

DISCOVER

WE CAN BELIEVE THE BIBLE

Don Richardson walked into the tropical forests of Irian Jaya in 1962 because he thought he could make a difference among a native tribe called the Sawi with just one book, the Bible, and one story, the story of Jesus. The Sawi were in danger of extinction. Villages forced closer together by land development were involved in constant skirmishes. Captives were killed and cannibalized. For generations, Sawi society had idealized a particular form of treachery called “fattening for the kill.” Tribal heroes were those who

had carefully cultivated friendships in some village down the river, developed trust over months and years, and then, when their victims least suspected it, closed in for the kill.

This practice poisoned attitudes and destroyed relationships. How do you share the gospel in an understanding way in this type of environment?

The breakthrough came from a tribal custom. When warring tribes settled their dispute they gave one another a “peace child.” This involved the exchange of two infants between tribes. Each tribe promised to rear the child as if it were their own. This custom mirrored what Jesus had done for the tribal members and all mankind. Jesus exchanged heaven for this earth and became a human living among us. He was the ultimate “Peace Child.”

The eyes of the tribal members lit up with understanding. They accepted Jesus into their lives and began to study the Bible. An incredible transformation took place. Men who hated each other lived in peace. Husbands who abused and tortured their wives as slaves cherished them as companions. The Sawis forgave their enemies, reconciled differences, and lived as a loving community.

Does God still speak to people through the pages of the Bible? He certainly does. As I write this, I’m looking at the answer sheet sent to us by a student in one of our Bible courses. A note at the bottom states, “I am on death row in the Utah State Prison. Before I took this Bible course, I was lost, but now I have something to look forward to, and I have found a new love.”

God uses the Bible in a powerful way to transform people’s lives. Wherever people really begin to study the Bible, lives are dramatically changed.

1. HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH THE BIBLE

After creating Adam and Eve, the first man

and woman on earth, God spoke to them face-to-face. But when God came to visit with Adam and Eve after they sinned, what did the couple do?

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and THEY HID FROM THE LORD GOD among the trees of the garden.”—Genesis 3:8.

(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

Sin interrupted face-to-face contact with God. After sin came to our world, how did God communicate with people?

“Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”—Amos 3:7.

God has not left us in the dark concerning life and its meaning. Through His prophets—persons God called to speak and write for Him—He has revealed His answers to life’s great questions.

2. WHO WROTE THE BIBLE?

The prophets gave God’s messages by voice and pen while they lived, and when they died, their writings lived after them. These prophetic messages were then gathered together, under God’s leading, in the book we call the Bible.

But how reliable are these writings?

“You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but

men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.—2 Peter 1:20, 21.

The Holy Spirit revealed to the prophets the messages of Scripture. The writers of the Bible wrote not according to their own will or whim, but only as they were moved, or controlled, by the Spirit of God. The Bible is God's own book!

In the Bible God tells us about Himself, and reveals His purposes for the human race. The Bible is a book of history, of prophecy, and of promise, outlining God's whole plan of salvation. It not only shows God's view of the past, but also opens up the future, telling us how the problem of evil will finally be resolved and how peace will finally come to our world.

Is all the Bible a message from God?

“ALL Scripture is GOD-BREATHED and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

The Holy Bible affects human beings so profoundly because “all” the Bible is “God-breathed.” It's more than a nice collection of moral principles; it's more than a great book; it's an inspired document, God's Book. The prophets related what they saw and heard in human language, but their message came directly from God.

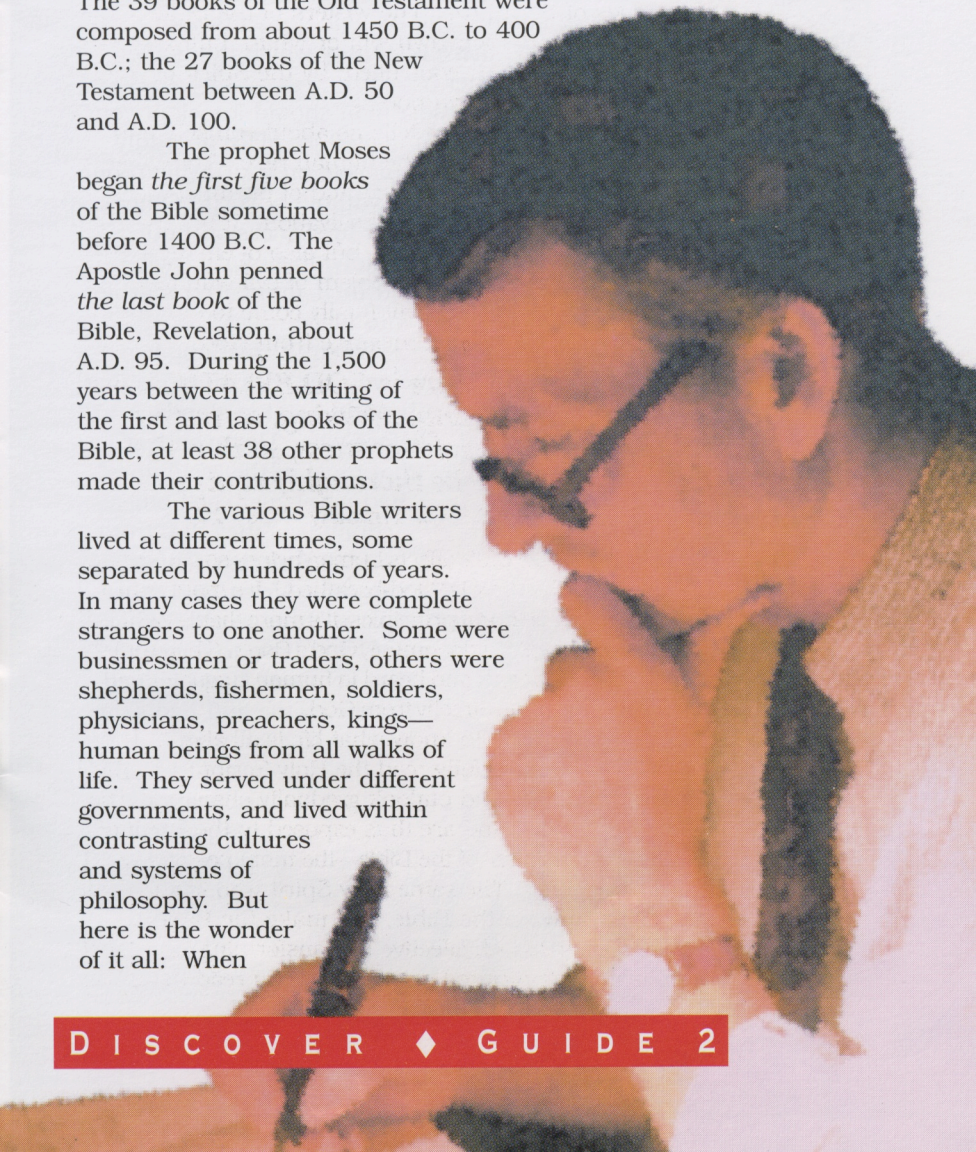
If you want to know what life is all about, honestly and prayerfully read the Holy Scriptures. You'll find your attitude and outlook gradually changing. The more you study—and are thus exposed to the Spirit of God, the real author of the Bible—the more peace of mind you'll experience. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets to write the Bible, will make the Bible teachings, its gospel, effective in transforming your life if you invite the Spirit to be present as you read the Bible.

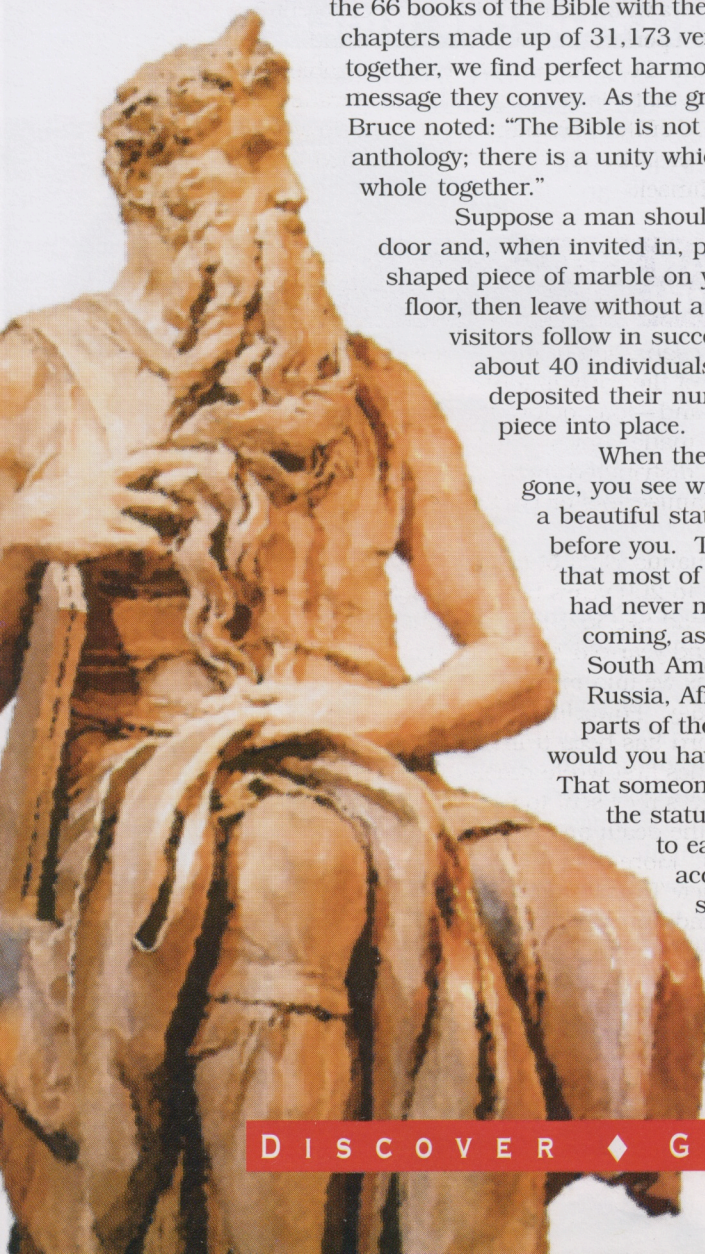
3. THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is actually a library of 66 books. The 39 books of the Old Testament were composed from about 1450 B.C. to 400 B.C.; the 27 books of the New Testament between A.D. 50 and A.D. 100.

The prophet Moses began *the first five books* of the Bible sometime before 1400 B.C. The Apostle John penned *the last book* of the Bible, Revelation, about A.D. 95. During the 1,500 years between the writing of the first and last books of the Bible, at least 38 other prophets made their contributions.

The various Bible writers lived at different times, some separated by hundreds of years. In many cases they were complete strangers to one another. Some were businessmen or traders, others were shepherds, fishermen, soldiers, physicians, preachers, kings—human beings from all walks of life. They served under different governments, and lived within contrasting cultures and systems of philosophy. But here is the wonder of it all: When





the 66 books of the Bible with their 1,189 chapters made up of 31,173 verses are brought together, we find perfect harmony in the message they convey. As the great scholar F. F. Bruce noted: "The Bible is not simply an anthology; there is a unity which binds the whole together."

Suppose a man should knock at your door and, when invited in, place an oddly shaped piece of marble on your living room floor, then leave without a word. Other visitors follow in succession until about 40 individuals have each deposited their numbered marble piece into place.

When the last one has gone, you see with surprise that a beautiful statue stands before you. Then you learn that most of the "sculptors" had never met each other, coming, as they did, from South America, China, Russia, Africa, and other parts of the world. What would you have to conclude? That someone had planned the statue and had sent to each man accurate specifications for his particular piece of marble.

The Bible as a whole communicates one coherent message—just like a perfect marble statue. One mind planned it all, the mind of God. Scripture’s remarkable unity gives evidence that it is not simply human literature but indeed the Word of God. Human beings wrote down the thoughts and words, but they were “God-breathed,” inspired by God Himself.

4. YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE

1. *The preservation of the Bible is remarkable.* All of the early manuscripts of the Bible were copied by hand—long before there were printing presses. Scribes made copies of the original manuscripts and distributed them. Thousands of copies of such manuscripts or portions of them still survive.

Hebrew manuscripts of the *Old Testament* that go back 150 to 200 years before Christ were found near the Dead Sea in 1947. It’s amazing that these two-thousand-year-old scrolls contain exactly the same truths as we find in the Old Testament of Bibles printed today. Powerful evidence of how reliably God’s Word has been transmitted to us!

The apostles first wrote much of the *New Testament* as letters they sent to Christian churches established after the death and resurrection of Christ (Colossians 4:16). More than 4,500 manuscripts of all or a part of the New Testament are on display in the great museums and libraries of Europe and America. Some of them date back to the second century. By comparing these early manuscripts with today’s Bible, we can readily see that the New Testament has also remained essentially unchanged since it was first written. Remarkably enough, we are much more

certain about the original text of the Bible than we are about the original text of Shakespeare's plays.

Sir Frederic Kenyon, once the director of the British Museum, in his book *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* assures us: "The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries."

Today the Bible or portions of it have been translated into over 2,060 languages and dialects. God's Word remains the world's best-seller; over 150 million Bibles and Bible portions are sold each year.

2. *The historical accuracy of the Bible record is remarkable.* At the time the United States was becoming a nation, many were skeptical about the accuracy of Scripture. They doubted the Bible record because they could not prove biblical events from the documents of secular history. Scripture spoke of battles, cities, and even entire civilizations which secular historians did not mention. Today many archaeological discoveries have dramatically confirmed the accuracy of the biblical record. Historians have discovered clay tablets and stone monuments which have brought to light names, places, and events previously known only from the Bible.

For example, according to Genesis 11:31, Abraham and his family "set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to [the land of] Canaan." Because only the Bible spoke of Ur, certain scholars stated that no such city had ever existed. Then archaeologists uncovered a temple tower in southern Iraq with a cylinder at the base written in cuneiform that contained the name Ur. Later finds revealed Ur as the thriving metropolis of a highly developed civilization. That city's identity had been forgotten and lost to later

historians. Only the Bible preserved its name—until the spade of the archaeologist confirmed its authenticity.

Ur is but one of many examples of archaeological information that now confirms the accuracy of Bible history. You can obtain fascinating books on biblical archeology from your local public library. Such books give hundreds of other examples of how history proves the historical reliability of Scripture.

3. *The accurate fulfillment of Bible predictions shows that you can trust the Bible.* Our confidence in the Word of God can also be strengthened by a look at Bible prophecies. Scripture contains many remarkable predictions of future events that are now being fulfilled before our very eyes. You will examine one of these exciting prophecies in guide 7. You will discover that God revealed the entire future course of history in advance from 606 B.C. (before Christ) right down the centuries to our day. This prophecy also looks into the future and tells us what is coming in our world today.

5. HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

Remember that the Bible is not some historical document which only scholars can understand. Some of the most exciting biblical insights have come from ordinary people with ordinary educations who simply responded to the Bible as a personal letter from Jesus. As you explore God's Word, here are seven important principles to keep in mind:

1. *Study the Bible with a prayerful heart.* If you approach Scripture with a heart and mind opened through prayer, the Word truly becomes a personal contact with Jesus. Remember to invite the Spirit in as your teacher when you open the Bible. "When he, the

Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. . . he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you”—John 16:13-14.

2. *Read the Bible daily.* Paul commended the Berean Christians because “they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scripture every day to see” what was true (Acts 17:11). Daily Bible study is a key to power in our lives (Romans 1:16).

3. *Study the Bible carefully.* Paul told Timothy to study the Bible as “a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Don’t just grab any stray text that seems to suit your opinions or inclinations and hang on tight. Look as carefully and as objectively as possible at what is being said in the passage. Reading the Bible is an encounter with the mind of God.

4. *Study the Bible verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and book by book.* As you read it, let the Bible speak for itself. Since the Bible is a message from Jesus, it is not

only true, but the test of all truth (Isaiah 8:20). So we should never let any “religious” belief or principle explain away any part of Scripture. Trying to make the Bible fit into a preconceived idea will only cause us to “distort” the Scriptures to our “own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16, KJV).


Make sure you understand each statement of the Bible in the light of its context: who is being spoken to, what problem it refers to, what other statements surround it, etc. The key question is: What did the Bible writer intend to say?

All of us must learn to distinguish what the Bible writer intended to say from our subjective impressions: what we think the writer should have said. After grasping what a text means we can apply it intelligently to our life today.

5. *Study the Bible by subject.* To really understand Bible truth, we must let the Bible be its own interpreter. How? By comparing scripture with scripture. Jesus used this method to demonstrate that He was the Messiah:

***“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in ALL the Scriptures concerning himself.”—
Luke 24:27.***

By putting together all




that the Bible has to say on a certain subject we gain a balanced perspective; we can more accurately reflect on God's point of view. For example, how do you find the secrets of successful prayer? Gather together all the statements made by the prophets, Jesus and the apostles, the promises and principles they gave, which relate to prayer and its answers. (That's essentially what we do in guide 14.) When we prayerfully let the Bible explain itself in this way,

we come to understand what God means, and not just what some person thinks, or what some church creed asserts.

6. *Study the Bible to receive power to live for Christ.* The Word of God is described in Hebrews 4:12 as a sharp, double-edged sword. It's more than words on a page, it's a living weapon that God uses to help us fight off the most persistent temptations.

7. *Listen as God speaks to you through His Word.* If a person is to know the Bible truth about a certain subject or doctrine, he or she must be willing to follow what it teaches.



“IF ANYONE CHOOSES TO DO GOD’S WILL, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”
—John 7:17.

The psalmist exemplified a healthy attitude:

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.”—Psalm 119:9.

6. THE BIBLE CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

What is the effect of the Bible in a person's life?

“The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”—Psalm 119:130.

Study of the Bible will strengthen the “understanding,” the intellect, as no other book. If you deeply examine the Bible and absorb its teachings into your life, it will give you the strength to overcome destructive habits and enable you to develop into the fullness of personhood—physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually.

The Bible speaks to the heart. It deals with the experiences of humanity—birth, love, marriage, parenthood, and death. Scripture heals the deepest wound in human nature—humanity's fall into sin and the misery resulting from it.

Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a great revival began to sweep over atheistic Russia. Millions accepted the Bible as inspired by God and became Christians. Galena, a woman in Nishni Novgorod, formerly Gorky, attended the meetings of an American evangelist. With tears running down her cheeks, she told him, “Before I came to these meetings, I was an atheist. I didn't believe in God. Now I have accepted Jesus, and I am a brand new person inside. The truths you have been teaching us

from the Bible have opened my eyes.”

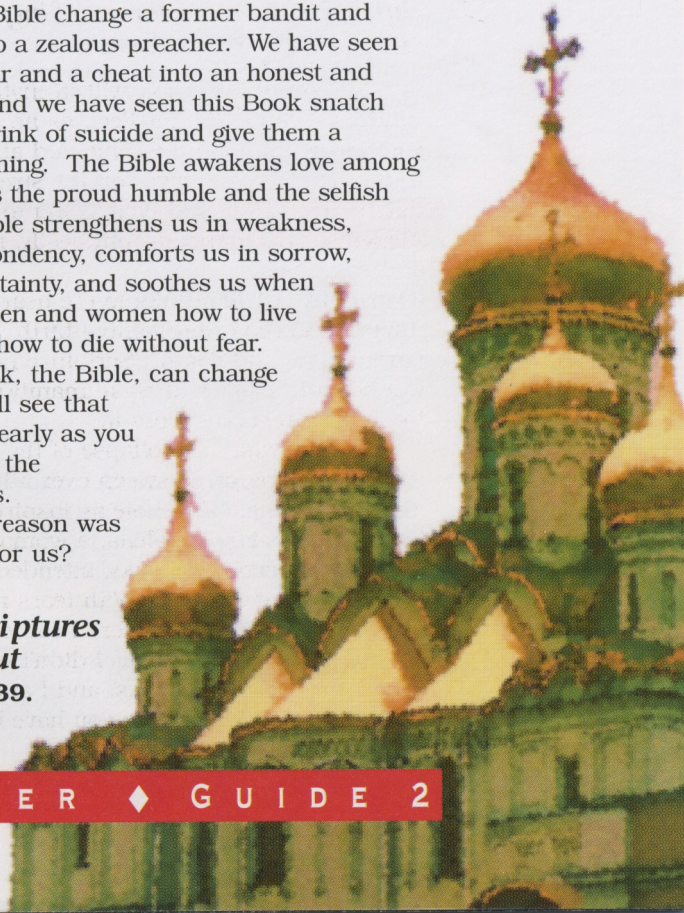
God’s Word is not a book of one race, one age, one nation, or one culture. Although written in the East, it also appeals to men and women in the West. It enters the apartment of the humble and the mansion of the wealthy. Children love its exciting stories. Its heroes inspire young people. Parents find in it wisdom to instruct their children. The sick, the lonely, and the aged discover in it comfort and hope for a better life.

Because God works through the Bible, it has great power. It breaks even hearts hardened against all human emotion, softening and filling them with love. We have seen the Bible change a former bandit and opium smoker into a zealous preacher. We have seen the Bible turn a liar and a cheat into an honest and upright teacher. And we have seen this Book snatch people from the brink of suicide and give them a hopeful new beginning. The Bible awakens love among enemies. It makes the proud humble and the selfish generous. The Bible strengthens us in weakness, cheers us in despondency, comforts us in sorrow, guides us in uncertainty, and soothes us when weary. It shows men and women how to live courageously and how to die without fear.

God’s Book, the Bible, can change your life too! You’ll see that more and more clearly as you continue studying the DISCOVER guides.

For what reason was the Bible written for us? Jesus answers:

“The Scriptures . . . testify about me.”— John 5:39.



“But these [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”—John 20:31.

The greatest reason we should become acquainted with the Holy Scriptures is that it is full of pictures that reveal Jesus Christ and assure us of eternal life. By looking at Christ throughout the Bible, we are changed and become more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18). That is Scripture’s real purpose. This will become even clearer as you study guides 3 through 6.

Begin now to discover the written Word, the living Word, for God uses it to make us more like Jesus.

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