

BA Article: KNOWING YOUR BIBLE

The first religious song I remember singing as a child is the familiar "Jesus loves me this I know; For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong; I am weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me; the Bible tells me so."

Out of the mouth of babes! That folks is the simple sweet sound of a strong, biblical theology. Eugene H. Peterson's paraphrase, The Message renders John 5:39, "You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me!"

Lots of us read the Bible. Some read it more than others. Barna Research Group found that 45% of believers read the Bible in an average week and 12% read it daily. Those age sixty-five (65) and older read it the most, while those between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-five (25) read it the least. Women are more likely to read the Bible than men; married adults are more likely than single adults; residents of rural areas are more likely than urban or suburban adults to open the Bible in a given week; and people living in the midwest and south are more likely to read Scripture than those living in other regions of the country.

Do we believe what we read? Surveys revealed that the more successful people are by the world's standards (those making \$60,000 per year and college graduates), the more likely they are to reject the Bible as the totally accurate Word of God. The good news is that the survey also found 47% of American adults believe the Bible to be totally accurate.' These statistics indeed point out that we are reading the Bible - and some actually believe what they are reading.

In the last half of the eighteenth century, the French unbeliever Voltaire made the prediction that within 100 years the Bible and all Christianity would be completely forgotten. Voltaire died in 1778.

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Since that time the Bible has flourished. It remains the best-selling and most distributed book of all time. Some calculate, the Bible is, over a \$200 million-a-year retail market in the United States. The United Bible Societies estimate they have distributed nearly 9 billion Bibles, whole or part since 1947. At least one book of the Bible has been translated into over 1,928 languages since the invention of printing. One estimate is that since 1952 there have been 26 English translations and revisions of the entire Bible produced, as well as 25 additional translations and revisions of the New Testament alone. One count of the number of available English versions of the Bible is put at 40. If we can believe the research at least 9 out of 10 of you reading this have one copy of the Bible in your home and 8 out of 10 have more than one copy. The success of the Holy Scripture flies in the face of Voltair's prediction that the Bible would be forgotten.

I prefer the plural form, Holy Scriptures which highlights the diversity of style and genre within the Scriptures. Knowing your Bible means you recognize that in them we have the oracles, the laws, the prophets, the dreams, the interpreters of dreams, the wisdom, the history, the stories, the psalms, the letters, and so on. It is a whole library. Bible means after all, "the little books". What makes the Bible the Bible is the canon (the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament). These Books are bound together by the stories of historical acts of God recognized in the communities of faith that have existed even to the present.

Knowing the Bible is to understand that the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation tells one story of God's work in history and His love through the person, Jesus. The greatest evidence that God is personal, knowable, immeasurable, and good is the life and ministry of His Son Jesus Christ. And nothing is more important to knowing God through the whole Bible than to see the way God has come to us in the person of His Son. Those who follow and believe the story line of the 66 books of the Bible are led to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is the Bible's central character and theme. What was written before He was born into the world looks forward to Him; what was written after His

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ascension looks back to Him. The Bible predicts His coming, tells the story of His life, describes the power of His message, traces His impact on His followers, and promises His return.

The value of Scripture therefore is in its witness to the coming of Jesus as Christ. The Old Testament was highly regarded by New Testament writers as an inspired witness of the coming and significance of Christ. In the same way, the New Testament Scriptures also give witness to the same, a view made clear by Paul when he announced that his aim was simply to proclaim Christ as Lord, and to be nothing more but a servant to that cause (2 Corinthians 4:5). In sum, that is the role of the Bible, to present the story of God and His coming to us in the person of Jesus Christ.
