



THE MIRACLE OF THE BIBLE

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## *THE WORD OF GOD IN PRINT*

THE Bible is accepted as one of the greatest masterpieces of the world's literature. The grandeur of the opening chapters of Genesis and of John's Gospel, the moving poetry of the Psalms, the fiery denunciations of the Hebrew prophets, the compelling records of the life and work of Jesus, and the apocalyptic mysteries of the Book of Revelation – all these serve together to set the Bible in a class of its own. It is quite unrivalled by any other work, in any language or from any age. But it is more than this: the Bible claims to be the written word of God.

### *The world's most remarkable book*

The Bible's contents are of the greatest antiquity. Parts of it are over 3,000 years old and, as any historian worth his salt will tell you, it contains the oldest and the most reliable records of ancient history ever written. Time and again its narratives have been shown to contain a remarkably accurate account of people, of places, and of events of bygone ages. No other book in the world can begin to compare with the Bible for the way it helps us both to understand the past and thereby largely to explain the present.

The Bible's influence on the history of civilisation has been enormous. As the textbook of two of the great religions of the world (Judaism and Christianity) it has been a source of morality and enlightenment to countless millions down the centuries. Translated into almost 1,500 different languages, it has also been produced in Braille, shorthand and, in recent times, in machine-readable format for use on computers. In an age of rationalism and materialism, when disrespect for ancient traditions has almost become a fashion, the Bible has still managed to preserve something of an aura of

uniqueness. It stands head and shoulders above all the very greatest in the literature of the world and has strong claims on our attention and respect.

The Bible is also very big business. Ask any of the dozen or so Bible publishers who compete so fiercely for this particular corner of the world's book market! In the last forty years alone the eight new Bible versions published in English have sold well in excess of 100 million copies. Worldwide sales of the Good News Bible (1976) stand at over 7 million; the New English Bible (1970) has sold over 10 million; about 23 million copies of the Living Bible have been bought since 1971; and sales of the New International Version topped a million copies within less than a year of its publication date in 1979. Even King James's allegedly outdated Authorised Version of 1611 still brings in every year over a million pounds in revenue for its publishers. The Bible is without doubt the world's best-selling book. And if to these mind-boggling commercial publishing statistics are added all the Bibles distributed freely in the U.K. and throughout the world by the Gideons (over 70 million copies) and the Bible Society (a staggering estimated 1,000 million), the numbers of Bibles produced must far outstrip anything ever printed and published in the history of mankind.

### ***“The most valuable thing that this world affords”***

Most people know that it has long been traditional in an English court of law for a witness to swear the oath of truthfulness on a copy of the Bible. Many will be aware that in an Anglican wedding the marriage vows are solemnised by placing the ring on a Bible before it is transferred to the bride's finger. But few will have memories detailed or long enough to know that when a king or queen of England is crowned, a copy of the Bible is presented to the monarch for the swearing of the Coronation Oath, when the solemn words are heard: “... to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the Law

*and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; This is the royal Law: These are the lively Oracles of God."*

There is, in all these ceremonies, recognition that the Bible is something special, something sacred, something more than just a work of purely human literature. It is, if only in a faintly superstitious way, an acknowledgement that the Bible has an authority greater than that of any man, of the law of the land, and even of the crown itself. But what a different place the world would be if every ruler (and every resident) of each so-called 'Christian' country were to obey truly the "royal Law" of God which the Bible contains! Sadly, these token recognitions of respect for the Bible do not generally lead individuals to commit their lives fully to its demands. We need to give the Bible a much more central place in everyday life if we are to demonstrate the truth of the above quotation.

### ***Unread bestseller***

It is perhaps one of the greatest paradoxes of the modern world that, in spite of its high-volume sales, the Bible is generally so little read. As Sir Frederic Kenyon once remarked: "*Bible reading has been a notable characteristic of the English-speaking peoples from the Reformation to the end of the Victorian Age*", and the decline in Bible reading has undoubtedly been "*a serious loss to the moral and cultural equipment of the nation today*". But why have people continued to buy the Bible while no longer reading it? How can we explain the paradox?

There are many reasons for this general decline in the reading of the Bible; but three principal causes may be identified for consideration here: the growth of certain popular misconceptions, the advent of scientific materialism, and the desire to exclude the miraculous

element from religion. Rationalistic criticism of the Bible has succeeded over the last hundred years or so in persuading popular opinion that the Bible has been largely discredited.

It is commonly thought that the Bible contains many errors and internal contradictions which stamp it as the work of fallible men. This view is now the 'received wisdom' and, sad to say, very few of each rising generation even bother to check it out for themselves, for surely the experts and majority opinion cannot both be wrong?

### *An age of materialism*

In fact, of course, 'majority opinion' is notoriously dangerous to rely on; and this popular misconception about the Bible has only grown in the fertile, generally atheistic, soil of scientific materialism. First, we live in the era of the expert – and especially of the scientific expert – whose opinions are rarely questioned by the layman. And secondly, this is an age of materialism, in which man's ability to provide himself with all the comforts of modern life has brought him to rely largely upon himself, to the exclusion of God and, ultimately, even of his fellow-men. And if God no longer matters, why bother to read what claims to be His word?

But saddest of all, perhaps, is the growing desire on the part of some, in the wake of this general desertion of Bible-based religion and morality, to make Christianity more 'acceptable', by removing from it all trace of the miraculous. It is hoped that this new religion of convenience will satisfy the popular scientific belief that miracles simply 'cannot' happen, in spite of what the Bible so clearly teaches.

### *Modern scepticism*

This then is the sorry state to which popular opinion has brought the world in relation to its attitude to the Bible. But is it not remarkable

that all this was foreseen almost 2,000 years ago in the Bible itself? “For”, said the Apostle Paul to Timothy, *“the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth ...”* (2 Timothy 4:3,4). The world, it seems, is in a kind of vicious circle. For if men will not read the Bible, how can they know for themselves what it contains and whether or not it is true? Like any book, the Bible needs to be read to be estimated at its true worth. The circle has to be broken if faith in its message, and in the God who gave it, is ever to be restored and sustained.

### ***A “divine library”***

What then is this book which so many buy and so few take the trouble to read? It is, to begin with, a collection of books – sixty-six to be precise – written by about forty different authors over a period of many centuries. It was brought together gradually until its present form was fixed, after long usage and by common consent, towards the end of the fourth century of our present era. It claims, of course, to have God as its one ultimate author, and we shall be looking at this claim to Divine inspiration a little later on. But the Bible also explains that the variety and diversity of its contents were God’s chosen way of communicating appropriately in different ways to men of every age, as the writer to the Hebrews says: *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son”* (Hebrews 1:1).

It was Jerome in the fourth century who described the completed Bible as the “Divine library”, thus recognising that its multiple parts had a single, Divine source. Even earlier, Origen is on record as having this to say also: *“There are many sacred writings, yet there is but one Book. All the writings breathe the spirit of fulness, and there*

*is nothing, whether in the Law or in the Prophets, in the Evangelists or the apostles, which does not descend from the fulness of the Divine Majesty.”*

Many of the individual books of the Bible claim for themselves this Divine origin which these early Christian ‘fathers’ so rightly recognised; and this internal hallmark is one of the many elements which have to be taken into account in assessing each separate book’s relation to the Bible as a whole. Referred to together, subsequently, by the plural Greek word *Biblia* (‘the Books’), the intrinsic unity of the different parts of the Bible was ultimately acknowledged when the same word was later read as a Latin singular, meaning ‘the Book’ and from which our English word ‘Bible’ has come. In this way, even the term by which we now refer to Jerome’s “Divine library” recognises the indivisibility of the word of God.

### ***The golden thread***

The unity of the Bible resides not merely in the fact that its many ancient books have been brought together between two leather covers. Once read, it becomes obvious that these books are one in message, principle and aim. In revealing to men the purpose of God with the earth, the Bible presents a single Gospel of salvation from Genesis to Revelation. From the Garden of Eden to John’s vision of the heavenly Jerusalem coming down to earth, the same Divine purpose can be seen to continue unchanged: the glorification of God through the salvation of man. And this golden thread is woven with many other basic strands into the very fabric of the Bible. The mortality and sinfulness of man, the promise of a Saviour, the need for sacrifice and faith, the place of God’s chosen people Israel in the Divine plan, and the coming kingdom of God – these and countless other themes weave their way through Old and New Testament

alike, binding them together and stamping them as the product of a single mind.

The Bible claims to be God's book. In its themes and structure, in its purpose and direction, it shows a unity consistent only with an omniscient designer. Coincidence would be a quite inadequate explanation of the beauty and intricacy of the Bible's texture. Such wonderful design does not happen by chance. Seen under the microscope of the closest examination, the consistency of Bible themes reveals the evidence of God at work. As an earlier writer so aptly put it: *"Here is a book written by forty authors, living in different ages, without possible concert or collusion, producing a book which in all its parts is pervaded by one spirit, one doctrine, one design, and by an air of sublime authority which is its peculiar characteristic. Such a book is a literary miracle. It is impossible to account for its existence upon ordinary principles."*

### ***The miracle of revelation***

To call the Bible "a literary miracle" simply on the evidence of its unified message may seem to be a use of words which devalues the genuinely miraculous. But there are also other indicators of the Bible's superhuman origin, not least of which is the evidence of fulfilled prophecy. Men often guess about the future, but they cannot predict it with any degree of accuracy – and least of all the distant future. Yet the God of the Bible offers precisely this ability to foretell long-distant events as evidence of His existence and of the reliability of His word. *"Ask me of things to come"*, said God through the prophet Isaiah, for *"I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done"* (Isaiah 45:11; 46:9-11).

Even the Bible's strongest critics will admit that the Old Testament was in existence long before the birth of Christ. Yet the writings of

Moses, of the Psalmists and of the prophets contain the most detailed predictions of the life and work of Jesus. Just look, for example, at Genesis 3:15 and, especially, at Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, and ask yourself honestly how you can explain away the fact that such clear prophecies about Jesus came to be in the sacred scriptures of the Jews, who do not even yet recognise him as their Saviour. Similarly, it is possible to show that the unfolding misfortunes of the Jews, as well as the fate of the leading nations of the world, were outlined long before they happened, in prophecies of quite extraordinary detail (Deuteronomy 28, Ezekiel 26 and Daniel 2 are just three examples out of many). Yet such predictions are precisely what we should expect from the omniscient mind of a God who sees the whole of human history in a moment of time. They are clear evidence of the truly miraculous, revelatory character of the Bible.

We need to be clear also about this important point: revelation, if it is properly understood as meaningful communication from God to man, is by its very nature miraculous. Like any miracle, revelation involves the exercise of God's power, His Spirit; it does not merely 'happen' in the ordinary course of events, and it is not achievable by men without the aid of God. The Bible exhibits all these characteristics of a miracle: its writers are continually reminding us that they were the instruments of revelation, not the originators of the message. "*Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*", explains the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:21); and even the Lord Jesus himself, "*the Word made flesh*", admitted that he too had been the subject of this miraculous work of God: "*For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak*" (John 12:49).

This miraculous work, most often referred to as inspiration, can be seen in operation throughout the pages of the Bible. For whether

through dreams, visions, prophets, apostles, or angelic messengers, the Spirit of God is presented as the moving force behind the message. It is this, above all, that explains why the Bible has so much to tell us which, as human beings, we simply would not otherwise know. It is the miracle of revelation which brings the things of God into the arena of human understanding. The Bible is the word of God made print.

### *The miracle of providence*

People often wonder when it was that the contents of the Bible were fixed in their present form, and by whom and on what grounds. Implicit in such questions is the feeling that if human selection has decided what is called 'the canon' of scripture, then the choice cannot be relied on as infallible. It is sometimes wrongly suggested in reply that the final form of the Bible was determined by the decision-making processes of church councils from the second to the fifth centuries AD, and that the canon of scripture must therefore be faithfully accepted on the authority of the church alone.

Instead, there is clear evidence to show that it was the character of each Bible book, as inspired and revealed, which ensured its more or less immediate inclusion in the growing body of Divine scriptures, which were committed as they grew first to the Jewish nation and ultimately to the early Christians (see Romans 3:2 and 2 Timothy 3:15). There is much internal Bible evidence to indicate that this process went on steadily in both Old and New Testament times alike (see 2 Chronicles 34:14 and 2 Peter 3:15,16 for just two examples). The councils of the Jewish and, later, of the Christian churches did not so much choose what was to be included or excluded from the Bible as confirm what had already been long accepted as the word of God.

We can rest assured in all this that the contents of the Bible have not been left merely to the fallible choice of men. It is, after all, not unreasonable to expect that an all-powerful God should safeguard through the centuries, by providential means, that which He had already brought into existence by miraculous revelation. *“My word”*, said God, *“shall not return unto me void”* (Isaiah 55:11).

God’s continuing care for the preservation of His word has clearly extended also to the manner in which it has been transmitted from age to age. We do not now possess so much as a single original Bible manuscript; and yet the centuries of scrupulously devoted copying which have preserved the text of the Bible as we know it today have done far more than simply safeguard the overall integrity of the Divine message. For God has ensured, through the labours of generations of gifted and painstaking men, from the early Jewish scribes to the later Massorettes and the monastic copyists of the Christian era, that the text of His word has remained remarkably free from substantial change or corruption. In this respect too the Bible is without parallel in ancient literature.

The discovery in 1947 of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in caves near Qumran, has illustrated in particularly spectacular fashion just how accurately the manuscripts on which our English Bible is based correspond with copies from a much earlier date. The miracle of providence enables us to say with confidence that we have a Bible text “so near to the original as makes no difference in any vital respect”.

### ***“Every man in his own tongue”***

When the miracle of ‘tongues’ enabled the apostles on the Day of Pentecost to preach the Gospel in many foreign languages to thousands of Jews from all over the Roman world (Acts 2:1-11), it was a sign that Christianity was on the march. Not many years later,

too, the Apostle Paul – whose mission as the apostle to the Gentiles was to evangelise the nations beyond Judea (Acts 9:15) – was supernaturally gifted with the ability to preach in many languages (1 Corinthians 14:18). These were clear indications of the important role that the translation of God’s word into foreign languages would have to play in later years in the spread of its influence into the lives of millions who could not understand the original Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek in which God’s prophets and apostles were inspired to speak and write.

An inspired text does not, of course, require an inspired translator for its meaning to be accurately conveyed into another language. And once the text of the Bible had been completed and the Spirit-gifted apostles had passed off the first century scene, it was necessary only that this collection of Divine revelations be preserved for subsequent generations to read or to translate for others to read also. The knowledge of languages and the ability to translate them are skills which can be learned over a period of time and without direct miraculous aid. Yet the history of Bible translations, from the Greek Septuagint version of the Hebrew Old Testament in the third century BC to the many English translations of our own twenty-first century, is a testimony to the providence of God in helping men to learn and practise their human skills so well.

The life stories of great scholars like John Wycliffe (1320-1384) and William Tyndale (1494-1536) in particular bear all the hallmarks of Divine oversight. By their dedication and scholarship they were able to translate into English the very thoughts of God, which had hitherto been jealously hidden from the common people in the Latin of the Romish priesthood. Privations, persecution and even torture were unable to prevent the diligent labours of such men from spreading the understanding of the word of God more widely than ever before.

The advent of printing with movable type (1454) – perhaps the greatest, and certainly the most far-reaching technological innovation of all time – was also the spur to many others who followed them. It made the Bible available on a scale previously unimagined, and helped to realise Tyndale’s ambition to make even the humble ploughboy familiar with the text of scripture.

The sudden growth in the number of copies of the Bible in existence was quite phenomenal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. And when the translation commissioned by King James I (the so-called Authorised Version) was published in 1611, the printer’s craft and the translator’s skill were brought together in such a providential way as to give the English-speaking world a Bible version which has never yet been surpassed for style and quality. In presenting the AV to their readers, too, the translators provided a fitting summary of that combination of human diligence and providential care by which the word of God has been broadcast to the masses. For, they explained, “having and using as great helps as were needful ... we have at length, through the good hand of the Lord upon us, brought the work to that pass that you see”.

The Revised Version of 1885 may reflect a fuller knowledge of ancient Hebrew vocabulary and of earlier Greek manuscripts; the Revised Standard Version of 1952, the New English Bible of 1970 and the New International Version of 1979 may put the word of God into language more comprehensible to the man in the street. But the fact remains that the Authorised Version, along with all genuine translations, <sup>[1]</sup> is a monument to Divine providence; through all such versions, even with all the problems inherent in the transfer of meaning from one language and idiom to another, the word of God still sounds clear and true. Through the translator’s expertise, the inspired word of apostles and prophets *“has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the earth”*. *“There is no*

*speech nor language, where their voice is not heard*" (Psalm 19:4, quoted in Romans 10:18).

### *A challenging claim*

The Bible comes before us, then, demanding to be heard as the word of God. *"Thus saith the Lord"*, and phrases like it, are an integral part of the fabric of the Old Testament. To remove all those parts of scripture claiming Divine inspiration for themselves, or recognising it in others, would leave but little remaining. The Apostle Peter's claim that the Jewish scriptures were produced when *"holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:21) is either true or it is a pious fraud. But when we realise the extent to which the Lord Jesus Christ himself – not to mention his apostles – recognised that same Old Testament as the authoritative word of God, there ought to be no doubt that the attitude of a true follower of Christ should be the same. *"Have ye not read?"*; *"It is written"*; *"What saith the scripture?"* – these were favourite phrases of the Master when referring to the largest part of what we now know as the Bible.

Significantly too, the Lord Jesus claimed no less of an inspired authority for his own words (see John 17:8); he promised his apostles that they too would be supernaturally guided by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13-15); and the early Bible Christians took it as a foundation doctrine that *"all scripture (both Old and New Testaments by then) is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ..."* (2 Timothy 3:16).

Such a challenging claim by the Bible about itself leaves no middle way for our personal reaction to its message. We must either accept or reject it. For if the claim is false, then the Bible's message is of no real value, and the Gospel of salvation it contains is but a figment of man's imagination. But if the claim is true, then the Bible's message

commands obedience and its Gospel offers the true hope of life beyond the grave. The Bible's claim is no academic exercise: it is a matter of life and death.

### *The critics confounded*

There have, of course, always been those who have preferred to reject rather than to accept the Bible as God's word. The serpent in Eden successfully undermined our first parents' faith in the spoken word of God with a question which has been heard on the lips of many a hostile Bible critic since: "*Yea, hath God said ...?*" (Genesis 3: 1). The wicked king Jehoiakim, who cut up the written word of God and sought – unsuccessfully – to destroy it (Jeremiah 36), has had his counterparts among the unbelieving in almost every age. Yet the Bible has survived, while its critics have passed away.

And the Bible has survived not just in the sense of having been preserved as a physical object: it has also retained its remarkable integrity as the textbook of a saving faith. Each new generation of critics has raised or, more often, reused, alleged Bible difficulties or discrepancies. Yet all such 'problems' are capable of perfectly reasonable solutions which commend themselves to men and women of goodwill. More frequently too, in recent times, the discoveries of archaeology have shown many criticisms of the Bible to be wrong. "Moses", we were once confidently told, "could not have written the Pentateuch because he lived before the art of writing was developed"; Belshazzar, Sargon and the Hittites were all said to have been fictitious Bible figures; and the census of Caesar Augustus at the time of the birth of Jesus, mentioned by Luke, was dismissed as inaccurate. Yet in all these examples, as in countless others, the Bible has been corroborated by further scholarly research.

The sad fact is that most criticism of the Bible goes hand in hand with an unwillingness to respond to the demands of its message, and is often based on preconceived theories which are themselves unproven or unprovable. Such 'willing ignorance' is a personal tragedy for those involved as well as for those who are taken in by it. The Bible can certainly stand the most searching examination but, as has been so rightly said before, "it does not yield its treasures to its critics".

### ***"The voice of God to every man"***

Speaking of the completed Bible, the third century Christian teacher Origen had this to say: *"Even at the present time the words of fulness speak in Holy scripture to those who have eyes to see the mysteries of heaven and care to hear the voice of God"*. This reflects the Bible's own rule of approach, based on the condition laid down by Jesus: *"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"* (Luke 8:8, quoted in Revelation 2:7 and elsewhere). The Apostle Paul told the Athenians that God *"now commandeth all men every where to repent"* (Acts 17:30); but that command is heard in our day through the medium of print and no longer by Spirit-guided prophets and apostles. The Bible is the word of God made print by miraculous and providential means, and God requires men to listen to His voice in its pages. Yet He does not compel them to do so. *"To this man will I look"*, says God, *"even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word"* (Isaiah 66:2).

In this age, when the printed Bible, available in a multitude of tongues, is the unique source of revelation about the mind and will of God, the daily prayerful reading of His word is the only way men can now hear His voice. The rich rewards that flow from such a regular audience with God need to be experienced to be believed; but there are examples enough in scripture to make it worth trying for ourselves (see for instance, Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2,3).<sup>[2]</sup>

## *“Converting the soul”*

God has set His word in the earth to produce fruit to the glory of His Name (Isaiah 55:10,11), and this is achieved by men and women learning of His thoughts and ways and responding to them. The aim and object of the Bible, therefore, is first to inform, and then to reform mankind. This is what the Psalmist means when he says:

*“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”* (Psalm 19:7)

Conversion – from the natural, sinful ways of man, to the spiritual, righteous ways of God – is the first essential step on the road to salvation. As Jesus himself said:

*“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 18:3)

The all-important task of the word of God is to bring men’s hearts, through humility, back to God. When that process has begun, a man can be spoken of, in the words of the Apostle Peter, as *“being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”* (1 Peter 1:23).

## *A word of power*

It would be a mistake to suppose that the word of God has somehow suffered a loss of its redemptive power by its reduction to print, and that it is necessary for the Holy Spirit to reveal its meaning directly to us before we can understand the Bible. As another writer has well said, *“The Bible is essentially rational, but because of its divine authorship it is instinct with power possessed by no other book, and all parts are profitable”*. This view is confirmed by Paul’s important statement to Timothy, that *“the holy scriptures*

*are able to make thee wise unto salvation*" (2 Timothy 3:15), for the words "are able" could be translated "have power", the original Greek word being related to the English word 'dynamic'.

The Bible reveals to the enquiring reader "the knowledge of God"; and the truth contained in it is sometimes referred to as the "power of God" or "Spirit", because it came by the Holy Spirit and is itself therefore "quickening", or able to make alive that which was dead (see John 6:63; Ephesians 6:17; 2 Peter 1:3; 1 John 5:7, RV). Though we are now required to manage without the direct, personal ministry of apostles like Paul, we are still commended, as the Ephesian elders were, *"to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build (us) up, and to give (us) an inheritance among all them which are sanctified"* (Acts 20:32). The "lively oracles" of God (Acts 7:38) are in no sense a dead letter. God's word "has still its ancient power".

### *A sense of purpose*

The power of the Bible is enshrined in its Divine origin and is demonstrated in its various effects in the lives of men and women. Prominent amongst such effects is the Bible's ability to bring a sense of purpose into life itself. The Gospel message contained in the Bible is essentially concerned with God's future plans for the earth and for mankind. The Bible is the record of God's continuing activity, centred in the work of His Son Jesus, and leading ultimately to man's redemption. The knowledge and conviction of the "great and precious promises", relayed to us in the word of God, impart purposefulness into man's otherwise aimless existence. There have been many down the ages who have experienced in their own lives the sense of direction felt by the Psalmist when he wrote:

*"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."* (Psalm 119:105)

And for those who, through their understanding of that word, come to follow the example of the “word made flesh”, the aim and object of existence becomes, as his was, to do God’s will, as it is written “*in the volume of the book*” (Hebrews 10:7).

### ***A source of comfort***

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

So wrote the Apostle Paul in Romans 15:4. In such a troubled world as ours, Paul’s words have an even more apt significance than the apostle may have known. The Bible not only opens up for us, as it has done down the centuries for generations of its readers, some of the otherwise disturbing mysteries of life and death; it also brings that most necessary commodity in times of distress: peace of mind. That peace which Jesus promised his disciples can be ours to the full through the pages of God’s word (John 14:27). No personal problem is without its solution in the word of “*the God of all comfort*” (2 Corinthians 1:3); and beyond all the difficulties and concerns of personal life, the Bible holds out the reassurance of that most certain antidote for all the world’s greatest ills: the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:11; 3:20,21). When we read of that great promise in the Bible and are convinced of its imminent fulfilment, we can “*comfort one another with these words*” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

### ***“The words of eternal life”***

The Lord Jesus Christ was, as always, giving good advice when he told his contemporaries to “search the scriptures” (John 5:39). The exhortation was not lost on Peter and a few of the other disciples,

for they recognised that there was no other source of saving knowledge apart from the words that came from God. “*Lord*”, said Peter as spokesman of the Twelve, “*to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (John 6:68). Peter’s moving confession of faith in Jesus was thus bound up inextricably with an acceptance of his message as the word of God – even though he and the early disciples did not then fully understand everything that Jesus said.

Today, as always, it is possible, like the shallower disciples of Jesus in John 6:67, to ‘go away’ from God by neglecting, ignoring, or rejecting that eternal life which is contained in the Bible, the word of God in print. Towards the end of his long prayer for his disciples, recorded in John 17, the Lord Jesus prayed specifically for those who would later come to believe in him through the words of his disciples (verse 20). The Bible is God’s answer to that prayer. Will you open your ears to the saving words of God’s Book? Or are you going to deny the miracle of the Bible?

*“Will ye also go away?”*

REG CARR

*[1] Paraphrase versions, such as the Living Bible and, in part, the Good News Bible and the versions by J. B. Phillips, cannot be classed as genuine translations, since their concern is not so much to transfer the sense of the actual words used in the Hebrew and Greek texts as to expound the meaning in an ‘easy-to-read’ style, with a consequent loss of accuracy.*

*[2] Bible reading tables are available online to print out for your own use at <http://findinggod.co.uk/bible-study/plan/> If followed daily, they will take the reader twice through the New Testament and once through the Old Testament in the course of a year.*

*“The Bible is more than a historical document to be preserved. And it is more than a classic of English literature to be cherished and admired. It is a record of God’s dealing with men, of God’s revelation of Himself and His will. It records the life and work of him in whom the word of God became flesh and dwelt among men. The Bible carries its full message, not to those who regard it simply as a heritage of the past or praise its literary style, but to those who read it that they may discern and understand God’s word to men.”* (From the Preface to the Revised Standard Version)

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