

The Book of  
the Year

by

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## The Book of the Year

**I**T WAS BENJAMIN FRANKLIN who said: "A good newspaper and Bible in every house, a good schoolhouse in every district, and a church in every neighborhood—all appreciated as they deserve—are the chief support of virtue, morality, civil liberty, and religion."

The Holy Scriptures, commonly called the Bible, should be the Book-of-the-Year for every one of us this year; for, first of all, how can one be educated without reading it, whether he be Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, or Moslem; or even if he be agnostic, skeptic, infidel, or atheist? To be acquainted with English literature one must be versed in the Holy Bible, especially the King James Version, which has been called the most wonderful monument ever erected with the English language. The same is true of several other languages.

It is also a fact that the Holy Bible upholds right living, morality, true civilization. In fact, the Bible makes things safe. I have visited certain parts of the world where, a few years before, human life was not worth much, morality was unknown, and most beastly practices were carried on; but the introduction of the Bible and its great truths changed everything. There are places in the world where the infidel himself would not be safe, had not the Bible preceded him.

But more than this, the Holy Bible gives life meaning which enables people to meet the trials and disappointments that are inevitable to all. It makes life worth living. It assures us of the existence of a God who cares for us and is interested in our salvation from whatever is wrong with this world, but which the Bible calls "sin." It helps the brokenhearted to meet the great mystery of death. It points to another life.

When Charles Dickens' youngest son was leaving for Australia, his father was ill and expected

never to see him again. Dickens wrote what he realized was his farewell message to the boy he loved, and here are a few of the things he said: "I put the New Testament among your books for the same reason, and with the very same hopes, that made me write an easy account of it for you when you were a child [and, by the way, Dickens did write out the Bible story in a way that would interest any child] because it is the best Book that ever was or ever will be known in the world, and because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty can possibly be guided." Dickens had written thus to all his other children as they left home.

It was John Bunyan, who certainly knew his Bible from Genesis to Revelation, who said: "Read the Bible, and read it again. Do not despair of help to understand something of the will and mind of God, though you think they are fast locked up from you. Neither trouble yourself though you have not commentaries and expositions. Pray and read, and read and pray, for a little from God is better than a great deal from man. Also what is from man is uncertain, and is often lost and tumbled over by man; but what is from God is fixed as a nail in a sure place."

And that is certainly true. By prayerfully reading the Bible, any earnest person can attain to a tremendous knowledge of spiritual things. Bunyan also said: "There is nothing that so abides with us as what we receive from God, and the reason why Christians of this day are at such a loss as to such things, is because they are content with what comes from men's mouths without searching and kneeling before God to know of Him the truth of things. Things which we receive at God's hand come to us as things from the minting house—though old in themselves, yet new to us. Old truths are always new to us, if they come to us with the smell of heaven upon them." I like that—"if they come to us with the smell of heaven upon them."

We never know how far the influence of one

copy of the Holy Scriptures may go, or in what unexpected place it may appear.

An earnest Christian man, who was a traveling salesman in the Southwest of the United States, was crossing the desert one day and stopped to pick up a hitchhiker. The man opened the car door as if to step in. Seeing an open Bible on the seat beside the driver, a strange expression came over his face. He paused a moment, then slammed the door shut, and said: "Forget it. Go on. I don't want a ride."

The driver wondered about his strange conduct. Several weeks later he was assisting in a jail service in one of California's large cities. As he finished speaking in one of the "tanks," a prisoner came up to the bars and asked to have a word with him. He wanted to know if he had been driving across the desert on a certain day. Yes, he had.

"Weren't you stopped by a hitchhiker who started to get into your car and then told you to drive on?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was that man," the prisoner said. "I planned to kill whoever stopped for me, take his car and money, and head out of the country. But when I saw your Bible I remembered my mother and her Bible. She was always reading it, when she wasn't praying for me, and it all came back to me like a flash. I knew then that I couldn't take your life with that Bible there beside you. So I told you to drive on."

Then he told how he had later found someone else and carried out his evil purpose. "They caught me and that's why I am here," he said.

This dramatizes the truth that the Bible has great power. While not all God's children have been protected from violence by its physical presence, it is a fact that when it enters the human heart it destroys violence there. Its spiritual power is unparalleled.

We do not need a Ph. D. degree to enjoy and appreciate the Holy Scriptures. Anyone who can read them can be blessed by them. And, if

one cannot read, he can get someone to read the wonderful words to him.

There is a vast amount of ignorance in the world regarding the Bible, even in so-called Christian lands. Some time ago the bishops of the Methodist Church sent out a questionnaire, which was answered by some 18,000 high school students. The answers were amazing, so far as ignorance of the Bible was concerned. Sixteen thousand could not name three prophets of the Old Testament. Twelve thousand could not name the four Gospels. Ten thousand could not name even three of Christ's disciples.

If the Bible is the Word of God—and it gives every evidence within itself that it is—then it is certainly the Book-of-the-Year, the Book of every year, the supremely important Book for all of us. My suggestion to each of my listeners is: Read it for yourself. Do not get it secondhand. That's good, but reading it for yourself is better. If possible, get a good copy of the Bible. Put your name in it. Never open it without prayer, and never close it without prayer.

You will find in the Bible some things hard to understand, some that you cannot understand, some things deep. Some things may seem uninteresting at first, but others will be of supreme interest immediately. Read in various parts of the Bible. I suggest the first chapter of Genesis, the first chapter of John, the Psalms. Use a check card, so you will know when you have read the entire Book of the Lord.

Why are the Scriptures so important? Here is your answer in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17:

*“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

*“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

If that is true, then it is certainly important for us to read the Bible. Do not judge it until you have read it. If it is inspired, then it has a message for you and for me.

Here is another statement from the Scripture itself about itself in 2 Peter 1:21:

*"The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

The great truths of the Bible are not of merely human origin. When you read the Bible, and read it prayerfully, it is just as if you could actually hear the voice of God; and the Holy Spirit will impress upon your heart the truth that you need.

Everything in the world is in change and flux today—everything except the Scripture, for Jesus said:

*"The scripture cannot be broken."*—John 10:35.

Everything else can be broken—human plans, armies, nations, even human hearts—but the Scripture cannot be broken.

What are some of the proofs from the Holy Book itself that it is inspired of God? We have read two of them, but here are some more: (1) Its fulfilled prophecies. (2) The scientific accuracy of the Bible, which actually revealed some scientific principles long before they were discovered by man. (3) Its historical accuracy, as revealed by archaeological discoveries. (4) The marvelous unity of the Bible. (5) Its inexhaustible depths. (6) Its indestructibility. (7) Its superior teaching. (8) Its matchless influence. (9) The absence of contradictions. (10) The testimony of Christ. (11) The character of Christ. (12) The testimony of vital personal experience. And there are other proofs of its inspiration.

The greatest reason of all why we should become acquainted with the Holy Scriptures is that they reveal Jesus Christ. Remember, the word "Scripture," simply means *writings*, and the word "Bible" means *book*; so we can say the Holy Bible, the Holy Writings, or the Holy Scriptures. These Scriptures reveal Jesus. We read in John 20:31:

*"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and*

that believing ye might have life through his name."

Isn't that reason enough to get acquainted with the Holy Bible? And here are the words of Jesus Himself:

*"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."*—John 6:47.

That being true, I should think you couldn't wait to get to your Bible and read some more.

These same Holy Writings declare that all men have sinned—that is, they have broken the holy law of God and rebelled against Him in their hearts. All of us have done this, really. And the Bible declares:

*"The wages of sin is death."*—Romans 6:23.

But right in the heart of this Book we find the most wonderful answer to our terrible need for God. Here it is in John 3:16:

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

This isn't something we get by working for it. It is given to us, a wonderful gift from God if we believe His promise.

*"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us."*—Titus 3:5.

That makes it possible for us all to have a part in God's wonderful plan for us and for this world. We can all believe, from the most ignorant to the most astute and cultured. You who are having a hard time to live a moral life—or should we say an impossible time?—we have good news for you. It is found in Psalm 119:11:

*"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."*

God's Word in our heart makes us victorious in every contest with wrong. The Holy Scripture is a guide to life, for we read in verse 105:

*"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."*

To those of us who don't know very much, this is just what we need—understanding.

*“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”—Verse 130.*

Above all things, the reading of the Holy Scriptures gives us hope at such a time as this, for we read in Romans 15:4:

*“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*

Even the children can learn much from this wonderful book, and here is something written especially for them in 2 Timothy 3:15:

*“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.”*

How often should we study the Bible? We find the answer to this question in Acts 17:11, where the apostle speaks of the people in the town of Berea who—

*“. . . were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”*

The only requisite for learning important things from the Bible is a willingness to obey its truths when we find them. Can we be sure of that? Certainly we can. Here it is in John 7:17:

*“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”*

But you will have to study God's Word. You will have to put some effort into it, for it is written:

*“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”—2 Timothy 2:15.*

Jesus said to the men of His generation, and we can say the same to those who ask us about the Holy Scriptures:

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”—John 5:39.

Because the Scriptures testify of Christ, they reveal and bring to us eternal life. And here are two or three sentences from someone who had really tried it and knew it was the truth. Listen: “The Bible should be our guide. There can be no greater deception than for a man to think that he can find a better guide, when in difficulty, than the word of God. The blessed word must be a lamp to our feet. Bible precepts must be carried into the everyday life.”

No, friend—whoever you are—don’t miss the power of the Holy Scriptures in your life.

One of the hardest experiences that Abraham Lincoln had as President of the United States was the delivery of his first inaugural address. The storms of the Civil War were about to break upon the land. One of his sons lay dead in the White House, and the other was at death’s door. Yet he walked into the Senate and delivered his address with such calmness and fearlessness that it was considered to be a living miracle. But that very morning, with his heart broken, he had taken down the Bible and in that darkened room where his boy lay dead, had conducted family worship as usual. Then he retired alone to his room and fell upon his knees to plead with God that He who sustains the world and all the vast universe would strengthen him and overrule his words to God’s glory. The secret of Lincoln’s power that day was that he had taken time to look upon the Word and heart of God.

Russell Lowell said that Abraham Lincoln spoke in the grand simplicities of the Old and the New Testament. Why shouldn’t we speak and live the same way?

When the sailor, Alexander Smith (who had changed his name to John Adams), found himself the only survivor of the *Bounty* mutineers on Pitcairn Island, he found a copy of the Bible in Fletcher Christian’s old sea chest. He began to teach its principles to his fellow exiles. The result

was that his own life was changed, and finally the lives of all on the island. When the United States ship *Topaz* came in 1808, they found the island a thriving, prosperous community with no whisky, no jail, no crime, no insane asylum. The Bible had changed the life of the island from a hell on earth to a little ocean-girt example of what God wants the world to be.

And so it has been in every age—the entrance of God's Word gives light. (Psalm 119:130.) The Bible is a powerful book. It is a revolutionary book. As Toyhiko Kagawa said, "When you start a Bible movement, it means revolution—a quiet revolution against darkness and crime."

During the Hitler occupation of Holland, the people thought the Bible must contain dynamite, since the Nazis were so anxious to destroy it. W. A. Visser-t'Hooft, of the World Council of Churches, said, "So they reopened its pages to find the dynamite, and they found it."

Let us read this revolutionary, this explosive, this light-giving, this soul-changing, this Christ-revealing, this blessed Book. It is our Book-of-the-Year, of every year, for—

We search the world for truth. We cull  
The good, the true, the beautiful,  
From graven stone and written scroll,  
From all old flower-fields of the soul;  
And, weary seekers of the best,  
We come back laden from the quest,  
To find that all the sages said  
Is in the Book our mothers read.

—JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

Have faith in God—  
    *Never worry or fear;*  
Have faith in God—  
    *For His Word of good cheer;*  
Have faith in God—  
    *With His Book-of-the-year.*  
Have faith, dear friend, in God.