



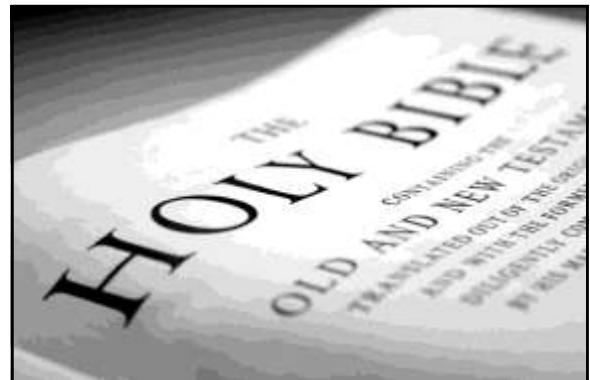
# The Bible: God's unchanging Word

Psalm 119:9-18

## Introduction

The Bible is consistently the world's best-selling book and has had a greater impact on nations, cultures and individual lives than any other work of literature in history. Many western democracies were founded on biblical principles and the legal framework of these nations still largely reflects a morality taken from the Bible. Many notable men and women through the centuries (including, in the last century, Martin Luther King and Muhatma Ghandi) have cited the Bible's influence on their lives and work. The Bible has now been translated into well over 2000 languages and is available in a wide variety of versions – varying in style from King James English to Cockney rhyming slang!

The Bible (which actually means 'library') is variously referred to as 'the Scriptures', 'the Word of God', and even 'the Good Book'! It is split into two main parts – the **Old Testament** (the Jewish scriptures written before Christ's birth), and the **New Testament** (covering Christ's earthly life and beyond). It contains 66 books in all: 39 in the OT and 27 in the NT. The Old Testament can broadly be described as a



foreshadowing of Christ – i.e. showing God's original design in creation, the consequences of humanity's sinfulness, and our need of a Saviour. The New Testament, then, can broadly be described as the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the person of Jesus Christ.

The literary styles in the Bible include historical narrative, letters, poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy and apocalyptic (literally 'revelation' or 'unveiling'). It was written over the course of 1,500 years, over 40 generations, by more than 40 authors...all from different walks of life: including shepherds, fishermen, kings, peasants and doctors. It was written during times of war and times of peace. It was

written in three different languages on three different continents. It contains every human emotion and addresses every human experience. Amazingly, despite such huge diversity, the Bible has a unity of message that is woven throughout and it still speaks authoritatively into our lives today. It exposed the motives of our hearts, informs our beliefs about God (doctrine) and shows us how to live God-honouring lives today.

### God's Word?

Although the Bible was written by human authors, most Christians proclaim that the Bible is also God's Word to us: although human authors penned the content, every word originated in the heart of God and was given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We can therefore accurately refer to the Bible as God's Word.

Three words sum up what the Bible says about itself: Revelation, inspiration and illumination. **Revelation** means that God has chosen to reveal His nature and will through the Bible; **inspiration** is the process through which God gave us the Bible – i.e. He inspired human authors to write down His words (2 Tim 3:16); and **illumination** is the Holy Spirit's work of bringing light to the words of the Bible as we read them, helping us to understand and apply what God is saying to us today (Luke 24:45).

### Reliability

Based purely on the volume of evidence, we can be much more confident about the contents of the Bible than about almost all the history we take for granted. It's been said that there is more evidence for Jesus than for Julius Caesar. There are many more manuscripts of the Bible than of any comparably ancient writings, and they go back to much closer to the original date of writing than do the manuscripts of comparable works (see table):

| Name of Work         | When written | Earliest copy  | Span | Number of copies                          |
|----------------------|--------------|--|------|---|
| Heredotus            | 488-428 BC   | AD 900   | 1300 | 8   |
| Thucydides           | 460-400 BC   | AD 900   | 1300 | 8   |
| Tacitus              | AD 100       | AD 1100  | 1000 | 20  |
| Caesar's Gallic War  | 58-50 BC     | AD 900   | 950  | 9-10                                      |
| Livy's Roman History | 59 BC-AD 17  | AD 900   | 900  | 20  |
| New Testament        | AD 40-100    | Earliest scraps AD 130<br>Complete manuscript AD 350 | 300  | 5000 Greek,<br>10000 Latin,<br>9300 other |

These figures, and the quality of the manuscripts, have led experts to conclude that the text of the Bible we have today is reliable and accurate:

*“In the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests, the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings.”*

(F. J. A. Hort)

And:

*“The interval between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”*

(Sir Frederic Kenyo)

In short, it is the most remarkable and influential collection of writings in human history.

## Life Group questions...

- 1. Do you sometimes struggle reading the Bible? Share some tips on what has helped you.**
- 2. If somebody asked you why Christians think the Bible is so important, what would you say to them?**
- 3. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. What do you think Paul meant when he referred to the Bible as 'God-breathed'? How should this affect how we read the Bible?**
- 4. Read Hebrews 4:12. What do you understand from this verse about the role of God's Word in the life of every Christian?**
- 5. Read James 1:22-24. Compare these verses to Luke 6:47-49. What is the lesson of these verses? What is the consequence of not applying this to our own lives?**
- 6. Read Psalm 119:9-11. What does it mean to hide God's Word in our hearts? How do we do this?**
- 7. As a Life Group, how can we encourage one another to go deeper into God's Word and make the Bible a bigger part of our lives?**