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THE D WORD  
3. STUDY TO MEDITATION

Abraham Lincoln said

“I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man.

George Washington said

It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible

Patrick Henry said,

The Bible is worth all other books which have ever been printed

Sir Isaac Newton said

There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any work of secular history

There has never been a book like the Bible, in its distribution, in its translation, in its mass appeal, in its endurance. And yet even for many followers of Christ, the book often gathers dust. Dr Hugh Ross has polled people about the Bible and almost 90% say they've read the whole thing. But when pressed, they can't name 4 books in the bible, or 4 of the 10 commandments. We buy the bible, cheer the bible, we just don't read the bible.

For many new followers of Christ, the Bible is just strange. It's as riveting as reading a dictionary, or as easy to understand as the instructions for tax form 1040EZ – which isn't. Why is that?

1. IT'S REALLY OLD.

The Bible's story dates back **4000** years and it contains history from 5 and 6 thousand years ago. THAT'S old. The older something is, the more foreign it's going to seem.

2. IT'S NOT ORGANIZED CHRONOLOGICALLY.

IF you sit down to read the Bible like you'd read a novel you'll soon be confused, wondering which part belongs where. It's not in chronological order. But if you understand that it's really a **LIBRARY OF BOOKS**, then it will begin to make sense.

Let's start with the Old Testament. Jesus referred to three sections: the LAW, the PROPHETS and the WRITINGS. Our modern bibles have four:

- a. **The Pentateuch** – First 5 books of Moses: Genesis Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
- b. **The History Books** – this section contains MOST of the Old Testament story line and chronology, from Joshua, Moses successor, to Nehemiah, the last big name leader before New Testament times.
- c. **The Wisdom Literature**, This is a collection of poetry and proverbs collected over centuries without much narrative, mostly written by David and Solomon.

- d. **The Prophets.** Written at various times, some of these contain a little history, but mostly just prophetic writings. This section itself is broken down into two subsections: The major and minor prophets. Not meaning important and unimportant. Major = long, minor = short.

### OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY TIME LINE

Old Testament history can be broken down into the following main eras:

1. **Creation/Flood – sets the stage**
2. **Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.**
3. **Slavery/Exodus – Promised Land**
4. **Judges – no king**
5. **Monarchy – transition from last Judge to first Kings (Saul, David, Solomon)**
6. **Divided Kingdom – civil war split country.**
7. **Exile – two of them**
8. **Return**

What this time line gives you is a sense of where everything fits. As you read the prophets it's important to note, they fit inside the history section. Finding out this history and knowing where events and people and books fit will help you appreciate the Bible more.

If you get to know the names of the players, the history of God's "team" I think it's going to suck you in.

Now, let's do the same with New Testament chronology.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> CENTURY TIME LINE:**

Birth of Jesus – 4 BC

Herod the Great (Infanticide, Big Temple, Building projects, Caesarea, Masada)

Jesus at Temple (at 12 years old) –

Tiberius Roman emperor

Jesus death/resurrection 30

Paul's Missionary Journey's and Letters -

Claudius emperor

Nero Emperor –

Peter Paul martyred (during Nero's reign, 65)

Gospels Written – (early dating, before 70 A.D. – no mention of:)

Temple destroyed – (by Romans in 70)

Persecution – spread of churches  
John and Revelation Written – 95 – 100AD

Just like the Old Testament, **The NEW TESTAMENT is a LIBRARY OF BOOKS**

1. HISTORY
  - a. Gospels (4 stories of Jesus life and ministry)
  - b. Acts (story of early church to about 62)
2. LETTERS
  - a. Paul's
    - i. Major (Romans; 1,2 Corinthians)
    - ii. Early (Galatians, 1,2 Thessalonians)
    - iii. Prison (Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians, Philemon)
    - iv. Pastoral (1,2 Timothy, Titus)
  - b. General
    - i. Hebrews
    - ii. Peter's
    - iii. James
    - iv. John's
    - v. Jude
3. PROPHECY
  - a. Revelation

So that's the overview of this amazing book we read from every week. (Bible Handbook would be a good investment.) Why do we read from it? If we're all about a spiritual God, why do we Christians put such emphasis on a physical book? How do I know it's God's word?

### **BIBLE AS GOD'S WORD**

**First**, we first have to ask what the Bible says about itself? This is how the Bible talks about itself:

2 Pet 1:20-21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

And Paul says something similar:

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Over 600 times the phrase, "God said" is used.

Now, just saying it's God's Word doesn't prove that it is, but you should know, not many books actually say they're God's Word. We have this idea that there's dozens of holy books claiming to be words from God. Actually the only books that claim to God breathed in a remotely similar way boils down to a couple: B.O.M., Koran. Vedas does not.

## INSPIRATION

But what does that mean, “God breathed”? That’s where we get the word inspiration from. “Inspiration” affirms that the Bible was written BY HUMANS not God, but humans so influenced by God (“carried along”) that the result is accurately called God’s Self Revelation.

Now, that’s a different view of inspiration than Mormons and Muslims. They think of their holy books as being wholly a work of God. They hold to a **dictation** model of inspiration. In fact, both Mormonism and Islam have a “golden tablets” idea that their book exists in heaven in perfect form, an angel dictated it to a human who is a mere scribe in the process.

Ironically, the dictation model backfires in giving us more confidence.

- Because, for example: when you read the Koran, you can clearly see the human context and influence, like when the voices misrepresent basic Christian doctrine or when the voices justify Mohammed’s marriage to young slave girls to his older wives. So denying the human element seems disingenuous.
- Another example, the Book of Mormon clearly plagiarizes whole sections of the King James New Testament – yet it was supposedly written in 600 BC in Hebrew in North America!
  - o The upshot for applying is also stickier with the golden tablets idea. If God dictated all the Koran, there’s no wiggle room for context or interpretation – it’s all prescriptions, equally and directly from God from start to finish.

There’s a part of us that would like golden tablets! Fax from heaven. And truthfully, one part of our Bible was written by God on tablets – the 10 commandments. Yet, what God most gives in Jewish history is not golden tablets, but special revelation to human individuals, with personalities and cultures, and the result is collected by a human community and transmitted by human scribes and all that humanness comes through. YET, God takes all that humanness and under the direction of the Holy Spirit it is inspired and becomes the WORD OF GOD.

So now, we have this book, endorsed by Jesus, written by humans, inspired by the Holy Spirit, providentially preserved through history and the result a text that is God’s Word – which is why it is useful for correction, for training in God’s way, because it contains God’s Voice.

## **MISUSING THE BIBLE**

But because this book is like our Master, fully human and fully divine, it’s not beneficial to us to just hold it. It’s not a magic book of incantations. It doesn’t help you to own 5 of them. It’s living and active ONLY when we read it, understand it and apply it properly.

It’s possible to have a Bible and even to read it and still not understand it or apply it well. In fact, already in NT times, Peter was warning people about this. He said about Paul’s

letters:

2 Peter 3:16 His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. NIV

And Paul would say about the O.T.:

1 Tim 1:8 We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

So friends, if it's possible for us to distort God's Word and for us to use it improperly, it's even not as simple a matter as just reading it to grow. We are responsible to do whatever it takes to find God's voice inside the human voices of this book. Otherwise we might make the same mistakes as this guy:

He picked up his bible and just opened it up, thinking, "this is God's Word! It's magic!" So the first verse he landed on said, "whatever you do, do it with all your might" Alright, he said, so he opened it again. The next verse he saw said, "what you are about to do, do quickly". Oh, man he said, what am I supposed to do? He opened it again and read, "then he went away and hanged himself."

If it was the Koran, that's what you'd do. But it's the Bible, inspired, not dictated. So you have to FIND God's voice inside the human voices to know how to apply it.

For example, do we sacrifice our daughters like Jephthath did in Judges? Some of you may wish that was God's word to you. Do we marry many women like David did? Maybe. It's God's Word after all. To know how to use it properly, we must interpret it rightly.

So here are some principles of good interpretation to keep in mind:

- O.T./N.T.
  - o Old Testament, much as been abrogated in new covenant
  - o Creation, Fall, Law, Redemption, New Creation.
  - o Progressive revelation, culminating in Christ (whatever God is, he is not different from what we see in Jesus.)
- prescriptive/descriptive
  - o the Bible describes holy war, but never prescribes it as universal principle.
- temporal expression/abiding principle
  - o "greet one another with a holy kiss"
- consider context, linguistic, historical, cultural
  - o Author's intent.

How should I discipline myself to use God's Word?

- Hear (at church),
- Read (daily, start with 5 minutes),
- Study (use a pen, ask questions \*)
- Memorize (hide it inside)
- Meditate (mull it over, focused thinking, anti-worry)

- Picture it
- Pronounce it
- Paraphrase it
- Personalize it
- Pray it
  - Key to change... because you're shaped by your thinking Prov 4:23  
"Guard your heart"
  - Key to answered prayer... Jesus: if my words dwell in you, ask
  - Key to successful living... Joshua: meditate on the Word, you will be successful.
- Apply (do what it says, don't just be a hearer)

## **CONCLUSION**

The eternal God is a communicating God. He has seen fit to enshrine his thots in Writing and in Flesh. That's a amazing thot. That ought to inspire you to worship. God wants to reveal himself to YOU! Amazing. So shouldn't we be eager students of that Self Revelation?

*To do so, we must be readers and hearers, but not hearers only: doers of the Word – as we are transformed by greater understanding, and meditation.*