

FACTS ON THE MOST FAMOUS BOOK

A Bible Introduction in Basic English

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Facts on the Most Famous Book. A Bible Introduction in Basic English

Originally dedicated to the Vietnamese Christians in Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp in Thailand.

From the author:

This easy-to-read and free book has been written for those who speak English as a second language, and for those who desire to know more about the Bible: what it is, how it came to us, and the many facts about it and its use. We hope that this information will be freely shared with many who would like to have a fast introduction to the most famous book on earth!

This condensed overview in basic English of Bible facts, and how the Bible can be studied, is not only suitable for those coming from other cultures. It can also be used by those desiring to refresh their approach to Bible study in a fast way, and for those who need a basic knowledge of Bible facts – including new Christians, young people, and those who seek an answer to their own on questions on the Christian faith. Of course, the information in this small book can never be complete. But may this book encourage many in their understanding of the Bible, making them excited about the words of our exciting God!

Finally, this book is totally free for all, and can be passed on to others, as long the content remains unchanged and with mentioning the source: www.gratis-antwoorden.nl, a website where more free English and Dutch material can be found that is helpful for everyday life.

Clara M. van Dijk, 2017.

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1. The Bible – What kind of a book is it?

The Bible is “God’s Book”. It is the oldest and most sold book on earth and the most life-changing book of all ages. More books have been written about the Bible, than on any other subject... It is the only book that can give true meaning to life and answers to life’s circumstances and problems. These facts alone already show us, why it is so very important to know and read the Bible! It is a book of God about you and me, and it’s full importance only becomes clear when we start acting on what He says in it – for only then we find out that what God says is indeed the truth!

The Bible is the best manual for life: It is an instruction book on how to know the meaning of life, and on how to live rightly even under difficult circumstances. It tells us about the origin and goal of our life, about the origin and goal of mankind - even about the beginning and end of all that exists! It tells us about the mighty acts of the only true and living God, and we will be amazed to find that He answers us, as we seek to know Him in a very personal way....

The Bible is a unique book with an Invisible Author. Although many different people have been used of God to write this book down, it is clear that all the different book sections that the Bible contains, form a unity and have been inspired by the same Holy Spirit of God. The people that wrote the Bible have had a very close relationship with God. He acted and spoke to them, and worked things out in their lives. Then, He inspired them to write these things down, so that we can be blessed and helped by this and in turn help others.

The Bible teaches and changes us. As we read, we not only discover interesting things about the Author. We discover that the Bible is about *me*! Through His Word, God inspires, teaches, motivates, comforts, and encourages us. He tells us what righteousness is and holiness, how to live a life that is pleasing to Him – and tells us many things about the character and personality of God. Thus, the Bible is a book that not only helps us, but reading it will also change us! And the most important thing we can learn from the Bible is: how we can be saved from our sins through what Jesus did for us, and have a personal relationship with God as our loving heavenly Father.

The Bible is both interesting and beautiful... It is amazing to learn that things happening hundreds of years later, were already prophesied in the first part of the Bible, the Old Testament. It is impossible to totally grasp the fullness of what God would love to tell us in His amazing book! We can see this also in the poetry and beauty of the Scriptures that tell us of His love for us, and for the wonderful plan that He has for each of our personal lives.

2. The Bible – What is it not?

The Bible is not a book with ancient sagas and myths, but a book inspired by God, to give us the truth about Who He is. In the Bible we read how He revealed Himself in His actions with mankind in general, and specifically in His dealings with the “children of Abraham”, the Jewish people - as a practical example to us! Many proofs have been given that facts mentioned in the Bible truly did happen, and it is good to read the Bible with an open mind and ask God to help us grasp His word.

Also, the Bible has not been written to be a theological system. It is not meant to be that - and there is a reason for this! Many of us would like to get to know God with our mind alone, but this is not possible. If we could fully understand God, He would not truly be God... If we could know God by our intellect alone and explain Him, we would almost be like God... However, there is the exciting fact that we not only will know things about God with our mind – a limited knowledge – but that we can get to know Him personally, as we discover that He acts in our lives! We can have a personal relationship with Him – not by a full grasp of systematic theology, but by obeying what He says in the Bible. We will then be overwhelmed to find out that He indeed is there, that He indeed speaks to us personally, and acts in our lives! This truly is the greatest discovery any of us can ever make...

The Bible is not a history book. True: it speaks about the lives of many people in days of old, and of events that historically happened! But the reason for this book is not just that such events did happen to the people we read about. These people were also important as an example to us, because God did speak to them in a personal way, and that so many of them got to know Him, the Almighty God, personally! It tells us of their joys and sorrows and the help He brought; about the warnings He gave when things went wrong in their country. Their lives are an example to us in our situations, not through some theological theories and historic knowledge, but we can learn from them in practical daily life, how they walked with God and how He answered their prayers. Their actual lives can inspire us to live with Him, and thus in future we, too, can become effective examples to others in our daily walk with God. That is an effective way to change the world for good – the good that God wants us to work in the world by His inspiration – thus changing even the history in our own realm. History – His Story – in the Bible...

3. The Bible – What is it all about?

The Bible is a book about God and about ourselves. No written book exists on earth about us (at least most of us), apart from the Bible. The only reliable book about us can be a book written by the One Who made us! Also, the only reliable book about God, Whom no man has seen, can be a book inspired by God Himself...

The fact that we even have a Bible shows that God felt it is necessary that we should have this information about Him and about ourselves. Right at the start of the Bible, we read how God had a relationship with man, with Adam and Eve, and how this relationship broke down when Adam and Eve did not obey God – that means they sinned. They became afraid of God and wanted to hide, because they were ashamed and felt guilty before Him and before one another. The unity was gone, and the relationship was broken... And so we can see that where sin entered the world, problems, frustration, fear and even death... entered the world as well. Sin is even the cause of the breakdown of society: lying, stealing, murder and many other sins make it difficult for people to be happy and for the economy to function...

Why the Bible is a very necessary book

We see in the Bible how sin entered the world, and that it made us lose contact with God – our relationship had broken down, because of the sins we did – you and I did them, too... Yet still, there is a way back to God! If we find that way, we can again find true meaning in life, and again have true fellowship with Him and other people. That way back we can find in the Bible... Therefore, God gave us His word in the Bible, to save mankind and to save us. Amazingly, we learn there that this way is not a theory or set of commands for life, but that this way is a Person: Jesus, Who says: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6).

How can the Bible help us find the way back to God? Our broken relationship with God needed to be repaired. The Bible explains, that God as our heavenly Creator and Father already had a plan, even before He created the world: He knew that things would one day go wrong... and He created a way back! This is His plan: God sent His Son Jesus to earth, Who is also called “The Way”, and “The Living Word”. The goal of His coming was that Jesus would pay the price for our sins, in our place, by dying the death we had deserved because of all the wrong things we did... And because this death was died by Jesus, we can be forgiven for all we did wrong – Thank you Jesus for taking my death penalty... We now no longer need to feel guilty and ashamed, but can have a fully restored relationship with God as our heavenly Father.

So we see that we need a Person: Jesus; not any human system or set of rules, to find the way back to God. The choice is ours: are we willing to go to Jesus, to receive His love, His forgiveness, and to obey God with His help? If so, the Bible becomes the most exciting book to us, once we do what it says! For God does what He promises, and often confirms His Word with His miraculous and wonderful actions. We can find many of such events in the Bible, and they certainly still happen today - God is very active on planet earth!

How can the Bible change our personal lives? As we already saw, the Bible tells us that Gods loves us and desires our forgiveness through Jesus. The result is, that we no longer need to feel guilt and shame, and that we know for a fact that God accepts us and desires to help us in daily life. The Bible also shows us, how we can find the way back to the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22), that we have lost through our sins. Yes, we can actually find these back! In the Bible, we read about the Holy Spirit Who enables us...

Our changed lives will then tell others that there is a God Whose own character is just like that – absolute love, joy, peace... Who would not want to get to know the goodness of our only Living God, Who sent His Son Jesus to earth to die in our place the death that we had deserved... so that we can receive the eternal life that He has reserved for us in heaven – where in His glory He will meet us!

4. The Bible – What is its goal?

The Bible teaches us that the God Who created us, loves us as a Father, and that He has a good plan for our lives. For many people, even among Christians, knowing God is not yet the first goal in their lives. Their real goal is something else: like to live a successful life, to earn a lot of money for themselves and their family, to be respected by people they know, or even to have prestige by doing important work – also in the church. We can be so busy for God – in itself not a bad thing, but it will not bring us closer to our Father-God: for if these works have become the goal of our lives, if these are what we strive for and focus on, they have taken God’s place... they can become idols that take all of our attention away from God! We cannot trust in our own efforts, only in God Himself and in our relationship with Him. Our place of trust belongs to our loving God only, not in our serving of Him or of things in the world. Such “false gods” even take away the effectiveness of our life: they bring no lasting fruit, and in the end they harm us. Only God and our relationship with Him as heavenly Father can be the goal of our life: knowing Him, His purity, His love for us – it heals us, restores us, brings us close to Him. *Let us have this goal to know Him - He is so special, so worthy of it!*

The Bible teaches to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2Petr.3:18). Interesting: Grace comes before knowledge here! God is gracious and helps us to know Him more intimately in spite of our past failures – to know what it means to be forgiven – and to learn to walk with Him in everyday life, so that we get to know Him right through life’s battle experiences.

It is good to ask ourselves some questions here. Do we truly walk with Him in practical daily life? Are we doing everything out of our relationship with Jesus and the heavenly Father, and is that relationship, and knowing Him better, indeed our goal in all we do? On what things do we spend most of our thoughts and our time? What is the true motivation of the things we do? What is the goal of our “striving” in life? – If our motivation has any other goals than the relationship with our Lord, we can be in danger of serving false gods, and our lives cannot really be effective for Him. Also, we will miss the fullness of His love, joy, peace - for He is an exciting God, and all His plans will reflect His beautiful character - and in the end, our own characters will reflect that, as we keep walking with Him!

The Bible teaches us to learn to trust Him in faith as we serve Him in the reality of life. If our striving is for a deeper relationship with God, above all else, and for actually doing what He tells us by serving Him, then He will take care of the things we would have to give up for this. He can help us find time, friends, ways to serve and to provide for our family - and learning to trust Him in this, will be a real step of faith for all of us...

Especially in situations where we obeyed Him, we will discover that He provides for our needs even in unexpected and miraculous ways - that truly makes our faith in Him grow!

The Bible teaches us that we can hear Gods voice for our lives and the lives of others. This is one of the most exciting things that we can learn! It can be seen already in the Old Testament, where Gods prophets spoke about God and His plans for the people. God wants to give us His Holy Spirit, and we can personally ask Him for that in our own lives! The Holy Spirit speaks to us what God has to say, gives us His insights, and many things more that we need. Therefore, it is so helpful to read the Bible, especially the New Testament! Moreover, we can even experience His amazing resurrection power (the same power that raised Gods Son Jesus Christ from the dead, after He had died for our sins: Phil.3:10) to help us in our new way of life with Him.

5. Can we trust what the Bible says?

Experimental proof can be used when theoretical science is not sufficiently conclusive. As we already saw, human thought and intellect can never prove God's existence to us. Even in science, each theory will find its final proof in the experiment – that means that the actual facts of life will show us if the theory “works”- if it is right in practice. The same is true for the Bible. We will find out if the thing that are written in it are true only as we start acting upon them – that means that we start doing what God tells us to do. I once met a young man who studied physics, and who wanted to find out if the message of the Bible was really true. He started to live like if it “would be true”, and after 1½ years he discovered that this try-out had totally changed his life! Then he knew that the Bible was indeed the truth, and he became a true believer in God.

The Bible gives us a good indication of how we know if a certain teaching is of God! It tells us in John 7:17, “If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God...”. If we truly follow God and act on His words, He will teach us to understand what He wants us to do, and to understand the Scriptures by the inner peace He gives, bringing us closer to Himself.

We can respond to people who attack the Bible. In our days, many have tried to attack the Bible. Many point to Darwin, who believed in the “evolution theory”, that states that lower animal life “evolved” and developed into higher forms of animal life like monkeys and apes, ultimately evolving into human beings. But there seems little real proof for that – the evolution theory is still no more than a theory, and it has been claimed that Darwin became a Christian towards the end of his life...

Another example of this is the creation story, that many feel might be unreliable – how could create God the world in only seven days? Now we need to understand, that these were not “days” as we understand them, because a day is defined by the going up and down of the sun – but the sun was only created on the 4th day!! They are “God-days”... Interestingly, the Bible says in 2Pet.3:8, that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”: Indeed, our God Who created time has the only rightful grasp of both our past and future; and as He is looking at it from above, and can foretell by His prophets what is to come.

About the reliability of old parts of the Bible like Genesis, much can be said. Many tried to attack the creation story, thinking it could be unreliable because in old times most people could not read and write and had to rely on stories passed on by their forefathers. If that were so, Moses could have been the first person to write these stories of God down. However, recent science has discovered that already before Abraham's time, now some 4000 years ago, the art of writing was in use! In 1975, archaeologists found a very old city in Syria called Ebla, from before Abraham's time. In it were clay tablets with writing that the specialists could read – even the old Bible cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were mentioned there, which up to then some people believed had never existed! So we see that the art of writing is very old, and many Bible scholars believe it is likely that Moses used writings from

earlier times, when he had the first five Bible books (the so-called “Pentateuch”) written down. Furthermore, Jewish tradition says that already before the flood, Enoch invented writing – another indication that we are on solid ground when we look at the historicity of the early Bible parts. We read more about Enoch below...

More important facts – yes, there are more important facts that point to the reliability of even the oldest Bible parts. Before the flood, people could become very, very old. We find this not only in the Bible, but also in stories outside the Bible. In the days before the flood, it seems that circumstances in nature were much more ideal for human life; circumstances that dramatically changed through the world events that also caused the flood - so that we now live much shorter lives...

Interestingly, the high ages of the people before the flood made it possible that reliable information was passed on! Genesis 5:27 makes clear that with his 969 years old Methuselah was the oldest man in the Bible, and he spent the first 250 years of his life at the time, when Adam was still alive! Methuselah was the son of the most godly man who lived before the flood: Enoch, who walked with God and God took him away at age 365 (Gen.5:24). Enoch is said to have been a prophet (Jude 14-15), and the name of his son Methuselah seems to mean "when he is dead it shall be sent" - and Methuselah died in the year of the flood! - By the way, his name must have been an awesome reminder to grandson Noah to continue building the ark, that God had ordered him to build, to save him and his family and many animals when the flood would come...

Looking at the high ages of the people living before the flood, as mentioned in Genesis 5, it appears likely that Methuselah has met with Adam, the most reliable historic source of the Genesis events. Methuselah was the father of Lamech, and the grandfather of Noah who survived the flood, because He obeyed God’s instructions to build the ark. And Shem, who was Noah’s son and Methuselah’s great-grandson, spent the first 100 years of his life while Methuselah was still alive, and undoubtedly has talked with his great-grandfather and with his godly father Noah about the things of God. And this same Shem was still alive after the flood when Abraham (who is called the Father of all believers) was seeking the thing of God – in fact, Shem only died towards the end of Abraham’s life...

Thus, Abraham can have heard of Shem, who can have heard of Methuselah, who can have heard of Adam in person! This shows that the Bible may indeed be the most reliable account of creation that mankind will ever possess... And while we cannot prove that Abraham or someone in his family would have written down what they heard about God, that would not be unlikely if Enoch had indeed invented writing. Moreover, we know from other sources that writing was already known in Abraham’s day, so it seems likely that these important facts would then have been written down for future generations.

6. Which Bible translation to use?

It is important to find out, what type of translation can best be used for our personal study.

Firstly, there are the more literal and precise translations, and these are best for those who want to study the Bible in depth, and who speak the language well. In English, the New American Standard Bible (NASB) would be a good example for study use; also the Revised Standard Version (RSV). A very famous old and fairly “literal” translation is the King James translation of 1611 (also named Authorized Version, or AV), but the old-fashioned type of English is more difficult to understand – also, it does not contain modern research and input of newly found manuscripts like the famous Dead Scrolls that we mentioned above.

Secondly, there are the “paraphrase”-translations, such as the Good News Bible and the Living Bible. Their English is easier to read and understand, but they are not as accurate as the more literal translations. Yet the paraphrase translations are good for our personal use, if we want to read the Bible through in a fast and easy manner, and especially if we do not yet know English very well.

Today there are many other different versions of the Bible; some with comments and footnotes that can be very helpful for our understanding – but these can be more expensive. In a good Christian bookstore, we can get good advice on the best Bible to buy.

7. How do we know that God exists?

A. Nature, creation.

We read about it in Gen.1 & Job 26-14):. God spoke, and the universe came into being – what a powerful voice that must have been! Nature, and the starry skies that God created (Psalm 8:4) show us Gods strength - how amazing He is, and how beautiful He made everything with a highly refined design. Just look at the ant, the grass, and the simplest bacteria – they are so amazing that even the greatest scientists have not been able to replicate them.

It is good to consider that if these things had “happened” all by themselves, that would have been a greater miracle than that the Creator-God has thought this out – and without Him, our life would have no true point or meaning...

B. The Bible.

In the Bible, we see how God out of His other, eternal dimension, made heaven and earth. Here we also see, why we are on earth: because He loves us and has a plan and goal for our lives. We may freely ask Him about that! God loves it when we come to Him with our personal prayers and problems; Jer.29:13 says, “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart”.

It is in the Bible that we read Who God is, and how we can get to know Him better. More than that, the Bible is also a prophetic book, that shows us how God through His prophets told us many things even centuries before they actually did happen...

C. The difference between good and evil.

Most people on earth accept that there is a difference between good and evil. As a standard for this, as a moral code, we have a “total good” (God), and a “total bad” (devil), by which we can measure if anything is good or bad. In a society that lets go of God’s standards (as in the Bible), we see an increase of injustice and violence. Even if people do accept God’s standards and try to do well, they often do make wrong choices in life!

We, too, all made such wrong choices: sins... ***For that sin-problem in all of history, there is only one solution: Forgiveness through the cross of Jesus, where He paid for our sins.*** Only the Bible shows us that solution! None of the other religions know about this, and miss the most important thing in life: the way back to God the Father.

When God created the world and gave us a free will, He knew that all of us would often make wrong choices (Rom.11:32-36). And He also knew beforehand, that Jesus would come to earth to bear our sins at the cross – this plan was included when He created all things with a Word – that became flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1:1-10&25; Col.1:15-17; 1Pet.1:20), who is also called “the beginning of God’s creation (Rev.3:14).

D. Answers to prayer

Sometimes, God speaks to us in a very personal way – especially through answered prayer. When that happens, you know for a fact that He, the Mighty God, has heard you - the small human being! He sees you and loves you, and speaks to us in many ways: by the peace He gives in your heart, by words in the Bible, through circumstances, events, things other Christians tell us, or what you hear in the church. If you love Jesus and think of Him more and more, you will learn to recognize His voice more easily. Only the Bible tells us that we can hear from God personally... In other religions, man tries to reach out to God by rules and rituals; but the special thing is that our God personally reaches out to us! The Bible gives us many practical historical examples of that, and answer to prayer is such an example. Ask God – try Him!

E. The Holy Spirit and miracles

By the Holy Spirit (we may ask God for His help again and again!), God teaches us Who He is. Also, by the Holy Spirit miracles happen even today, such as prophecy: God knows what His plans are for our lives and future. He knows what will happen because he as Creator of time is above the times. He speaks about these things in the Bible, and He desires to speak to us by the Holy Spirit. He confirms the truth to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And even miracles still happen today: people still get healed, and are sometimes even raised from the dead in Jesus Name! Moreover, the Holy Spirit also makes our lives fruitful. The fruit of the Holy Spirit in our personal lives are love, joy, peace, patience, and much more (Gal.5:22-23). So, real love is not based on something that science can prove, but it is a piece of God’s heart, and we can receive it out of His supernatural dimension: The Holy Spirit. - We can read about all this, but do we ask for His Presence and help?

8. Languages of the Bible

The two parts of the Bible: The Old Testament (OT, written before Jesus' days) and the New Testament (NT, that tells us about Jesus and the growth of the church), have each been written in different languages: the OT mainly in Hebrew (and tiny portions in Aramaic), and the NT in Greek.

Hebrew and Greek are well-known even today! It is wonderful that we still know so much about the language of the Bible. That is a huge help in making reliable translations. Much language study has been done on both the OT and NT to give us a translation for our Bibles today that is as accurate and precise as possible. Also, the early manuscripts – the old hand-written copies – have been carefully studied, and occasionally we still find parts of even older manuscripts.

Old Testament (OT)

The OT has mainly been written in Hebrew, the ancient language of the Jews. The Jews have faithfully studied their language, and after a long period where Hebrew was mainly used for worship and use in the synagogue, it has now been revived to become the language of the new-born state of Israel in 1948. Most of the OT is in Hebrew; but a few parts were written in Aramaic: Daniel 2:4b – 7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18, 7:12-26, and Jeremiah 10:11. It is interesting to look at these passages and find out why they are in Aramaic: The Babylonian exile was an important period of influence in Jewish history. People were taken as slaves to Babylon; God had allowed that because of their sins.

During and after this period, when many went back home again to their country, many Jews had started to speak Aramaic; and by the time Jesus was born, it was the common language. However, for temple purposes and study of the OT, the Hebrew language remained very important, and the Jews who copied the books of the OT were extremely careful in doing so - but how could we verify that?

Until 1948 the oldest manuscripts of the OT were from the 9th century AD – and many critics thought that after so many years of copying, these manuscripts could not be reliable and trustworthy. However, in 1948 a young shepherd boy found some very old scrolls in caves close to the Dead Sea in southern Israel, that were about 2000 years old! These scrolls clearly showed how accurately the later copies had been made - only very small differences with the much newer copies were found. Among these ancient Dead Sea manuscripts was a complete scroll of the book Isaiah, which is now one of the most precious possessions of the nation of Israel. God had protected His Word for future generations.

New Testament (NT)

The Greek culture was one of the most influential of all times, especially in the years before Christ was born. When the NT came into being, it was also written in Greek, as the language understood by most people in that part of the world (today, English could have been such a language). Many important writings from that time still exist for our studies; therefore, we can make good translations of the NT in Greek, in our languages of today.

Important is also, that after returning from the exile in Babylon, many Jews had moved from their homeland on to surrounding countries where Greek was the common language. They could read the NT. Also, they had already translated the OT into Greek (the so-called “Septuagint”, named after its 70 translators). It is important to know this, for the NT mentions some Scripture verses from the OT which sound a bit different in the NT – because they were taken from the Greek version of the OT and not from the original Hebrew, which was hard to understand for all peoples outside Israel.

9. The division and contents of the Bible

The word “Bible” comes from the Latin word “Biblia” which means “book”. It is a collection of smaller books assembled into one large book that we now call the Bible. The Bible is divided into two parts, the Old Testament (OT) which means “Old Covenant”, and the New Testament (NT), which means “New Covenant”. A covenant is an official agreement that God has made with man.

The Bible was not written in a chronological order, and it is important to realize this as we read in it. Rather, the books in the Bible are grouped into categories, with historical books (the past) are in the beginning, the prophetic books (about the future) at the end, and the other writings in the middle. This is true for both the OT and the NT, and within each grouping there can be under-divisions. As we can see, to some extent the chronological time order has been taken into account in the arrangement.

The Bible has been grouped into categories:

Old Testament – 39 books:

1. Historical books : (a) Books of Moses, Genesis – Deuteronomy
(b) Other historical books, Joshua-Esther
2. Writings : Poetic books, Job – Song of Solomon
3. Prophetic books : (a) Major (larger) prophets, Isaiah – Daniel
(b) Minor (smaller) prophets, Hosea – Malachi.

New Testament – 27 books:

1. Historical books : (a) Gospels, Matthew – John
(b) Acts of the apostles (birth of the church)
2. Writings : (a) Letters by Paul (Romans - Hebrews)
(b) Other letters (James – Jude)
3. Prophetic book : The Revelation to John.

Finding a Scripture fast: *It is very useful to learn the order of the Bible books by heart, to quickly find a scripture. It also helps to mark the cutting edge of your closed Bible with a pen line, for the following groups of books: Gen.-Deut., Job-Song of S., Matth.-Acts. The unmarked chapter pages then contain the rest! - By the way, isn't it beautiful to see above, how the Bible books were placed together, with creation at its beginning, and the "last things" (Revelation) at the end?*

10. General content of each Bible book

Below, some short information about each Bible book, so that we find what we are looking for more easily. Not all of the content of a book can be given in just one sentence, though!

OT – Historical books

(a) Books of Moses: the "Torah" (Law), also called "Pentateuch" (meaning 5 books)

- Genesis : Beginnings – creation, flood, Abraham and his family, journey into Egypt
Exodus : Moses, journey out of Egypt in the desert, 10 commandments, priesthood, tabernacle.
Leviticus : Laws on priesthood, offerings, feasts in Israel
Numbers : Numbering Israelites in the desert, unbelief, wanderings'
Deuteronomy : "Second Law"; book of remembrance, death of Moses.

(b) Other historical books

- Joshua : Conquest of Canaan, the Promised Land; dividing the land.
Judges : God is King over Israel, using strong leaders; but many fail.
Ruth : A foreign woman believes God; she becomes an ancestor of Christ.
1Samuel : Birth of Samuel the prophet; Saul rejected as king, David anointed as new king.
2Samuel : David's kingship over Israel. David buys a threshing floor (later temple there).
1Kings : David dies, Solomon's reign and death. The kingdom gets divided: North & South
2Kings : Divided kingdom; judgment on sins of Israel (North), later Judah (South).
1Chronicles : Israel's forefathers until David; his reign and death (overlap with previous books)
2Chronicles : Reign of Solomon; divided kingdom, sin of the people, until exile to Babylon.
Ezra : First attempts to return from exile to restore temple in Jerusalem and its people
Nehemiah : Reconstruction of Jerusalem's walls; spiritual restoration.
Esther : A Jewish queen in exile in Persia saves her people.

OT – Writings

Poetical books

- Job : A righteous man keeps his faith in God during his sufferings
Psalms : Five groups of songs to God; many were written by David.
Proverbs : Words of wisdom and advice for life, many by Solomon, son of David.
Ecclesiastes : Life on earth will never give full satisfaction...
Song of Songs: A song of love, written by Solomon.

OT – Prophetic books

(a) *Major Prophets (books with larger content)*

- Isaiah : His calling; prophecies of judgement (Israel & nations); prophecies of future comfort.
Jeremiah : His calling; prophecies of judgment on Israel & nations; exile to Babylon.
Lamentations : Jeremiah's song of sorrow over Jerusalem's fall.
Ezekiel : His calling , prophecies of judgment and future restoration.
Daniel : A godly Jew in exile in Babylon becomes a leader; prophetic visions from God.

(b) *Minor Prophets (books with smaller content)*

- Hosea : His unfaithful wife is compared to Israel's sin before God.
Joel : Prophecies of judgment; the "Day of the Lord" – an end-time vision.
Amos : Prophecies and visions of judgment; future restoration promised.
Obadiah : Prophecy of judgment on Edom, a neighbour of Israel.
Jonah : Disobedience of Jonah, his salvation, and repentance in Nineveh
Micah : Prophecies of judgment and restoration; a plea to repent
Nahum : { Prophecies of destruction on the strong city of Nineveh
Habakkuk : His questions about God's actions; his prayer and trust.
Zephaniah : Judgment on the whole earth; a promise of restoration
Haggai : Temple to be completed. Future destruction of the world
Zechariah : Visions and prophecies; future of Israel; the Messiah
Malachi : God judges priests and people, but remembers the upright.

The time between Old Testament and New Testament

Between the OT and NT lies a period of about 400 years, ending right before Jesus was born. During that time, no Bible books were written; but some manuscripts of those days do have value – we call them "apocrypha" (meaning "hidden").

They do not have the same authority and quality as the Bible, but can be good to read as background reading, and add to our insights regarding that period of Jewish history.

NT – Historical books

(a) *The four Gospels:*

- Matthew : Birth, message, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Mark : Message, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Luke : Birth, message, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (longest Gospel)
John : Jesus as Son of God who sent the Holy Spirit; death & resurrection of Jesus.

(b) *Acts of the apostles*

- Acts : Birth of the church; works and travels of the apostles as the first missionaries.

NT – Writings

(a) *The letters by Paul*

- Romans : How we are saved from sins, now righteous by Jesus' death, and the implications.
1Corinthians : Principles for church, marriage, and spiritual gifts. The dead will indeed be raised.
2Corinthians : Be a letter of Christ; in Him we are a righteous new creation! Advice on giving.
Galatians : Christ fulfilled the OT-law; we are now under grace. Fruit of the Holy Spirit.
Ephesians : Unity of Jew & heathen; Christian life by the Holy Spirit; spiritual warfare.
Philippians : Paul's prayer and example; justified by faith of Christ. And amazing advice...
Colossians : We are complete in Christ; so act in His Name. Seek what is above...
1Thessalonians: Paul's advice to the church; messages by Timothy; dead raised at Christ's return.
2Thessalonians: Reassuring the church; the future return of Jesus; let brethren be faithful.
1Timothy : Pastoral advice on church leadership to Timothy, a fine young church leader.
2Timothy : Remain faithful when suffering and false teachings come. Paul's coming death.
Titus : Guide the churches in Crete, watch out for false teachers. Obey authorities.
Philemon : Paul's plea: Receive Onesimus back as a good brother.
Hebrews *) : Christ's glory & rest by faith; High Priest; New Covenant. Heroes of faith.

(b) *The other letters*

- James : Faith at work in perseverance and discipline. Sins of the tongue.
1Peter : Encouragement and advice to a persecuted, suffering church.
2Peter : Keep sound teaching and holiness in time of false teachers
1John : Walk in the light, for fellowship with God and man. Try the spirits...
2John : Encouraging a lady to stand strong (some think it was written to Mary).
3John : Encouragement and advice to Gaius, a faithful worker.
Jude : Warning against false teachers; prophet Enoch; mockers in the last days.

NT – Prophetic book

- Revelation : Letters to 7 churches; John's visions on the end of the world and heaven to come.

11. Some of the most famous chapters in the Bible

Below, we mention some very important and beautiful Bible chapters, especially good to read. Of course, this list is never complete and can differ from person to person...

Old Testament:

Gen.1,24 – Ex.20 – Deut.18 – Josh.1 – 1Sam.3,17 – Psalms 16, 23, 45, 51, 84, 91 etc.; Prov.3 – Is.5-6, 11-12,40,53,61 – Jer.1,31 – Ezek.37 – Dan.7 – Joel 2 – Micah 5 – Hab.3 – Zech.3-4.

New Testament:

Matth.5-7,13,24-25 – Mk.4,16 – Luk.10,23-24 – John 14-17 – Acts 1-2 – Rom.6-8,12 – 1Co.12-14; 2Co.4 – Gal.5 – Eph.3,6 – Php.2,4 – Col.1-2 – Hebr.11-12- 1Pet.1,4 – 1John1 – Rev.1,21-22.

12. How to study the Bible

Making a good start

Find a quiet place, have a Bible, pen and paper at hand. Pray to God that He helps you understand what you read, and to focus your thoughts. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you, so that you can see what new things you can learn, and what you can make practical in your own life.

It can be exciting to write down what you find out, and what your own personal thoughts are. It is important to rely on the Holy Spirit, who guides us into all truth – so read prayerfully and carefully so that God can speak to you in a fresh way.

Realize that the *chapter and text numbers did not originally belong in the Bible*, but were added to help us find a text. The NT was divided into chapters in the 13th century, and the division into verses was done in 1551 by Robert Stephanus, a book printer from Paris, as he was sitting on horseback, travelling from Paris to Lyon! Because the numbering of chapters and verses did not belong in the original Bible, this is good to realize: things we read about can continue into the next chapter, and it often brings new insights as we read on into that next chapter! In case you have never read the Bible through in its entirety, and want to take up the challenge, a good start would be in the NT with the Gospel of John, and then to read on from there.

Perhaps some questions arise in your heart as you read. Then, it can often be helpful to use a different translation. Many people use several translations together when they study the Bible. When using a Bible with notes and comments, that can be very useful. The notes often point to other Bible verses with a similar content, an exciting way to study...

Below, some books that can help us understand the Bible more fully:

A. Concordance. A good and complete Concordance will cost some money, but it is the most helpful tool imaginable. This “dictionary of Bible words” is also a study tool, in that we can study a topic by simply looking up all the verses that have such a word! Look up, for instance, “baptism” and “to baptize”, to get a true grasp of the original meaning in NT days.... Some concordances mention the original Hebrew and Greek words; that gives you an insight into the original meaning of verses even if you do not know Hebrew or Greek yourself! One such example is Young’s Analytical Concordance.

Interesting is also, to look up there, how often a word is used, and in which Bible book it appears the most. That can also give us some insights about the author!

B. Bible Dictionary. Here we find specific Bible words explained, for instance the historic background of the city of Ephesus, or background information on people, plants etc. Most Bible dictionaries have a brief summary of each Bible book, so that you can read about a book before you start digging into the Bible itself. However, this can make us a bit lazy in relying on other people’s discoveries, rather than making our own with the help of the Holy Spirit...

C. Bible Commentary. Here we find in-depth and often detailed information for each verse. Such books can be quite expensive, but in our days many such commentaries can be found on the internet (that is also true for many other Bible helps).

It is very important to ask advice on which websites give the most reliable comments and information; so it can be helpful to ask your Christian bookstore or church leaders for advice.

D. Daily Devotional

Next to the above, a daily devotional book with scripture readings for every day and comments, can be a good way to start or end the day. Find one by a good author, and a version that you really like. Such a book can feed your soul!

However, for in-depth Bible study, the other Bible helps are more informative.

Note: These materials can all be found on the internet, yet having them at hand is far more practical!

13. Memorizing Scripture verses

Learning important Scriptures by heart is a great tool to get deeply familiar with God's Word, and an amazing help in evangelism. Especially where no Bible is available, this can prove important! Use the most accurate Bible translation for your efforts... *Examples of good NT-verses can be:*

Matth.3:11, 4:4, 11:28-30, 28:19-20; Mk. 1:17; Lk.12:31; John 3:15-17, 5:44, 11:25-26, 14:6; Ac.1:8; Rom.3:23-24, 5:1-2, 11:29, 12:1-2; 1Cor.6:11; 2Cor.1:7, 5:16-17+21, 12:9; Gal.5:22; Eph.1:7, 4:31, 6:10-18; Phlp.4:4-8; Col.1:13-14, 2:10, 3:12-14; 1Tim.4:14; 1Pet.5:6-7; Rev.7:14.

14. Bible study methods

We probably all develop our own favourite Bible study method, but it is good to change now and then (and learn new things!), so we mention some well-known methods to choose from:

A. Personal method

Read a passage of Scripture, and pray about it. What can you learn personally from it, what can you apply? What do you see about the character of God, and of Jesus? What is the best part here, what speaks to your heart? Is there a prayer topic in it for you, or for others?

If you write down what you find out (with date), and keep it in a file, that can become precious!

B. Overview method

Start a Bible book by first reading it through, starting with a short book to see if you like this method. Then, read it passage by passage, and underline what you think is the most important thought. As you finish the chapter, try to see the main line of thought there, and write it down on a paper. When you have read the full book, find the conclusion: what is the *main thought*, and the *goal* of this book?

C. Detailed method

Read a passage through carefully, and find out verse by verse what it really says. In what other Bible parts do we find the same thought, the same subject, the same person? What can you find out about the city mentioned, etc. – so look at the details in depth. A Bible Dictionary or Concordance can help here (also the internet). This is a study method we can learn a lot from – it takes time, but is good fun!

D. Biographical method

Find out about a person, for instance Barnabas, all you can: his circumstances, all cities where he went, the meaning of his name, etc.. Who was he? What was his life like? What is the meaning of his name? What can you find out about his character, situation, problems, example, etc.? Again, a Concordance etc. can help a lot; write down the special things you find.

E. Topical method

Take a subject or theme you are interested in (for instance joy-gladness-rejoicing, and related words) and look up in a Concordance all Scripture verses you can find about this topic. Read these verses all through, preferably with surrounding verses. Write down the special things you find. Even though this method can be time-consuming, it is especially helpful for topics that nobody else has information about. You can thus still find real and unique Bible-based answers! The conclusions can surprise you – worthy of writing down...

F. Fast method

Before you start reading a new Bible book, you can read a brief introduction from a Study Bible or Commentary. You will then already have a grasp of the main message, the circumstances and facts of this book from the start, and can read it through quickly while still having a good understanding of what the book says. Disadvantage when using Bible helps: we may now read the Bible passages with preconceived ideas...

G. Reading the whole Bible

The Bible has about 1100 chapters, so if we read 3 chapters a day, we will cover the whole Bible within a year! Some read 2 chapters of the OT and 1 of the NT each day; others take things easy and just continue where they last read. This is a good method for those already familiar with the Bible, but you will need a bit of persistence... Your bonus: a much better overview of the Bible as a whole.

15. Different ways of group Bible studies

Of course, we can select some of the ways to study the Bible mentioned above. However, some interesting ways for group Bible study are also possible, as mentioned below.

A. The one-teacher way

One person (not necessarily the leader of the meeting) introduces the Scriptures, while others listen and make notes. This quiet and disciplined way can lead a group fairly quickly through even a difficult passage or topic that is studied, and this way is also suitable for recordings. Some questions can be asked to the group members, to see if they have truly understood what was read.

The positive of this way to study together is that it opens up possibilities for young leaders to grow in leadership by bringing a well-prepared Bible study, where a question time at the end can be done with the help of a more mature person.

However, this method has a few weaknesses. Firstly, the person introducing the Scriptures must have some spiritual maturity. Another disadvantage is, that questions can only be answered at the end, which weakens the group participation. A solution can be, to stop the recording at the end of each passage, to answer any questions.

B. The delegated way

Every Bible study time (or just now and then), a different person leads the opening prayer, the time of singing, or the actual Bible study. They are asked to do so by the leader of the team meeting, who helps them as they go along. The overall leader remains in the background, as much as possible.

A weakness of this method is, that it is less suitable for groups who know little about the Bible, unless a mature Christian is present who can answer questions people have about the Bible passages. The advantage of this way is, that people obtain experience in leading a group Bible study and can grow fast in their gifts – and that they get to know each other in new ways.

C. The panel way

This interesting way of studying Scripture is not done often but sheds a broad light on the truth of the Bible. Here, 3 or 4 mature Christians each prepare the chapter(s) of the Bible in depth, but each has a slightly different task. They take part of the chapter each, while focussing on a different aspect of the text: historical background, main message, parallel verses, etc. As they each expound their part of Scripture, the others add their own insights when the first one has had his turn, etc. At the end, the people in the meeting can ask their questions to the panel.

A disadvantage of this way is, that 3 or 4 mature Christians with a good Bible knowledge are needed. On the other hand, this exciting and different way to study gives the hearers a broad spectrum of the truth... This can be an excitingly different way, very suitable for difficult passages like the book of Revelation, and it is very interesting for large audiences looking for a quality Bible study.

D. The find-out-together way

After reading a portion of Scripture together, each person thinks about it prayerfully for a few minutes, to see what God seems to speak through it. Then, each person can share in turn briefly what strikes him or her. Much room is given to questions, remarks, personal experiences, etc. This way does not require a lengthy preparation, and the group can really bond together. However, it only works if some mature Christians are present. Have a concordance and Bible Commentary at hand as well, and take a Bible book that can easily be applied to your own lives, such as the book of James.

E. The internet way

If no experienced Bible teachers or mature Christians are present, this is still a great possibility to get to know the Bible, while listening to a quality message together. Ask advice in your church, about what speakers available on the internet are good to listen to, and if possible have a Concordance and Commentary at hand. You can decide to stop after each portion of the passage for a question time if needed. At the end, there can be brief time for discussions and prayer.

An advantage of this way is, that only little preparation time is needed. A disadvantage is, that some questions may not be answered. If so, the group leader can ask advice in church to give the right answers next time...

16. How to prepare for a group Bible study

As we prepare for a Bible study meeting, we first pray to God for sensitivity to the people's needs, and for insight and help, also on which passages to study – and how!

An eye for the group

Ask the Lord to make you sensitive to the group, and to each person. Pray for each person, for their circumstances, and that God will speak to them personally... Try to find ways to get all of them involved, encouraging especially the shy ones. Pray also for a good and positive time of fellowship.

Make note of the personal details of people in the group, and a list with addresses and birthday dates of each one, to encourage their mutual bonding. A great way to bond can also be, to regularly organize a dinner party for the group, to go on a weekend together, visit the sick, etc.

We can also ask ourselves questions like these:

- * In which way is the Lord already at work in the lives of the people in the group?
- * Are many of those present recent converts who still need much basic information?
- * Which Bible subjects would be helpful for those present? What are their own preferences?
- * How can we get people involved in personal ways? Are some ready to take on responsibilities?

In preparation

When you know what Bible book or passage to study, pray about how to interpret the text, get familiar with it, and prepare as best you can - including details, difficult parts and background information. Use Bible helps and the internet. Ask yourself, which study method you are comfortable with that will be helpful to the group also? What ways of studying a text have been helpful to you personally? What did you enjoy yourself? How can you use that to bless others? Things you have liked yourself, are the things you can bring in an exciting way, and the group will enjoy that! Mention interesting facts; and make it a bit personal, with ways to apply these Scriptures to our personal lives. Internet can be a great help, too... Prepare some questions you can ask the group, to activate them.

Finally, if possible, you have a Concordance and Commentary at hand, to find answers that people have. If no answers can be found, ask someone in church, and next week come back on it.

The actual Bible study time

Many Bible study meetings begin with an informal and happy coffee- or teatime. Take plenty of time to share personal news, and to find out what each person may need prayer for. This is a very valuable time – people will know that we are Christians by our love! (John 13:35).

After that, a simple way is to start with prayer and some singing. Then together read through a Bible passage – depending on the way you have chosen to do Bible study. When introducing a passage, some questions can be asked to the group, to see if they understand what has been read; the group in return can ask questions about the passage.

Finally, ask someone to finish the Bible study in prayer; if possible try to choose someone who has been a bit in the background... Thanking God for this time is important, He has been active in it!

17. How to keep the results of your Bible studies

Keeping your study notes: Write your notes on separate sheets of paper (not 2 different topics or chapters on the same sheet), find a nice file, and collect them in the order of the Bible books and chapters that you took notes on. Thus, you will easily trace back what you had already found. That way, in the future this file can become a precious and personal guide...

A way to quickly jot down notes, for instance during a sermon, is by using your own abbreviations! Scriptures can be written: 1Cor.13:6, 7, 12; 1Cor.16:13 etc. ; but shorter and clearer is: 1Cor.13^{6-7,12}, 16^{13ff}.

Keeping your personal “golden treasures” and notes: Select a nice journal, and write in it your personal thoughts and findings about the Bible, or on a poem, memory or sermon, or things God speaks to you personally, etc. and place a date before each entry. Put page numbers in the top corner of each page and leave the last pages empty, to make a directory of your most special entries.

18. Dates of some important Bible events

*After thousands of years, it is not quite possible to give precise dates for many Bible events, but below is a **rough estimate** (scientists have differing opinions!) of some main events:*

Creation of Adam	: 4000 BC or before
Noah's Ark, the Flood	: 2400 BC
Abraham	: 2050 BC
Moses	: 1550 BC
Entering the Promised Land, Canaan:	1400 BC
King David	: 1000 BC
Building of the first temple	: 960 BC
Kingdom of Israel divided	: 930 BC
Fall of Northern Kingdom	: 722 BC
Prophet Isaiah	: 700 BC
Fall of Southern Kingdom & exile	: 586 BC
Prophet Daniel (in exile)	: 550 BC
First exiles are returning	: 537 BC
Temple & walls of Jerusalem rebuilt:	516 BC and later, till ±450
Malachi (last OT book)	: 430 BC
Birth of Jesus Christ	: 5 BC
Death of Herod the Great	: 4 BC
Death & resurrection of Jesus	: 29 AD
Paul dies	: 68 AD
Fall of Jerusalem	: 70 AD.
Apostle John on Patmos	: 90 AD.

19. In conclusion...

We are so blessed today! Many good books about the Bible are available in bookstores, and much valuable information can also be found on the internet. The Bible is worth all of it: it is not only the most famous, but also the most wonderful, most printed and oldest book on earth.

Having seen the importance of Bible study groups for many years, I felt it worthwhile to make this book available for free, on the website www.gratis-antwoorden.nl – it is shareware, and it may be sent on to as many people as you like! If you mention this website you may also copy it (unchanged) for your Bible study group, etc..

Although much of this Website is in Dutch, it also contains more shareware in English, that you might find interesting: **“On the Road to Renewal. A Practical Approach to Problems”**. This book, too, can be downloaded for free; it offers advice and encouragement in many problems we all may face, and I believe it can be a great help to you or your friends.

Clara M. van Dijk, 2017.