

CHAPTER ONE

1 PROLOGUE

2 GETTING THINGS STRAIGHT

3 A UNIQUE BOOK

1 PROLOGUE

The year—circa 33 A.D.

The sun burned midday hot. All was quiet. Even the birds refused to sing in the oppressive heat. Cleopas kicked a clod of dried mud from the dusty road, drew a large breath and blew out his cheeks in a weary sigh. Squinting into the haze, he could barely make out the next ridge. A few miles beyond lay Emmaus—home. Sunset would be on them before their arrival. Normally they would have left Jerusalem sooner—after all, seven miles is a decent walk—but the events of the morning had kept them hanging back, wishing for more concrete news. Emmaus wasn't much of a town, but today it seemed very attractive. Any place but Jerusalem, with its yelling rabble, its Roman cohorts, its governor—Pontius Pilate.

Cleopas' heavy thoughts were jerked back to the present as his irritated companion asked a question for the second time. The two of them had been discussing the day's events—the last few years' events—until it seemed no detail could be dissected more. Cleopas was tired, but more than that, he was confused by all that had transpired in Jerusalem. These days, it seemed, life held more questions than answers.

Trudging down the hill they rounded a bend. It was then they met the stranger.

Hours later, the same day, the same night, when the two of them stood hot and sweaty before their friends back in Jerusalem—for it was there they had rushed—they couldn't give a good answer as to how the stranger had joined their twosome. At first, Cleopas thought he had stepped out of the shadow of a big boulder, but that didn't jive with his friend's explanation. The bottom line was, they just weren't sure where he had come from. Lamely, Cleopas had said that the stranger had “kinda, well just sort of—appeared.” That had been met with some derisive statements about the heat and too much sun.

But of one thing they were sure. The stranger had taken that ancient collection of books—the Bible—and starting at the very beginning, over the next several hours, had explained it in a way

that made incredible sense. The stranger's message had driven all despondency and doubt from their minds. So thrilled were they by their new understanding that they had hurried all the way back to Jerusalem to tell their friends about THE STRANGER. Somehow, somewhere, they too needed to hear this message—the message they had heard ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS.

So just what did THE STRANGER say about the Bible—a book that has puzzled so many—that made so much sense?

That is what this book is all about. And to understand it clearly, we will do what THE STRANGER did—start at the very beginning.

2 GETTING THINGS STRAIGHT

When you stop and think about it, it's entirely reasonable—indeed, just plain logical—to take a few hours out of your entire life to gain an understanding of the Bible.

After all, the Bible has some very profound things to say about life ... and about death.

For centuries it has been a best seller. Anyone who claims to be the least bit informed should understand its basic content. Unfortunately, the Bible has fallen into disrepute, not because of what it says, but because some very prominent men and women, who claim to follow the Bible, have made some of the worst choices in life.

Even the message of the book has been attacked at times, often by well-meaning people who have never taken the time to really understand what it says.

But the Bible has not changed. And despite what the hypocrites or critics say, it does make good sense to know it for **yourself**—

... for **your own** peace of mind,

... for **your own** life and death's sake.

A PUZZLE

In many ways, the Bible is like a puzzle. By this, I do not mean that its message is hidden, but rather that to understand the Bible accurately, the biblical pieces must be put together in the right way. We can do this by applying four basic principles of learning.

FOUNDATIONS

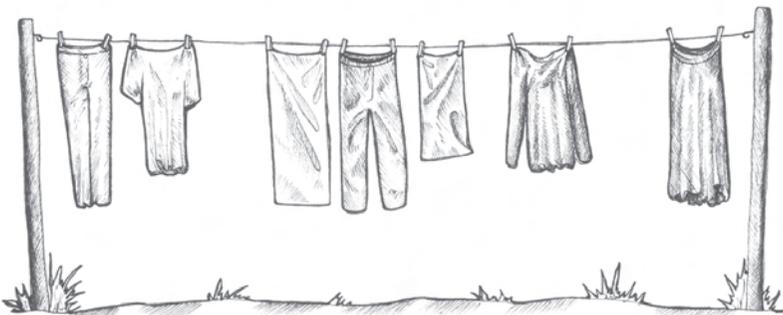
The first principle is one we use all the time. To learn any new concept, it helps to build from the foundation up—to *move from the known to the unknown*. You don't start children in kindergarten by teaching them algebra. Rather, you begin with basic numbers, and *move from the simple to the complex*. If you skip the fundamentals, even rudimentary algebra will be beyond your grasp.

It's the same way with the Bible. If you neglect the foundations, your biblical understanding will incorporate some unusual ideas, resulting in the message being confused—the puzzle will present the wrong image. In this book we begin with the basics, and progress through each chapter, building on previously gained knowledge.

BUILDING A CLOTHESLINE

The second principle is especially important when learning history or reading a story. Simply put, it's this—*start at the beginning and move sequentially through to the end*. That may seem obvious, but many people tend to read the Bible in bits and pieces, never taking the time to tie them together. In this book we will cover key events, stringing them together in logical sequence—like hanging laundry on a clothesline. Since this overview is far from comprehensive, expect some gaps on the line. If you wish, the gaps can be filled in later, after you have the overall picture.

Although this clothesline cannot include every story, the events we do study will tie together in one continuous message. If you are a typical reader, by the time you have finished this book, the Bible will make remarkable sense. Whether you believe it or not is entirely up to you. I sincerely hope you will, but that is your choice. My job is to help you understand it clearly.



PICKLES AND PIE

The third principle is of critical importance. *Don't mix your subject matter—stick to one theme at a time.*

The Bible addresses many different issues. It might be compared to a cookbook with its many diverse recipes. Traditionally, the Bible has been broken down into topics, such as God, Angels, Man, and Prophecy. The intention was to create better understanding, but one needs to be careful. Some people, finding certain similarities between topics, attempt to combine the ideas, often resulting in a distortion of the original meaning.

It's like jumping from a pickle recipe to a pie recipe because they both share the initial letter "p." If you begin by making pickles and end with the pie recipe, you will bake the pickles until they are well-browned! Both may start with the letter "p," but combined they make bizarre food!

In the Bible, if you unintentionally leap from one topic to another, the end result will be confusion—your puzzle will be disjointed. To avoid this biblical chaos, we will stick to one *theme*.

MAJOR ON THE MAJORS

This last principle—*major on the majors*—should be applied to any learning situation where the content is unfamiliar to you. The idea is to learn the most important points first.

The Bible covers an incredible array of topics, but not all are of equal importance. In this book we will focus on one major theme—the most significant theme in the Bible. Once you understand it, the Bible will make profound but simple sense.

The mixing of various topics is one of the contributing causes as to why we find so many different church groups, religions and cults, that to varying degrees hold the Bible as their book. The pie has been mixed with the pickles. The puzzle has a jumbled picture. In some cases, the confusion is minor. In other situations, the mix-up has had catastrophic results.

3 A UNIQUE BOOK

There is no doubt about it; the Bible is a unique book. Actually, it's a collection of books, sixty-six in all. One author, in writing of the Bible's uniqueness, put it this way:

Here is a book:

1. *written over a 1500 year span;*
2. *written over 40 generations;*
3. *written by more than 40 authors, from every walk of life—including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, etc.:*

Moses, a political leader, trained in the universities of Egypt

Peter, a fisherman

Amos, a herdsman

Joshua, a military general

Nehemiah, a cupbearer

Daniel, a prime minister

Luke, a doctor

Solomon, a king

Matthew, a tax collector

Paul, a rabbi

4. *written in different places:*

Moses in the wilderness

Jeremiah in a dungeon

Daniel on a hillside and in a palace

Paul inside a prison

Luke while traveling

John on the isle of Patmos

others in the rigors of a military campaign

5. *written at different times:*

David in times of war

Solomon in times of peace

6. *written during different moods:*

some writing from the heights of joy and others from the depths of sorrow and despair

7. *written on three continents:*

Asia, Africa, and Europe

8. *written in three languages:*

Hebrew . . . , Aramaic . . . , and Greek . . .

9. *Finally, its subject matter includes hundreds of controversial topics. Yet, the biblical authors spoke with harmony and continuity from Genesis to Revelation. There is one unfolding story...*¹

This *one unfolding story* is what we want to look at—simply and without theological jargon. By far the most unique thing about the Bible is that it claims to be God’s own words.

GOD-BREATHED

Often referred to as Scripture, the Bible states that ...

*All Scripture is God-breathed...*²

2 Timothy 3:16 NIV

The whole concept of God *breathing out* Scripture is a study in itself. Just as when one exhales his breath, and that breath comes from his innermost being, so ultimately all Scripture is to be viewed as the very product of God himself. God and his words are inseparable, which is one reason the Bible is often referred to as *God’s Word*.

PROPHETS

Highly simplified, it can be looked at this way. God told men what he wanted recorded and those men wrote it down. Most of these men were called *prophets*.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets...

Hebrews 1:1 NIV

Today, we think of prophets as those who foretell the future, but in Bible times a prophet was a messenger who passed on God’s words to the people. Sometimes the message had to do with future events, but more often than not, it was concerned with daily living.

God guided the prophets in such a way, that what was recorded was precisely what he wanted written. At the same time, God allowed the human writer to record *His Word—God’s Word*—in the prophet’s own unique style, but to do so without error. These men were not free to add their own private thoughts to the message; neither was it something they dreamed up on their own.

... you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy

*never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from
God as they were carried along...*

2 Peter 1:20–21 NIV

God was not putting his stamp of approval on some literary effort of man. The phrase *carried along* is used elsewhere in the Bible in reference to the transporting of a paralyzed man.³ Just as a disabled man could not walk by his own power, so the prophets did not write the Scripture at their own inclination. The Bible is clear on this point—it was *God's* message from beginning to end.

EXTREME ACCURACY

The prophets wrote God's words on a scroll, usually an animal skin or paper made from plant fiber. The originals were called *autographs*.

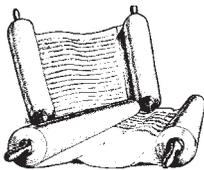
Since the autographs had a limited life span, copies were made of the scrolls. But such copies! And all by hand! The writers' awareness that what was being recorded was God's own *Word* resulted in one of the most remarkable *photocopy* jobs ever done. In writing the Hebrew text...

*They used every imaginable safeguard, no matter how cumbersome or laborious, to ensure the accurate transmission of the text. The number of letters in a book was counted and its middle letter was given. Similarly with the words, and again the middle word was noted.*⁴

This was done with both the copy and the original autograph to insure that they were exactly the same.

These scribes were so accurate in their transcription that, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found (written in 100 BC), and compared with manuscripts resulting from centuries of copying and recopying to a period of time 1000 years later (900 AD), there were no significant differences in the text.⁵

Dead Sea Scrolls



100 BC

Previous Oldest
Manuscript



900 AD

essentially
no change in 1000 years
of making copies

Josephus, a Jewish historian from the first century A.D., summed it up for his people when he stated . . . *how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews . . . to esteem those books . . . divine.*⁶

These men were absolutely convinced that to meddle with the text was to tamper with God. We have ample reason to be assured that what we have today is essentially the same as what the prophets wrote.

Truly, the Bible is a unique book by any standard. No wonder the Bible is . . . *the most quoted, the most published, the most translated and the most influential book in the history of mankind.*⁷

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

As we begin to navigate through the Bible, it may be helpful to know that the Scriptures are divided into two major sections—the *Old* and *New Testament*. Historically, the *Old Testament* portion was further sub-divided into another two⁸ categories:

1. the Law of Moses (sometimes referred to as *The Torah, The Books of Moses, or The Law*)
2. the Prophets (Later on, a third section called *the Writings*, was sub-divided out of *the Prophets*.)

In the Scriptures, the phrase, *the law and the prophets*, is a way of referring to the entire Old Testament—a part which comprises approximately two-thirds of the Bible. The remaining one-third is referred to as the *New Testament*.

GOD'S WORD

Remembering the biblical categories is not critical. The important thing to keep in mind is that the Bible claims to be God's Word—His message to mankind. We are told that through its pages we can become acquainted with God. Such a claim should cause even the most indifferent person to pause and consider what it has to say.

Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm . . .

Psalm 119:89 NKJV

Dictionary Definition of *Bible* and *Scripture*⁹

Bi·ble (bi'bel) *noun*

1.
 - a. The sacred book of Christianity, a collection of ancient writings including the books of both the Old Testament and the New Testament.
 - b. The Hebrew Scriptures, the sacred book of Judaism.
 - c. A particular copy of a Bible: *the old family Bible*.
 - d. A book or collection of writings constituting the sacred text of a religion.
2. Often **bible**. A book considered authoritative in its field: *the bible of French cooking*.

Scrip·ture (skrip'cher) *noun*

1.
 - a. A sacred writing or book.
 - b. A passage from such a writing or book.
2. Often **Scriptures**. The sacred writings of the Bible. Also called *Holy Scriptures*.
3. **scripture**. A statement regarded as authoritative.