

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

The Bible is a very big book. Actually, it is a library of 66 different books. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. These books are all joined together because they have one common theme. This theme is God's plan to save man from his sins through Jesus Christ. The first 39 books, the Old Testament, tell us that "Christ is coming." The first four books of the New Testament tell us that "Christ has come." The last 23 books of the New Testament tell us that "Christ is coming again."

In order to understand the Bible properly, one needs to ask five questions as he reads: (1) Who is speaking? (2) Who is spoken to? (3) When is he speaking? (4) What type of language is the speaker using? (5) What are the circumstances or conditions under which he is speaking? If one can answer these five questions correctly, it will help him to understand the Word of God clearly.

Who is speaking?

Everything in the Bible was written by men who were inspired by God. However, these inspired writers sometimes recorded by inspiration the words of evil men. Even the words of Satan are found in the Bible (See Job 1:9-11; 2:4,5; Matthew 4:3,6,9). These words are accurately recorded, but they are not recommended for us to follow today. If one asks, "Who is speaking?" it will help him to know whether the words he is reading are words he should obey.

Who is spoken to?

In Genesis 6:14, we have the following commandment of God: "***Make yourself an ark of gopher wood.***" Is it necessary for us today to build a ship out of gopher wood in order to please God? No, God does not want us to do this. This command was given to Noah. It was necessary for him to obey it in order to be saved from the great flood which God was going to send on all the world. But this command does not apply to us today. If we answer correctly, "Who is spoken to?" we will see this command was meant only for Noah.

When is the Bible writer speaking?

Is the writer speaking to people such as Abraham and Isaac who lived in the Patriarchal Age when God revealed His will directly to the fathers? Or, is he speaking to the people of Israel who lived under the Law God gave to Moses at Mt. Sinai? Or, is he speaking to people today who live under the Law of Christ, which is the New Testament?

In the days of the Law of Moses under which Israel lived, animal sacrifices, sabbath keeping, special feast days, instrumental music and choirs and a special priesthood were all a part of required worship (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23; 1 Chronicles 25; 2 Chronicles 29:25; Psalm 150). But Jesus fulfilled the Law, Psalms, and Prophets [the Old Testament] (Luke 24:44). He has taken it away (Colossians 2:14). Today, all men live under the Law of Christ, which is the New Testament (Hebrews 8:6-13). If we ask, "When is he speaking?" it will let us see that these Old Testament laws of worship are not for us. We must go to the New Testament to find how God wants us to worship Him today.

What type of language is the inspired writer using?

All human languages have two types of speech: literal and figurative. Literal language is the type which is found in the historical books of the Bible such as Genesis and Exodus, the book of Acts, etc. It is fact. Literal words must be understood to have their actual meaning. In literal language, if a sheep is mentioned, it means a four legged animal which has wool on its back.

Figurative language is different. Words are used to represent ideas or thoughts which are different from the actual meaning of the word. For example: a sheep or lamb may be spoken of, but an animal is not meant. It is being used to represent something else which has some of the qualities of a sheep or lamb. Jesus was a man. He is the Son of God. But in figurative language in the Bible, He is sometimes spoken of as a lamb. John the Baptist said of Jesus: "***Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world***" (John 1:29)! Lambs were used for sin offerings under the Law of Moses. John did not mean that Jesus was an actual lamb. But he meant that Jesus would be the offering for our sins.

What are the conditions or circumstances in which this writing is given?

If we know the circumstances surrounding the writer at the time he writes, it will help us to understand what he is saying. For example: many people have great difficulty understanding the book of Revelation. But if we know the circumstances under which the book was given, it will help us to understand its message. The writer of Revelation was John, the apostle. He had been imprisoned by the Roman government on a rocky island called Patmos. This was done because he was a Christian. The heathen Roman government was persecuting the church of Christ near the end of the first century (about A.D. 95 to 100). The things which were revealed to John were "***things which must shortly take place***" (Revelation 1:1). The book of Revelation was intended to encourage those Christians who were being persecuted in the first century (Revelation 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5, 12, 21). Any time that Christians are persecuted, they can gain great encouragement from studying the book of Revelation.

The Bible is God's inspired Book. It is His revelation to mankind. But in order for us to understand the Bible, we must learn how to study it properly. We must "***rightly divide the word of truth***" (2 Timothy 2:15). If we will ask these five simple questions as we study, we will find that we can indeed understand God's Book!