



# How Can We Know?

Many of our “important questions” seem difficult to answer, and different people answer them in different ways. Who and what should we believe? How can we know truth?

## Truth Discovered and/or Truth Revealed

- ❑ Some say “There is no truth,” but this statement is a truth-claim, so it is self-defeating. Some say we discover truth through scientific inquiry. Certainly, we can learn many truths through scientific discovery. Some say we discover truth through meditation. Others say we *cannot* know truth *unless* truth is revealed to us by the Source of truth. Christians believe the only way to know truth (especially spiritual truth) is by God’s “revelation.”
  - ⚙ General revelation – God’s revelation to all persons at all times and in all places. God reveals himself through nature, history, and human consciousness.<sup>1</sup>
  - ⚙ Special revelation – God’s revelation to particular persons at definite times and places. God has revealed himself in various ways in human history, ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ. The Bible is the record of, and is, the essential special revelation of today.<sup>2</sup>

## Scripture

- ❑ “Scripture” literally means “product of writing.” Different religions have different “Scriptures” – that is, sacred or authoritative writings that supposedly provide truths, wisdom, and answers to “important questions.”



## Different “Scriptures”

Religion/ Philosophy	Scriptures (sacred or authoritative “writings”) <sup>3</sup>	Source/Cause (according to adherents)
Naturalism	N/A. (We might say the naturalists’ “Scriptures” are the writings of scientists and philosophers)	Science, Philosophy
Buddhism	Theravada – <i>Tipitka</i> (“ <i>The Three Baskets</i> ”) 500-250 BC Mahayana – no clear limits (>5000 volumes), includes <i>Lotus Sutra</i> Vajrayana – <i>Kangur</i> (108 volumes), <i>Tanjur</i> (225 volumes)	Enlightenment (Buddha did not claim divine inspiration)
Hinduism	Vedas (Shruti: “what is heard”) – <i>primary Scriptures</i> 1500-600 BC Smriti: “what is remembered” – <i>secondary Scriptures</i> . <i>Numerous writings, including the popular Bhagavad-Gita</i> 400-300 BC	<i>Shruti</i> – revealed to inspired sages ( <i>Smriti</i> not claimed as revelation)
Islam	Qur’an – <i>according to Islam, the Qur’an is the will of Allah (God) dictated in Arabic (it includes its own versions of many Bible characters and stories)</i>	Revealed by Allah to Muhammad (610-632)
Christianity	Bible ( <i>see page 4 for a brief description</i> ) 1500 BC – 90 AD	Revealed by God

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-16

<sup>2</sup> John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21

<sup>3</sup> Scripture dating was taken from readily available sources on world religions. Estimation of dates is often difficult and is frequently disputed.

## Distinctive Characteristics of the Christian Scriptures

- ❑ The Bible is the best-attested text of any ancient writing in the world.
  - We can be confident that today’s Bible is authentic (consistent with the original text).
- ❑ The Bible is rooted in actual historical events.
  - God has revealed himself in “what he has done” in history.
  - The historical accuracy of the Bible is confirmed by both internal and external evidence, including extra-biblical sources and archeology.<sup>4</sup>
  - The actual occurrence of particular historical events (e.g., the resurrection of Jesus) is essential to the Christian faith (*1 Corinthians 15:7*).
- ❑ The Bible contains prophecies that were literally fulfilled hundreds of years after they were written (see *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell).
- ❑ The Bible was written over a period of roughly 1500 years by more than 40 different human authors, but it is still remarkably unified.
  - This Bible is unified because it records one continuous story, revealed by the one Divine Author (see “How is the Bible ‘God’s Word’?” below).
- ❑ The Bible is the revelation of a *personal* God concerning his *relationship* to humankind.



## How is the Bible “God’s Word”?

- ❑ The Bible says, “All Scripture is God-breathed” (*2 Timothy 3:16*).
  1. What does this say about the nature of the Bible? Read 2 Peter 1:20-21.<sup>5</sup>



## Why Read & Study the Bible?

2. People attend Bible studies for different reasons.<sup>6</sup> Why are *you* interested in Bible study?
3. Christians believe the Bible helps us answer our “most important questions.” Do you think the Bible answers *all* our “important questions?”<sup>7</sup> How much does it answer?

What questions does the Bible answer according to the following verses?

📖 “...the Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (*2 Timothy 3:15*)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See ‘The Reliability of the New Testament’ on the ICF website, or ask Jay for a copy.

<sup>5</sup> The Bible is ‘God-breathed’ (*theopneustos*) – some translations say ‘inspired.’ The origin of the Bible is God, not man. The human writers were ‘carried along’ or ‘moved’ by the Holy Spirit (*2 Peter 1:21*). While the writers of Scripture had their own active role in writing Scripture, the Holy Spirit guided them so that the words they wrote were the words God wanted them to write. In that sense, the Bible is ‘God’s word.’

<sup>6</sup> For example, international students and scholars may attend English-speaking Bible studies to improve their English, or learn about another culture and belief system. Others may be searching for truth and guidance.

<sup>7</sup> We may not find clear answers to *all* of our questions, but the Bible, along with the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment and guidance, provides *adequate* answers to our most important questions. The Christian faith is not about knowing everything we want to know, but rather knowing and trusting the One who does know everything.

<sup>8</sup> God uses the Bible (His written revelation) to lead us to faith and salvation. God uses the Bible to lead us into a growing relationship with Him.

- 📖 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV)<sup>9</sup>



## Getting the Most out of the Bible

- ❑ Commit to understand & respond appropriately.
  - 📖 *Jesus said*, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” (John 7:16-17, NIV)
- ❑ Humble yourself.
  - 📖 “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6, ESV)
- ❑ Pray.<sup>10</sup>
  - 📖 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7, NIV)
- ❑ Understand the spiritual nature of God’s Word.
  - 📖 “What we have received is...the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us...The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 2:12, 14, NIV)<sup>11</sup>
- ❑ Be regular in “feeding” on God’s Word (we should “feed” daily).
  - 📖 *Jesus said*, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4, NIV)
- ❑ Seek to understand the basic purposes, themes, and teachings of the Bible.
- ❑ Seek to understand individual passages *in context*. It may be helpful to read more than one translation. To gain sound understanding of the Bible, use good Bible study methods.<sup>12</sup>
- ❑ Others?

## Reflection/Application

- If you are a Christian, you should know that the Bible is your “instruction manual” for life. Are your beliefs and way of life firmly based on the Bible? Make a specific commitment to regularly read and study the Bible, allowing God’s Word to teach, rebuke, correct and train you, so that you will be thoroughly equipped for the Christian life.
- The Bible is a truly unique book that *must* be seriously considered. Whatever you believe now, commit to read and study the Bible. Ask questions. And be open to the “possibility” that the Bible presents the Truth that answers your “most important questions” about life.

<sup>9</sup> The Bible is our ‘instruction manual’ for life.

<sup>10</sup> Pray that God would help you understand and apply what you read. Remember that the Word of God is living. In other words, God is present as we read the Bible, and the Holy Spirit can give us fresh understanding as we read.

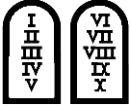
<sup>11</sup> Nonbelievers are limited in their understanding and acceptance of the Bible’s teaching because they are ‘without the Spirit.’ In any case, God uses the Bible to speak to nonbelievers too! However, nonbelievers should realize that true understanding is spiritual understanding. Thus nonbelievers should be open to the Holy Spirit’s work in their life, which is primarily to help them understand their spiritual need and ‘see’ that salvation is found only in Christ.

<sup>12</sup> Sound method involves understanding the historical and literary contexts of the passage. The historical context may include the physical, geographical, cultural, and ideological context, as well as historical events. The literary context involves understanding the language itself, including the literary form and immediate context (Robertson McQuilken, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1992], pp. 67-68.) See Jay’s *Understanding the Bible* for a suggested Bible study method.


## The Bible

- ❑ The Bible is the best-selling book in all of history. The word “bible” was derived from the Greek word *biblia*, which means “books.” The Christian Bible is comprised of 66 books, written over a period of roughly 1500 years by approximately 40 different human authors. However, the Bible is also one book, containing two main sections: the Old Testament (old covenant) and the New Testament (new covenant).<sup>13</sup>

### *The Old Testament*

- ❑ The Old Testament contains **39 books**, written over a period beginning at least 1400 years before the time of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament, written in the Hebrew language (and some Aramaic), has different types of literature, including:
  - 📖 **The Law & the historical books** (17 books, including Genesis through Esther): These books record the history of what God did, primarily through the people of Israel. They record the formation of Israel and the history of the nation prior to the time of Jesus. 
  - 📖 **Poetry and wisdom books** (5 books, including Job through Song of Songs)
  - 📖 **Prophecy** (17 books, including Isaiah through Malachi): These books record the prophets, those who spoke God’s message. The prophets spoke mostly in the context of Israel, but many prophecies apply to the whole world, and many relate directly to Christ.

### *The New Testament*

- ❑ The New Testament contains **27 books**, written within the first century after the time of Jesus Christ. The New Testament, written in the Greek language, includes:
  - 📖 **The Gospels** (4 books, including Matthew through John): These are historical books concerning the life of Jesus Christ. 
  - 📖 **The Acts** (1 book): This historical book records the beginning and spread of the Church.
  - 📖 **The Epistles** (21 books, including Romans through Jude): These books are epistles (letters) written from Church leaders to other Christians for various reasons, mostly instruction in the Christian faith.
  - 📖 **The Revelation** (1 book): This book speaks about the return of Jesus Christ to the earth, the end of this age, and the consummation (completion, fulfillment) of the age to come.

### *The Scope & Theme of the Bible - 'God's Story'*

- ❑ The Bible spans the history of the earth. The first book (Genesis) begins, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” The last book (Revelation) talks about the end of this earth, and the making of a new heaven and a new earth (*Revelation 21:1*).
- ❑ Genesis records the creation of man, and speaks of mankind’s good relationship with God at the beginning. But man rebelled against God, resulting in mankind’s separation from God under His holy and righteous judgment. The world is now fallen and needs salvation.
- ❑ The Bible reveals God’s plan to provide a way through which mankind can be reconciled to God, resulting in salvation and eternal blessing for those who respond. God’s plan surfaces in Genesis with His promise to Abraham, continues through Israel (the descendants of Abraham), and eventually leads to Jesus, through whom all nations can be restored to God.

<sup>13</sup> ‘testament’ is derived from ‘covenant’ – an agreement between two parties that establishes a relationship of obligations or mutual responsibilities. Some Bible covenants provide only divine promises while others entail obligations. God enacted a ‘new covenant’ with the coming of Jesus – providing a new way of relating to God.