be King over all the world.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

In the *New Testament* the gospels of *Matthew* and *Luke* tell how a baby boy was born to a young virgin named Mary in the land of Israel. God’s power, or Holy Spirit, came upon her. The child – Jesus – was therefore the Son of God. He was also Son of Man, because his mother was a normal woman. Throughout his life, he was subject to the problems, trials and temptations of all other men and women.

Mary was engaged to a godly man called Joseph. God sent an angel to Joseph to tell him the baby was from God, not man. Then, when Mary was nearly ready to give birth, they

had to travel to Bethlehem. When Mary and Joseph arrived there was no place to stay so they slept in an animal barn. There, Jesus was born, and spent his first night in a feeding trough as a makeshift bed. So the saviour of the world was born in poverty, in humble circumstances.

THE TEACHING AND WORK OF JESUS

Jesus the saviour grew up in a small village named Nazareth in northern Israel. He learned the trade of Joseph, a carpenter. When he was thirty years old, he began to preach, and teach about God's coming kingdom. With God's power, he also healed sick people, and showed those who would listen the way to live, and prepare for this kingdom. Jesus showed God as a father to his children, and taught his disciples to say "Our Father" when speaking to God in prayer.

Twelve disciples followed Jesus. He travelled throughout Israel, showing the people God's ways. But the leaders of the Jews, were jealous because so many people listened to Jesus, and plotted to kill him.

Jesus often spoke in stories, or parables. He explained the meaning of these parables to his disciples. The parables were often about God's coming kingdom on earth, and what it would be like, who would be there, and how to be ready. The New Testament contains four records of the life of Jesus, the Gospels of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke* and *John*.

After about three and a half years of preaching, the chief priests and rulers in Israel succeeded in arresting Jesus. They accused him of many things, condemning him to death. After a quick trial, they handed him over to the Roman governor, demanding his execution. After some hesitation, the governor had Jesus killed in the Roman way, by crucifixion, nailing to a cross of wood dropped into a hole in the ground. The victim died after hours of suffering. Jesus died a sinless man, never having disobeyed God. Even so, he showed in a public way what humanity deserved – death.

THE RESURRECTION

After three days God raised Jesus from the dead. The Jews who had killed him were perplexed, as Jesus' body was missing, and his disciples insisted that he was alive.

Jesus appeared to over five hundred disciples during the few weeks that followed, before ascending to heaven. Angels of God promised that Jesus would return, the same way he had gone into heaven.

Jesus' disciples were now very bold to preach the good news of the kingdom as Jesus had, and that all men could be saved by Jesus' work. The Jews could not show that Jesus was still dead, and could not disregard God's power shown by the disciples in miracles of healing.

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

In the book of *Acts* we read about how Christianity soon spread through the Roman world, and congregations of believers sprang up in many cities. Much of the New Testament of the Bible is made up of letters from Jesus' disciples to these new believers, showing them God's teachings, and helping them live in Godly ways. Many of these letters, such as *Romans*, *1&2 Corinthians*, *Galatians*, *Ephesians* and *Philippians* were written by a converted Jew by the name of Paul.

The preaching of Jesus' disciples showed that God's purpose was with men and women everywhere, not only the Jews. The message was that individuals everywhere should learn about God, repent of their evil deeds and be baptised into the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. The disciples also preached about the kingdom of God, and showed that God would keep all of his promises to Abraham, and other faithful men in the Old Testament.

Many, many people who believed the message about God's kingdom and Jesus Christ were baptised at that time. They were completely submerged in water, as a sign that they were willing to die with Jesus, and then rise out of the water to a new life. Jesus himself commanded his disciples to teach God's message and baptise people of all nations who believed it.

THE LAST BOOK OF THE BIBLE

The last book of the Bible, *Revelation*, contains a message from God and Jesus Christ to seven first century congregations. This book speaks of future events in sign and symbol. There are many allusions to previous parts of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament.

Following Revelation, the Bible was complete. There are no other holy writings from God. The Bible offers the only way of being saved from permanent death. (Acts 4:12; Acts 16:30-31). It is a book for all races, all colours, all cultures, rich and poor, men and women, old and young. It contains the words of life, and is truly able to change lives.

WHY WAS THE BIBLE WRITTEN?

The Bible is a very special book, which has been preserved for thousands of years. It has been translated into hundreds of languages and dialects. Ancient copies of the Bible have been discovered, and the words have not changed.

God caused the Bible to be written because he wants to be known. He is not interested in those who want power, human wisdom or riches, but in him who:

“understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth.” (Jeremiah 9:24).

God wants people to move away from their own ways, and turn to his. God is looking for people who will believe him, and put their trust and faith in him. God wrote his word in

order to show that he has a plan for mankind, and wants as many as possible to turn to him and be saved, and to live forever in his kingdom on earth.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

Jesus' disciples preached repentance to the Jews in Jerusalem soon after his ascension to heaven. Many of the Jews realised that they had contributed to the death of the Son of God, and were pricked in their conscience. They asked the disciples, "*what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:37-38)

The answer was clear and simple. "*Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*". In another situation, it was asked, "*what is to prevent me from being baptised?*" (Acts 8:36-38) The answer this time was, "*if you believe with all your heart, you may*".

The same applies today. It is important to read the Bible to understand and know the true and living God. Just like Adam and Eve at the beginning, he gives us a free choice. We can understand and accept his message, be baptised, and join other believers dedicated to following him.

Read the Bible for yourself. Write to the address on the cover for a free Bible Reading Planner. Make time to read it every day, and discover why it has changed so many lives for the better. God as a father has called you as one of his children. Will you answer?

Mike Bull

QUESTIONS

1. Who wrote the Bible?
2. Give two reasons why we can believe the Bible.
3. What is the name of the first book of the Bible?
4. What was the nation descended from Jacob?
5. What are 'Psalms'?
6. What is a 'prophet'?
7. Which books tell about the birth of Jesus?
8. What did Jesus do that was special?
9. Why did God give us the Bible?
10. What must we do to be saved?