

WHAT IS THE BIBLE

2 Peter 1:19-21

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At Church Acadiana we love the Bible. We study it together on Sundays and in small groups. We teach it to our kids. We read it every day in private. We memorize it.

But what is the Bible? **2 Peter 1:19-21** gives us an overview of what the Bible is.

19 We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

6 FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE

ONE: The Bible is confirmed by fulfilled prophecies.

Verse 19 ends Peter's explanation of why we believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

One, because of eyewitness testimony – verse 16. Two, because of the Transfiguration in which God explicitly proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God. Three – because Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament – Verse 19.

Verse 19 “We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed.” The “prophetic word” refers to the Old Testament. In other words, another reason to believe in Jesus is because He fulfills hundreds Old Testament prophecies.

But if Jesus fulfills hundreds of Old Testament prophecies, then that also confirms the trustworthiness of the Bible. The Old Testament confirms the identity of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ confirms the authenticity of the Old Testament. This

is one of the primary reasons we believe that the Bible is the word of God. It has many fulfilled prophecies.

We already looked at many of the Messianic prophecies that were fulfilled by Christ. But let me show you a few other fulfilled prophecies.

The first is in the book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 25:11, Jeremiah predicted that Israel would serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. In Jeremiah 29:10, Jeremiah predicted that at the end of seventy years God would restore the Jews to their homeland. And that's exactly what happened. In 605 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judah and forced them to pay tribute. A few years later He took most of the Jews away to live in Babylon – including Daniel and his three friends. Exactly 70 years later, the Persians had conquered the Babylonians, and King Cyrus of Persia issued a freedom decree allowing the Jews to return to Israel. He also paid for the rebuilding of their temple.

A second example of fulfilled prophecy surrounds the same events. In Isaiah 45, Isaiah predicted that God would raise up Cyrus and enable him to conquer the world, and then he would free the Jewish captives and be benevolent toward them. We know from history that this happened. The amazing thing is that Isaiah made this prophecy 150 years before Cyrus was even born. In Isaiah 45, he calls Cyrus by name!

TWO: The Bible is beneficial to those who pay attention to it.

Verse 19 “We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it.”

In other words, it will benefit you if you pay attention to the Bible.

How does the Bible benefit those who pay attention to it? The Bible has too many benefits to recount, but let me just mention **five benefits of the Bible** that you may not know. **One: The Bible helps you overcome depression. Psalm 119:28** “I am weary from grief; strengthen me through your word.” **Two: The Bible helps you to be happy. Psalm 19:8** “The precepts of the Lord are right,

making the heart glad; the command of the Lord is radiant, making the eyes light up.” **Three: The Bible gives you comfort in your affliction. Psalm 119:50** “This is my comfort in my affliction: Your promise has given me life.” **Four: The Bible helps you to achieve success. Joshua 1:8** “This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do.” **Five: The Bible helps you to overcome worry. Psalm 119:165** “Abundant peace belongs to those who love your instruction; nothing makes them stumble.”

When he signed into law an Act of Congress proclaiming 1983 as the "Year of the Bible," **Ronald Reagan** said, "Within the covers of the Bible are all the answers to all the problems that face us today, if we'd only look." The Act asserted “a national need to study and apply its teachings.”

President **Theodore Roosevelt** said, “A thorough knowledge of the Bible is more important than a college education.” He graduated from Harvard.

THREE: The Bible is like a lamp shining in a dark place.

Verse 19 “We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

Peter mentions one of the ways that the Bible benefits us. It is like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

“Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” This refers to the Second Coming of Christ, which is often called the Day of the Lord, the day, the day of judgment, the day of God, and that day. Christ refers to himself as the morning star in **Revelation 22:16** “I am the Root and descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

The Bible is like a lamp. It helps us to see in this dark world until Jesus comes back. When Jesus comes back, there will be no more sin; no more devil; no more temptation. But right now, we need light.

How is the Bible like a light?

The primary way that Satan attacks us is with deception. He lies to us. If he can get us to believe a lie, then his work is done, because our actions follow our beliefs. If we believe a lie, then we will live according to that lie.

So the devil tempts us with lies like these: “God doesn’t exist. God doesn’t love you. God isn’t watching. God won’t reward you. Godliness is a waste of time. You can’t have fun without sin. You can’t be happy without sin. There’s no heaven. There’s no hell. The Bible can’t be trusted.”

Every day the devil is selling you lies. **1 Peter 5:8** “Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.”

And that’s how the Bible benefits us. The Bible is a light shining in a dark place. It helps us to see the lies of the devil for what they are. The Bible helps us to see what is real, and what is fake. What is true, and what is false. What is good, and what is bad. That’s why David wrote **Psalms 119:105** “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.” The Bible is our lie-detector. If you know the truth, then you can detect the devil’s lies and live in the truth.

FOUR: The Bible is called Scripture.

Verse 20 “Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet’s own interpretation.”

Notice that Peter makes a reference to Scripture. By this he means the Bible.

The word “Scripture,” or *graphe* in Greek, was what the first century Jews and Christians commonly called the Bible. Originally it was called Scripture, or the Scriptures.

Jesus usually called the OT the Scriptures. **John 5:39** “You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me.” His followers did the same. **Luke 24:32**, “They said to each other, ‘Weren’t our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us?’” **Romans 1:2** “which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.”

But “Scripture” isn’t the only name for the Bible. The Bible is given many names. Jesus referred to the OT as “the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Lk 24:44).” He also called it the Law and the Prophets (Mt 5:17). And sometimes He simply called the entire Old Testament the law (Ps 82:6). In Nehemiah it is called the book of the law (Neh 8:3). In Psalm 1:2 it is called the instruction of the Lord. Psalm 19 refers to it as the testimony of the Lord, the precepts of the Lord, the command of the Lord, and the ordinances of the Lord. Psalm 119 calls it the statutes of the Lord, and the righteous judgments of the Lord. Paul called it the Holy Scriptures, the word of God, and the word of life. Peter calls it the word and the prophetic word. And James called it the perfect law of freedom.

Today we call Scripture the Bible, but Christians didn’t start using the word “Bible” until many years later. The word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which means books – since the Bible is not one book, but 66 books – 39 in the OT, and 27 in the NT.

FIVE: The Bible was written by prophets.

Verse 20 “Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet’s own interpretation.”

Here Peter says that Scripture contains prophecy. Some of Scripture is law, some is narrative or history, some is poetry, some is didactic (or teaching), and some of it is prophecy, such as the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

But in verse 19 Peter refers to the entire Bible as “the prophetic word.” So the Bible contains prophecy, but the Bible is prophecy.

The word prophecy can mean two different things. On the one hand, a prophecy can be a prediction of the future. The Bible contains many prophecies. On the other hand, prophecy is simply the revealed word of God.

So the Bible contains prophecy, because of its many future predictions, but it is also prophecy in its entirety because it is the revealed word of God.

In that sense, every author of the Bible is a prophet, even if they didn’t make any predictions. They were prophets because God used them to reveal His word. **Hebrews 1:1** “Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways.”

Who were the prophets who wrote Scripture?

The Bible was written by more than forty authors over a period of 1,500 years.

The authors included a shepherd, a king, a prophet, a scribe, a cupbearer, a politician, a doctor, a tax collector, a Pharisee, a fisherman, and a brother of Jesus.

Every author but one was Jewish; Luke was the only Gentile.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, except for a few verses in Aramaic; and the New Testament was written in Greek, the common language of the Roman Empire in the first century.

By 500 BC the entire Old Testament was completed. And the entire New Testament was written in the first century, just a few years after Christ’s death.

From very early the vast majority of the books in the NT were universally accepted as Scripture, but there wasn't an official canon, or definitive, authoritative list of inspired books.

Over time, other writings began to emerge, and so there arose a need to clarify which books were inspired Scripture, and which were not.

So church leaders gathered together to clarify the canon of Scripture. They looked for three important features. 1) If the document had apostolic authorship (or an associate of the apostles), 2) and was accepted by all the churches, 3) and agreed with the rest of the Bible, it was treated as the inspired word of God, right alongside the Old Testament.

In the 300s AD the official canon that we have today was recognized.

In the early 300s the Christian historian Eusebius named the 27 books as the New Testament used by churches around the world.

Then in 367 AD the church leader Athanasius published an official list of the 27 books that we now have in our New Testament. From then on Christians around the world have accepted the divine inspiration of the 39 books in the Old Testament, and the 27 books of the New Testament.

SIX: The Bible is God's word.

Verse 20-21 "20 Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

"No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation."

The Bible is not Moses's ideas put to paper. It is not David's philosophy of what God is like. It is not Paul's opinion. It is not Luke's interpretation of something he heard. It is not Matthew's imagination.

“Because no prophecy ever came by the will of man.”

The Bible doesn't exist because Moses decided to make a Bible; or because Samuel decided to make a Bible; or because the apostles decided to make a Bible.

“Instead, men spoke from God.”

It is not a man's interpretation, it is God's revelation. The Bible is God's word. It is the Vox Dei; the voice of God. It is God's mind. It is God's thoughts. The Bible has over forty writers, but only one author.

“As they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

The Bible is not by the will of man. It is God's voice, and God's choice. The writers of Scripture wrote because the Holy Spirit told them to.

One time the prophet Jeremiah was so frustrated that he wanted to give up, but God made him go on. **Jeremiah 20:9** “I say, ‘I won't mention him or speak any longer in his name.’ But his message becomes a fire burning in my heart, shut up in my bones. I become tired of holding it in, and I cannot prevail.” Jeremiah spoke God's words, not his own. And he spoke because God told him to. God moved him.

And not only did the Holy Spirit tell prophets to write, but He carried them along. It doesn't say that the Holy Spirit dictated every word to them, and they mindlessly copied it down. It says that He carried them along.

God used the personalities and backgrounds and vocabulary of each writer so that each writer's style is different. But He carried them along, ensuring that every word was exactly what God wanted them to write. Every word was God-breathed. **2 Timothy 3:16** “All Scripture is inspired by God....” Literally, all Scripture is God-breathed.

Christians believe that the entire Bible is inspired by God – every single word. The theological term for this is the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture. Plenary means all – the whole Bible. Verbal means words – every single word is inspired by God. Every single word was exactly what God wanted it to be.

The Bible does not contain God’s word; it is God’s word. If I wrote a letter, it would not merely contain my word; it is my word. The Bible does not contain God’s word; it is God’s word, because every word comes from Him. “Men spoke from God.” When you read the Bible, you are reading the very words of Almighty, Creator, Sovereign God.

Because the Bible inspired by God – every single word – then it is also inerrant (without error) in its original autographs, because God doesn’t make mistakes, and He does not lie. (The original documents of Scripture are called autographs, and early copies are called manuscripts.)

Here is our church’s statement of faith about what the Bible is. You can find this on the church website under **Essential Beliefs**. “The Bible is God’s word to all men. It was written by human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. Because it is inspired by God, it is truth without any mixture of error.”

SO WHAT? HOW TO HANDLE THE BIBLE

Now that we know what the Bible is, we know how to handle the Bible.

ONE: We must praise God for the Bible. Psalm 119:7 “I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous judgments.” **Psalm 119:62 (TLB)** “At midnight I will rise to give my thanks for your good laws.” **Psalm 119:164 (ESV)** “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules.”

Without the Bible we wouldn’t know God; we wouldn’t ourselves; we wouldn’t know how to treat one another; we wouldn’t know Jesus and the way of salvation; we wouldn’t know about heaven and hell. Without the Bible we are blind.

God did not have to give us the Bible. He did not have to reveal Himself to us. He did not have to give us His law. He did not have to give us His wisdom. We certainly don't deserve to have it. But God is merciful.

Psalm 103:10 "He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities."

He chose to reveal Himself to us. **Psalm 103:7** "He revealed his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel."

And through Israel to us. That may be the best verse in the Bible. God chose to reveal Himself to us.

And now that we have the Bible we can see. We have truth. We have light. We have life – abundant life and eternal life. Because of the Bible we have God. We have Jesus. We have hope. We have freedom.

Of all the things we can thank God for, the Bible is at the very top of the list.

TWO: We must believe the Bible.

Psalm 19:7-9 "The instruction of the Lord is perfect... the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy... the precepts of the Lord are right... the ordinances of the Lord are reliable and altogether righteous."

If the Bible is God's word, then it is truth without any mixture of error. It is perfect.

It is true when it speaks about creation. It is true when it speaks about God. It is true when it speaks about mankind. It is true when it speaks about morality. It is true when it speaks about happiness. It is true when it speaks about history.

If you believe that God is a God of truth, then you should believe the Bible, because it is His word.

At the same time, to disbelieve the Bible is to disbelieve God.

The Bible says there is only one God, and His name is Yahweh (or Jehovah). Believe it. The Bible says that mankind is inherently evil. Believe it. The Bible says that God created the world in six days. Believe it. The Bible says that there are only two genders. Believe it. The Bible says that marriage is the union of one man and one woman, and that sex is only for marriage. Believe it. The Bible says that heaven and hell are real, and they are forever. Believe it. The Bible says that there is only one way to eternal life – through faith in the cross of Christ. Believe it.

Psalm 119:42 “Then I can answer the one who taunts me, for I trust in your word.”

THREE: We must obey the Bible.

James 1:22 “22 But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

The Bible is not written for our entertainment like a New York Times best-selling novel. The Bible is not written for our education like a college textbook. The Bible is not written for our decoration like a coffee-table book. It is written for our obedience, like the Constitution of the United States. It was written for our careful obedience.

The Bible is God’s word. God is our king. He is our master. His word is law.

The Bible is not is not book of suggestions. It is not a book of helpful advice. It is a lawbook. God’s lawbook. We must obey it. To obey the Bible is to obey God. To disobey the Bible is to disobey God.

Psalm 119:4 “You have commanded that your precepts be diligently kept.”

FOUR: We must delight in the Bible.

Psalm 119:16 “I will delight in your statutes. I will not forget your word.” **Psalm 119:24** “Your decrees are my delight and my counselors.” **Psalm 119:47** “I delight in your commands, which I love.”

What does it look like to delight in God’s word? We see the answer by looking at David’s example.

He memorized it. **Psalm 119:11 (ESV)** “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” David loved God’s word so much that he committed it to memory. It wasn’t enough to own a copy of God’s word. He wanted it etched in his memory so that he could access it at any time, in any situation.

David proclaimed it. **Psalm 119:13** “With my lips I proclaim all the judgements from your mouth.” When we are genuinely excited about something, we can’t help but talk about it. And when we have found something that has truly added value to our lives, we can’t help but spread the news.

David rejoiced in the Bible. **Psalm 119:14** “I rejoice in the way revealed by your decrees as much as in all riches.” He rejoiced in it because it added more value to his life than all of his wealth.

David longed for the Bible. **Psalm 119:20** “I am continually overcome with longing for your judgements.” He deeply desired to better understand God’s word, and to better live by God’s word.

David was not ashamed of it. **Psalm 119:46** “I will speak of your decrees before kings and not be ashamed.” He was not ashamed of the thing that added the most value to his life. He boldly proclaimed God’s word to everyone.

David sang about it. **Psalm 119:54** “Your statutes are the theme of my song during my earthly life.” We sing about the things that we love the most. The things that have made the biggest impact on us. The things that affect us on the deepest level.

David thought about the Bible all the time. **Psalm 119:97** “How I love your instruction! It is my meditation all day long.”

David kept it with him at all times. **Psalm 119:98** “Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are always with me.”

David didn't leave home without a copy of the Scriptures. He took it with him to battle; he took it with him to meetings; he took it with him to bed; he took it with him to meals; he took it with him on vacation. It was his constant companion.

My wedding ring stays on all the time. I bathe with it. I sleep with it. I wear to work; I wear it when I preach; I wear it on vacation; I wear it on my day off. That's what the Bible was like for David. It was his wedding ring. He never took it off.

We should love God's word. We should delight in it. The Bible is the word of the living God; the God who created and sustains the universe; the God who knows everything about everything; the God who knows the past and the future; the God who made us; the God who loves us perfectly and who wants what is best for us.

The Bible should be our most prized possession; our favorite thing; the thing we want most; the thing we do most; the thing we think about most; the thing we talk about the most; the thing we sing about; the thing that we are most excited about.

FIVE: We must study the Bible.

Psalm 119:45 “I will walk freely in an open place because I study your precepts.”

The Bible is the wisdom of God, but it does us no good if we don't open it and read it.

It has the secret to happiness, to success, to the purpose of life; it tells us who God is, and who we are, and where we come from, and where we are going. It

tells us how to get to heaven. And so much more. But we only benefit from the Bible if we open it up and read it.

If you are not in the habit of reading the Bible on a daily basis, then I strongly urge you to do that. Get a good Bible translation, like the CSB. Download a Bible-reading plan from the church website. And start reading. Start studying. Start enjoying the wonderful treasure that is God's word.

In 600 AD Pope Gregory I imposed a new church law that only allowed the Bible to be translated and read in Latin. For the next 800 years, nobody in the world could read the Bible unless they understood Latin. But then in 1395 AD, an Englishman by the name of John Wycliffe, the most popular priest in England, translated the Bible from Latin into English. It was the first English translation of the Bible – handwritten (before the printing press). But church authorities did not approve. They condemned the Wycliffe Bible and burned every copy they could get their hands on. They fired Wycliffe from his teaching job at Oxford. And then 43 years after his death, he was formally condemned at the Council of Constance. They dug up his body, burned his remains, and threw the ashes into the river. But his Bible was still very popular. Over a hundred years later another priest named William Tyndale sought permission to translate the New Testament from Greek into English. He was denied. So he left England and went to Germany and produced the first translation of the New Testament from Greek to English. It was mass-produced with the newly invented printing press and 6,000 copies were smuggled into England in bales of cotton and sacks of flour. Church authorities were furious. They bought as many copies as they could and burned them. Anyone found in possession of a Tyndale New Testament risked execution. Finally authorities found Tyndale when he was betrayed by a friend. He spent a year and a half in prison. In 1536 he was condemned as a heretic, removed from the priesthood, and sentenced to death. He was given a chance to recant, but he refused. He was bound to a wooden beam, and an iron chain and a rope were put around his neck. First he was strangled to death, and then his body was burned using copies of his Bible as fuel. His last words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." Three years later God answered his prayer, when the King required authorized the publication of the Great Bible, the first legal English translation of the Bible. And he ordered that a copy be distributed by every

church in England. When you consider the sacrifice that so many people made in the past to get the Bible to us in a format that we can read; that many people lost their lives for that cause, it is shameful that we don't value our Bibles more. It is shameful that we don't read it. That we don't know it. That we don't teach it to our children. Let us not be ungrateful. Let us take up and read God's word.