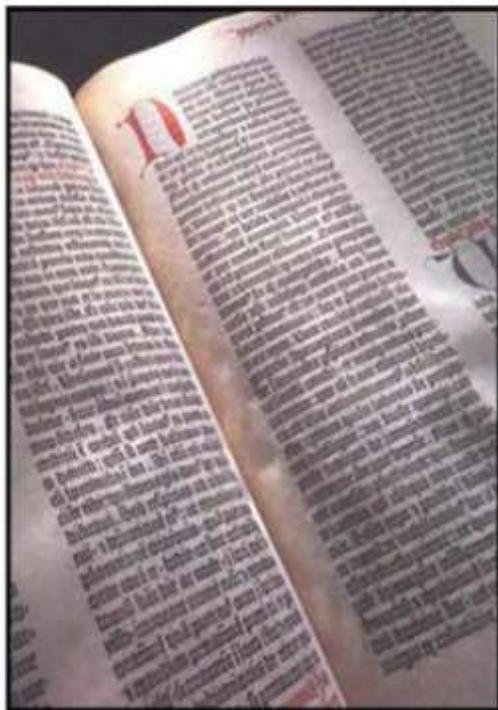


THE BIBLE



Page from the 42-line, 1453 Gutenberg Bible



A FENLANDS CHURCH STUDY BOOKLET

The Bible

A Study

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The cover picture is of the first printed Bible. Before this all Bibles were copied by hand – a painstaking work by monks. The printed Bible came at a time when believers were seeing the importance of having God’s Word in their own language instead of only in Latin.

This is one of a set of straightforward studies about the Christian Faith. They do not cover every aspect but try to present the basic truths that will help the reader discover more for themselves.

Bible quotes use the New International Version

THE BIBLE

The Bible is often referred to as “The Word of God”. We need to respect this and also understand what is meant by it.

First, let us make sure we see that the Bible is not a “magic book”. It does not have unusual properties or powers nor do the words contained within it. The power of the Bible is in the Spirit. Many people have read the Bible and found it a reason not to believe. They express horror and dislike for what they read inside. At best they accept that Jesus was a “good teacher”. However, everyone who approached God’s Word with humility and a searching heart will discover the truth that sets us free!

Our modern world wants a nice God who is oblivious to the corruption, wickedness and vile behaviour that goes on. It wants him to identify all the nice people and, if necessary “do something” about the nasty people – but not be too harsh. I know this is being sarcastic but it does highlight the problem that the Bible is not “nice” reading! It gives us a realistic picture of human nature and explains why we are this way. It also shows that God is not pleased with the dependence on self and man-made gods. BUT, the amazing thing is that the Bible reveals a loving, gracious, merciful, righteous Person who really cares about our condition and has prepared a better future for those who trust him.

Deuteronomy 6:6 -9 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

God commanded that his words should be written down thousands of years ago. When the Lord Jesus was tested in the wilderness he answered Satan with the words, “It is written ...”. It has been the sacred duty of believing people to write down God’s words. It is an amazing thing that, over thousands of years of opposition, persecution and destructive intent, the Bible has survived, intact and safe.

2Timothy 3:16,17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

When the apostle Paul wrote these words he was thinking of a collection of writings that were honoured as God's revealed word. He may have had some idea that the writings of the Apostles were to be included in this collection. There have been discussions about which books should be in or out of the collection. Over all this God has ruled and ensured that we have in writing what we need to know. It is important that we recognise a spiritual control over the Bible that has preserved it against all kinds of interference. If we do then we will read it and benefit from it.

Hebrews 1:1,2 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Reading the Bible can be a challenge – even for a believer! Where do you start? Why all the details and lists of names? We are used to a very different kind of writing. It is possible that we do not consider it necessary to think very deeply about what we read? We respond superficially to the things we read and are more influenced by general opinion. Knowledge about all sorts of things has increased over the last couple of centuries. However, it is still partial and fragmented. Scientific ideas are just accepted and then new discoveries demand that we adjust our opinion or beliefs. History presents a “truth” but time forces an adjusted view of some event or person. We need to understand that the Old Testament is a bit like that. It is a gradual unfolding of the truth about God and his purposes. God did not reveal everything all at once but chose to reveal some things at different times. We need to see that only when Jesus appeared did we receive the full revelation of God and his purposes. Jesus is God's “last word”. Rather he is God's complete Word. So we understand the Old Testament through him and the New Testament in him.

When we do this we find that the Holy Spirit breathes life, love, grace and truth out of every page of the Bible and ministers (serves) Jesus Christ to us. Puzzling pages begin to make sense – when we see them in the Light of Jesus.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, God's chosen Servant, the Saviour of the World. He is THE WORD of God! "In the beginning was the Word ..." - this is not an easy concept. It is not just about spoken words and sentences but the essence behind these. Jesus expresses all that God is; he is the wisdom and power of God. So the expression of what God is brought the universe into being and brought Jesus to live on earth in the likeness of human beings. The Bible is an expression of God's Word – in words. Within its pages is the revelation of Jesus Christ. These written words require the work of the Holy Spirit to bring them to life. That is a bit like the opening words of Genesis where the Spirit of God hovers over the dark waters and when God says, "Let there be Light" - there was light!

So allowing the word of Christ to live and make a home in us is about receiving Christ himself and his words. In the same way that the Word brought a glorious creation into being, the Word brings a new creation in our lives and we begin a transformation into his likeness. We begin a process called "sanctification" that changes us into the people God wants us to be. This process will be completed when we enter glory (heaven, the presence of God, go to be with Jesus). This process is speeded on through reading the Bible and "digesting" God's Word.

2Corinthians 3:6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

When Paul wrote this he made a very important point about the way we read and use the Bible. He describes himself and other apostles as competent servants; they were sensible, trained and had the ability to teach from the Bible in a way that brought life to their hearers. This implies that the opposite can occur – people can teach from the Bible without being competent and cause havoc. It is too easy for us to use the Bible as a "rule book", as a means of having power over others. The Law was, in the first instance, used to keep some control over the nation of Israel until the revelation of the Messiah. Once Jesus appeared everything changed and a NEW COVENANT was introduced that was not about control but about grace. A lot of New Testament writings deal with this topic

because Jewish believers needed to realise that the controls of the Old Covenant had been done away with in Christ, through his death and resurrection.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

The Lord Jesus speaks these words in a prayer to his Father. It contains several things we need to trust in and have faith about. Jesus is the Word, he is the truth and he sets us free. The Bible contains the expression of God's Word and brings us the truth that sets us free. This is made available to us through the work of the Holy Spirit of Truth. We live in a world where truth is accepted only in a personal form. We choose our particular kind of truth because it suits us. Some would say that there is no absolute truth. Believers in Jesus will not agree because we accept that truth is not a thing but a Person. We believe what Jesus said; we believe what Jesus did; we believe what Jesus is going to do. So we accept his word as truth.

So, truth, God, the Bible are all wrapped up in one Person – Jesus. People who confess to believe in Jesus take this on and believe Jesus. We have a faith that belongs to Jesus – it is not ours to play around with but His for us to trust and follow with all our hearts!

James 2:1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of (ou)r faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.