

His Word Afresh, My Life Anew!

A F R E S H Approach to Bible Study

*P*AMELA CHRISTIAN

His Word Afresh, My Life Anew!

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Dedication

It is to you, dear reader, that this book is dedicated—that you may grow in your knowledge of and relationship with God the Father, through faith in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Appreciation and Acknowledgment

All glory, thanks, and honor are due my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, without whose prompting and help this Bible study method would not exist. It is neither my effort nor my book in that I relied upon the guidance and strength of my Lord. My desire to be an instrument for the Lord's work to help others find truth has been my motivation. To work in ways that help promote the gospel is the least I can attempt, considering all He has done and continues to do for me.

No work is ever that of just one person, and so I have many to thank. First my husband, who has been subjected to “refrigerator dining” while I've been writing. And my children, who have patiently waited for me to be available, both physically and mentally. Their support has made this very much a family effort.

Thanks are in order to my dear friends, beginning with Betty Southard. She has lent me her experience as an international speaker and author, which I most dearly appreciate. But her belief in me, her ability to see what existed in me before it was visible, and her encouragement will be eternally appreciated. To Debbie Parnakian, who sees my preliminary rough drafts—on paper and in life—and still remains my friend, and to all the women from the Temecula CBS class who tolerated, sustained, and propelled me in the very beginning. But most especially my sister, Teri, whose prayers along with others were instrumental in bringing me the Truth that led to my eternal salvation.

My thanks also to the countless men and women whose work (by way of reference and research) contributed to the development of this method and book. And to the many more whose practical, inspirational, and prayerful support have been pillars of strength. It is to these, in retrospect, that this effort is dedicated with profound gratitude.

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Introduction

Jesus answered them and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4)

It took the impact of a major life crisis to cause me to examine everything I believed. Because of my life growing up, all I wanted was to find the right man, marry him, and then enjoy a family of my own that would be safe, secure, and loving. I’d been striving to make that happen in my life, but instead, at nearly thirty years of age, I was further from my life’s desire than I’d ever been. The man I thought I’d marry broke off our relationship.

This completely broke me. In a state of despair I questioned everything I’d ever hoped for, believed in, or wanted. I wondered if a safe, committed, loving relationship was even possible. I considered God and my faith in Him. Looking back upon my entire life of repeated pain and disappointment, I wondered if God even existed.

Yet, because of being so utterly broken and desperately wanting to find answers that I could trust, I began a journey that I likely would not have otherwise. Oftentimes it takes a crisis to cause us to reconsider our core beliefs. In my quest to discover truth, I found the God of the Christian Bible not only to be real but personal. I discovered the difference between a religion that merely knows about God and a relationship that personally knows God.

Finally having a hope for my future, with a sense of urgency to make up for lost time, I delved into everything I could to learn more about God, about humanity, about faith and truth. Each layer of understanding I gained caused me to desire more. I read voraciously to learn all I possibly could. It wasn’t knowledge I was seeking. It was a transformed life based on truth that I was beginning to experience as I sincerely sought truth. In this process of discovery I found genuine joy and confident hope arising within me. The more I gained, the more I wanted others to discover the same truth that I had.

Since then, through teaching and ministering, I’ve had several opportunities to help others discover truth. This workbook, originally created for presentation at the 2000 Christian Leader Author and Speaker Services (CLASServices Inc.), is a standalone resource for anyone interested in learning truth. This is an updated and revised edition of the workbook presented fourteen years ago. What follows is the original workbook introduction.

When the leaders of CLASServices asked me to present a Bible study workshop at their Southern California Women’s Retreat, I was honored and very excited. My years serving as teaching director for Community Bible Study (an independent, international inter-denominational organization) had prepared me to do this. But I have to admit that my first thought was, *This event is predominantly attended by committed Christian women who, no doubt, are already very familiar with Bible study. Who would want to sign up to attend, especially considering all the other great workshops?*

And that's when the idea hit. *I will not only offer a workshop that provides a method for personal Bible study, I will provide compelling and convincing reasons why studying the Bible is uniquely worthy of our time and effort!*

As a result, *His Word Afresh, My Life Anew!* presents basic facts and evidences needed by the unconvinced Bible student to reveal that the Bible is exclusively inspired by the one true God, and therefore worthy of applied study. It provides the convinced Bible student information to refresh a proper appreciation for the Bible, reinvigorating the desire to study it. And for everyone, it offers a fresh inductive method of study to maximize the application of Scripture and experience the gloriously transformed life available through the truth of the Bible.

If you're completely honest, you may have one or more of the following questions insufficiently answered:

- Why should I trust the Bible?
- Is the Christian Bible the only book inspired by God?
- Does God even exist?
- Is there more than one God?
- What is God like and what does He want?
- What is the origin of humanity?
- Is the Christian faith the only way to be united with God?
- What about other religions?
- How can Jesus be the Savior of the world?
- What does the world need to be saved from?
- Do I need to be saved and if so how can I?

His Word Afresh, My Life Anew! will help you find answers to these excellent questions. But don't think this book will *provide* the answers. Rather, it will direct you and instruct you into discovery of the truth for yourself.

Using sound principles, this inductive method for learning about God, humanity, faith, and truth from the Bible is simplified with the use of the acrostic AFRESH. With the help of this workbook, you can learn how to study the Bible effectively and discover all the many promises God has waiting for you to enjoy now and forever. With God's Word afresh in you, your life will truly become new!

Before you begin, and with each step, be in
PRAYER:
seeking God, believing God, receiving God.

APPROACH

Observation

Reason with an open mind, understanding that the Bible is the very Word of God. Your approach must be **Prayerful – Personal – Penitent – Passionate**

FACTS

Observation

Look for the 4 W's—Who? What? When? and Where? Divide the passage into logical divisions and subdivisions. *In sentence form*, write about the *most obvious* facts for each division.

Consider **People – Places – Predicaments**

REPRESENT

Observation

Look for the main point of the passage. Consider the facts and ask, Why is this written in God's Word? Write out a summary sentence based on all the division facts that identifies what the passage actually represents (the point). The sentence will identify spiritual lesson(s) or life principle(s) represented in the passage.

Consider the **Purpose – Precedent – Point**

EXPLAIN

Interpretation and Evaluation

Look for God's meaning, not man's interpretation. Consider the facts again and ask, how does the *point* of the Scripture passage play out for humanity in general? What spiritual lesson or principle is explained for us in this passage? In sentence form explain the blessings or benefits, curse(s) or consequences of the spiritual lessons or principles.

Consider the **Principles – Problems – Prospects**

SPECIFIC

Evaluation and Application

Look for the specific application for each division. Prayerfully ask very personal questions to reveal how your actions and motives honestly measure up to the lesson or principle. Write a specific question that comes out of the text and your study.

Consider questions that are **Probing – Piercing – Purging**

HEART

Application for Transformation

Meditate on all that you've just learned. Meditate on the whole counsel of God regarding this. Prayerfully identify a definite course of action you will take to overcome your obstacles, grow in maturity, or share your realized blessings. Commit it to God as you write in your prayer journal. Then rejoice over the new dimension of truth you've gained from the study of God's Word.

Yours is to Possess – Practice – Praise

Chapter One

Approach: Reasoning with an Open Mind

Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord. (Isaiah 1:18a)

I remember one Friday evening just before I was to deliver my first message. As a retreat speaker I like to meet as many of the women as possible. In that regard, this evening was no exception. While I mingled, introducing myself, a very tall commanding woman approached from somewhere behind me. As she walked toward me, long before she ever reached me, she pronounced, “I simply can’t believe in a God who will send people to hell just because they don’t believe that Jesus Christ was anything more than a good teacher.” I immediately wondered, *Will tonight be the exception?*

Suddenly the room became quiet. Every pair of eyes focused on me, waiting expectantly for my response. I knew I’d better have one great answer for this woman or it would be a very long weekend for me. I quickly prayed asking for guidance and from my mouth I heard these words, “Are you seeking to find the truth, or do you think you’ve already found it?” The onlookers apparently satisfied with my response to this woman’s challenge resumed the normal buzz of conversation. I breathed a sigh of relief knowing that I was off to a good start.

Since then I’ve posed the same question to my audiences, “Are you seeking to find the truth, or do you think you’ve already found it?”

The discovery of the truth is the most important effort any one of us will ever undertake. Those who have discovered truth know that it is not elusive. It is, however, a continual quest to discover more and be certain that each truth fits perfectly upon the truth already realized. The truth is something of which we must be certain—we must know why we believe what we believe. And it begins by considering our Approach to the truth.

How one goes about searching and finding truth—one’s Approach to truth—is critical to its discovery. The woman who challenged me about God, did so on the basis of what she had already come to believe. My question in return challenged her about whether or not what she believed was in fact true. Being open-minded, able to reason, and willing to challenge what one already believes is essential.

So let’s start with the obvious first question, “What is truth?” In this postmodern culture the increasingly common answer is to say that truth is relative. This is what is being taught in our institutions of higher education, but is it accurate? My experience has been that instructors more often tell students what to think rather than teach them how to reason. Without the ability to challenge and consider rationally why we think and believe

what we do, we could easily base our entire life on a lie and not know it. It is only through careful, rational evaluation that we can discover truth.

What is truth? Is it relative or not? Dan Story, an author who has a BA in theology and an MA in Christian apologetics, is one who has clearly and concisely addressed the question. In *Christianity on the Offense* (Kregel Publishers, 1998) he writes, “Anybody can claim anything, but claiming doesn’t make it true. Anybody can believe anything, but believing doesn’t make it true. One can sincerely believe in something and be sincerely wrong. There has to be some criteria for determining religious truth if religious truth is to be known at all.” He expertly reveals and examines the criteria explaining that two fundamental concepts must be understood. First is that truth corresponds to reality. He writes, “Truth is a fact that, by its very nature, is immutable—it cannot change. Whatever is true must be in agreement with and conform to reality.” Truth and reality must correspond.

“Second,” states Story, “is that truth depends on *first principles* (or *universal givens*, or *fundamental laws of human belief*) which govern how all people in every culture throughout all of history reason. It is because of these first principles that we can determine that truth does correspond to reality and that it is universally applicable.” The *laws of logic* or reason are the most fundamental of the first principles. “These principles,” writes Story, “are foundational to all thought and knowledge. They need no confirmation because they are necessarily true—that is, they are undeniable and self-evident.”

Included in the laws of logic is a fundamental principle known as the *law of non-contradiction*. It states that something cannot be two different things at the same time and in the same sense. “For example,” Story writes, “it can’t be both raining and sunny outside at the same time in the same spot. If it were possible for contradictions to mutually exist, there would be no difference between true and false, black and white, up or down and so on. Truth would be impossible to discuss and facts would forever elude us.”

Having provided the objective criteria for identifying truth, now let’s look at the claim that the truth is relative. Another way of stating this is to say, “There is no such thing as absolute truth.” Notice what takes place when the claim is rephrased. The claim that there is no such thing as absolute truth relies on absolute truth in order to make the statement. It relies on the very law it refutes. It violates the law of non-contradiction, so therefore it cannot be true.

Learning how to reason does not require tremendous intellect or higher education. It just requires a commonsense approach to discover the truth. It is a matter of knowing how to reason as opposed to simply adopting what someone else claims to be truth. Moreover, reasoning with an open mind is essential. Personal biases, presuppositions, assumptions, and the like are matters that influence the “truth” we adopt, and such could easily cause us to think we’ve discovered the truth when in fact we have not. Where truth about religion and faith is concerned the law of non-contradiction is especially important. Two conflicting truths cannot both be accurate—one is truth, the other is false. It is illogical and inaccurate to conclude that contradicting truths could all be true.

Examining what you believe and why you believe it will allow you to either confirm the truth you already possess or expose a deception you've unknowingly adopted. Either way the effort will be well worth it, especially considering the eternal impact for what we believe.

First in our effort to study the Bible is to prepare our Approach—to lay aside any presuppositions, and be willing to challenge anything we've been told to believe, as we seek to discover the truth for ourselves.

The Bible is referred to as the Word of God. It's believed to be inspired by God and penned by men. Do you believe that? What one believes about the Bible directly impacts one's Approach—one's reception of it. Is it the inspired written Word of God? Is it one of many divine inspired writings? Since the other so-called sacred writings conflict with the Bible, which is correct? If they could all be correct, would that mean there is more than one God, and wouldn't that violate the law of non-contradiction?

The quest for truth takes us down many paths, posing questions that demand answers. Chapters two and three will provide some answers for these and other similar questions. But with this first chapter begin by honestly determining what you believe about the Bible. Using a notepad, take time now to write down your current conclusions, doubts, and questions about the Bible. Keep this notepad handy as you work through this book. As you seek to discover truth for yourself, prayerfully expect to find the answers—providing you search for the truth with your whole heart while reasoning with an open mind.

For me, referring to the Bible as the *Word of God* has come to have rich and profound personal meaning. The Word of God is *the promise of God*. The promise is expressed in what God has spoken and inspired man to write, to create what we call the Bible. The promise of God was and is expressed in the person of Jesus Christ. The promise of God is evident in the transformed lives of those who have personally received the Word as truth.

First John 1:1-5 from the NIV translation of the Bible states this: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." Nowhere in Scripture is the term *the Word* more inclusive in its meaning than in this passage.

The life and miracles performed by Jesus are recorded in the New Testament portion of the Bible. The apostle John, who was an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, wrote, "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). In 1 John 5:13 we read, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know you have eternal life."

Do you believe that Jesus Christ was who He claimed to be? What preconceived conclusions do you have about God and about Jesus? Here again, stop and write down what you believe to be true about God and Jesus and about humankind.

Through the centuries even to this day, there has been no argument over the existence of a man named Jesus who profoundly impacted the world. But there has been argument over who He claimed to be. What did Jesus say about Himself? What did Jesus say

about the Holy Scripture? Jesus claimed that God, the one and only God, inspired the Scripture. The New Testament records Him quoting Scripture, relying on Scripture, and claiming to be the fulfillment of Scripture—the Word of God. In fact, He placed His life on it. Will you? It is my hope that at the conclusion of this workbook you will with greater certainty place your very life on the Word of God.

The woman who had difficulty believing in a God who would send people to hell just because they didn't believe Jesus Christ was anything other than a good teacher disclosed her lack of knowledge. In reality, according to Scriptures, God doesn't send people to hell—it's a choice people make for themselves. God offers heaven to anyone who wants it, through faith in Jesus being who He claimed to be. She hadn't made the effort to discover the truth for herself at that point in her life. However, I am most pleased to report that by the end of the retreat she very much wanted to explore what she believed and why she believed it, so that she could be certain she was basing her life on truth. Now this is your challenge.

To obtain research and real-world testimonials for this book, I conducted a survey (copy included as an addendum). When asked "What is your motive for studying the Bible?" the respondents who were professing Christians listed several. Some cited reasons from Scripture itself: "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 NIV). Many stated that they wanted to learn how to live their lives as Christians. Others wanted to know God better. Then there were those whose motives for studying the Bible were a matter of performance to please or impress others. Some stated that it was simply because they'd been told they should study the Bible as a matter of strict discipline.

As I examined their responses to other questions on the survey, an interesting fact surfaced. Those who approach study of the Bible convinced it is the Word of God have a passion for it that propels them to continual study. In contrast, those who have questions about the validity of the Bible admit to being more sporadic in their study time. Further, those with a passion for the Bible are generally satisfied with the growth of their Christian faith, while those who study from a matter of strict duty or discipline struggle with their Christian life.

Embracing Bible study versus simply enduring Bible study—the Approach—is determined by what we believe about the Bible itself. Likewise the satisfaction or struggle with the Christian faith is based on the very same foundation—one's belief about the Bible.

One other question I asked in the survey was, "What prevents you from meaningful study of the Word of God?" Answers didn't vary quite as much as with other questions. Bob Bowdish from Yorba Linda, California, said it best: "The tyranny of the urgent, the distractions of life in this physical world all generated by Satan as a means to separate me from God in any possible way. But in the end I am the only one who prevents me from meaningful study of the Word of God." That's the truth for us all.

The survey also asked the question, "What specific things have markedly enhanced your commitment to and success in Bible study?" The two most common answers were being secluded to have time alone in communion with God and accountability through

belonging to a study group or a leadership group. The one answer that most impressed me came from a man in full-time ministry who wishes to remain anonymous. What enhances his Bible study commitment and success? “God’s actual interventions into my life in real relational ways.” This man is proof that with God’s Word afresh, life is made anew.

Those who believe that the Bible is the one and only inspired written Word of God, who realize that Jesus as revealed in the Bible is indeed the *Savior* of the world, the *Son of God*, find studying it a way to seek and personally relate with God. When one appreciates the Bible for what it truly is, it’s not a religious exercise, it is a relational joy. If you are one who approaches Bible study as a discipline of drudgery, I suggest that you do not properly understand what the Bible is. But you can, and the subsequent chapters of this workbook will help.

There are many different methods of Bible study that are successful for different individuals, but there is only one approach that is successful for all—maintaining an open, rational, thinking mind. Study methods provide a system to enhance our Approach to God’s Word so that we may rightly perceive, receive, and believe the truth in our everyday lives.

Almost all inductive Bible study methods have the same basic three elements: *observation*, *interpretation*, and *application*. As you can see from the method outline on page ix, *His Word Afresh, My Life Anew!* includes these sound elements. However, the most critical in the overall process is observation. From this foundation all doctrine is built. Observation must be careful and complete. In my method of study, I’ve devoted three of the six steps to observation because good observation is absolutely necessary for meaningful Bible study. Everything we gain from Bible study depends on how well the text has been observed. If you are in a rush, if you presume knowledge of the text, if you skim over details, the information in chapter two will help guide you methodically through the observation phase so you won’t shortchange this important component.

Beyond the elements of observation, interpretation, and application, I’ve included *evaluation* and *presentation*. Evaluation is the step that promotes personal interpretation of Scripture for better personal application. Presentation provides a method of sharing scriptural truth based on Jesus’ instructions to believers to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-20). We who have come to understand, believe, and receive the truth are entrusted by God with the task of sharing it with others, that they may also believe and receive eternal life, that they may be changed once and forever by the Word of God. This is my desire for you. So to begin I ask that you remember:

A is for APPROACH which must be with a reasoning and open mind that is
Prayerful – Personal – Penitent – Passionate

Chapter Two

Facts:

The Four W's — Who, What, When, Where?

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV)

In chapter one I stated that the term *the Word* has many meanings, one being the person of Jesus, the Christ. Christ is the Greek word for anointed, which refers to the Messiah or the Savior. Many people are convinced they need a Savior. Just looking at the condition of the world we live in is enough to convince us we need help!

But before we can adequately conclude about Jesus we must conclude about the Bible since it is the primary document that proclaims His existence, His life, and His work.

Surely you've heard people ask: "How can we know the Bible is true and genuinely inspired by God? After all it was written by men, hand-copied and handed down through centuries of translation!" Perhaps you are one who has asked these or other questions and are still unsettled yourself. In this chapter we'll explore some facts—some objective, verifiable facts—about the Bible to help us find the answers we need to trust the Bible as God's inspired Word.

Faith in the Bible, and consequently faith in Jesus as Savior, is not a subjective, blind faith as so many wrongly think. There is overwhelming factual evidence that gives us reason to believe—reason to place our faith in all the promises of God. With this chapter we'll consider the Facts about the Bible itself.

The Written Word of God

The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *biblia* (meaning books), which actually refers to the inner bark of the papyrus reed, the ancient paper used in writing books, or more accurately, scrolls. Daniel 9:2 refers to the Old Testament prophetic writings as *the Scriptures*. Jesus customarily referred to the Old Testament books as the Scriptures, and His followers did likewise (Matthew 21:42, Mark 14:49, Luke 24:32, John 5:39, Acts 18:24, Romans 15:4). The apostle Paul referred to them as *the sacred writings* (2 Timothy 3:15), *the Holy Scriptures* (Romans 1:2), and *the very words of God* (Romans 3:2). The history of origin as well as the integrity of content through the ages helps us understand why the Bible is referred to as the Word of God.

The whole of the *Old Testament* was written before Jesus came to this earth. The original language of the Old Testament was almost entirely Hebrew, with portions in Aramaic. Both languages are *Semitic* dialects. The earliest books, the first five books of the

English Old Testament, known as the *Pentateuch*, are estimated to have been written in 1450 BC. The last book, Malachi, was written in approximately 400 BC. All the books of the Old Testament cover the historical period of approximately 2100 BC to 330 BC. From Malachi, the last prophetic voice of the Old Testament, until the advent of Jesus four hundred years later, divine revelation as it developed in the production of *canonical scriptures* was in abeyance. (Canonization will be discussed later in this chapter). During these four hundred silent years, the Old Testament was translated into the Greek language in a version known as the *Septuagint*.

For nearly two decades after Christ's ascension, the Old Testament Scriptures, mainly in Greek (the Septuagint), constituted the only Bible in existence. The gospel was first preached by word of mouth and interpreted in the light of Old Testament history and prophecy. Oral accounts of the life and work of Christ were written down and finally gave way to the inspired *Synoptic Gospels* that most scholars agree were penned sometime before AD 70. The need for doctrinal interpretation of Christ's person and work soon became a necessity, accentuated by the need to define Christianity against such errors as *legalism*, *Gnosticism*, and *antinomianism*. So the eyewitnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus became those to write the Synoptic Gospels.

Additionally, there were several other writings circulating during the early church era, all clamoring for recognition and causing believers much confusion about how to live their new lives as believers in Jesus Christ. The letters (*epistles*) authored by the apostle Paul were written to meet this need. A clearly delimited *canon* was essential to confirm which writings were authentic and true to Christ's teachings.

The earliest canonized *New Testament* book was apparently written by James, perhaps as early as AD 45, with the last, Revelation, dated at approximately 96 AD. The New Testament books were originally written entirely in Greek.

The Canonization of Scripture

The canon of Scripture, explained in *The New Unger's Bible Handbook*, is a method of testing so-called sacred documents to verify their authenticity and provide a means to catalogue the designated writings. The Greek word *kanon* originally signified a reed or measuring rod. Only those scriptures which were measured by the standard or test of divine inspiration and authority—and were adjudged to be *God-breathed*—were included in the canon.

Conservatives hold that inspired Scripture had the imprint of canonical authority from the moment of inspiration by the Spirit of God, independent of formal collection or mere human recognition. The higher critical view, however, is that canonization took extensive time. According to this theory, *the Law* (the Law of Moses contained in the Pentateuch) was first canonized by 444 BC, the *Prophets* not until 300-200 BC, and *the Writings* about 165-100 BC. The Law, the Prophets and the Writings are categories of the Old Testament writings.

During the four hundred silent years between the Testaments, fourteen books collectively known as the *Apocrypha*, were written after the Old Testament canon had

closed. The Roman Church at the Council of Trent in 1546, by the Decree *Sacrosancta*, declared eleven of the fourteen apocryphal books to be canonical. These are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, the Son of the Three, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. They also accepted later additions to the book of Esther. Protestants deny the canonical status of these books on the basis of both internal and external evidence.

By the end of the third century AD, in light of a variety of popular yet opposing doctrinal writings that circulated within the early church, canonization of New Testament writings became essential. The first criterion for the New Testament canonicity was *apostolicity*. Was the writer a bona fide apostle? If not, did he have close association with an apostle, as did the writers of the Gospels of Mark and Luke, the book of Acts, and the epistle to the Hebrews? The second criterion was *content*. Were the subject matter and the treatment of it of the highest order and spiritual stamp as demanded by the test of Holy Scriptures? The third criterion was *universality*. Did the church as a whole receive the book? Did it have a universal appeal? The fourth criterion was *divine inspiration*. Did the book give unmistakable evidence of being God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16)? And did the Holy Spirit convict men of God that this was true? This was the final test. Without providential guidance, the New Testament canon would never have been correctly determined.

The inspiration and intrinsic authority of each individual book were the determining factors in their eventual recognition and canonization. By 200 AD, the New Testament contained essentially the same books as we have today. These were regarded with the same authority and finality by Christians then as they are now.

Unity of the New and Old Testaments and Future Testaments

As applied to the Scriptures, the terms *Old Testament* and *New Testament* have been used to differentiate the Hebrew writings as being before Christ and the Christian writings after Christ. Men and women of the Old Testament era who belonged to God were rightly related to God *by faith that looked forward to the coming of the Messiah/Savior*. Those who belong to God after the coming of the Messiah/Savior are rightly related *by faith that looks back at the first coming of the Savior*. Yet there is one covenant, expressed in different eras, past, present, and future. Therefore, the study of both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible is essential for the Christian faith.

Old Testament

The Old Testament of the Christian Bible contains the same books as the Hebrew Bible. There are twenty-four canonical books. In a present-day Hebrew Bible the books are arranged in a threefold division—*The Law* or first five books of the English Bible (Pentateuch or *Torah*), the *Prophets*, and the *Writings*. The thirty-nine books of the Christian Old Testament are identical with that of the Hebrew, the only difference being the arrangement of the material. The Christian Bible arranges the books of the Old Testament in a historical order as follows:

Historical

Note: The first five books of the Old Testament are collectively referred to as the Pentateuch or the Law of Moses—and occasionally simply the Law. Genesis means *the beginning*, and this book reveals God’s creation of all things. From Genesis through Malachi, the Bible provides us with historical record of the intervention of God in the history of man prior to the coming of *the Promise*, Jesus Christ the Messiah.

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

Joshua

Judges

Ruth

1 Samuel

2 Samuel

1 Kings

2 Kings

1 Chronicles

2 Chronicles

Ezra

Nehemiah

Esther

Poetical

Job

Psalms

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

Song of Songs

Prophetic

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Lamentations

Ezekiel

Daniel

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

New Testament

Estimated dates for the writing of 1 Peter and Jude are generally uncertain. However, all other books of the New Testament have been dated with reasonable certainty, with the earliest at 45 AD and the latest (Revelation) at 96 AD. The books of the New Testament are arranged described below.

Biographical Gospels

Note: Synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Synoptic means *seeing the whole together at a glance*. These three, in contrast to the Gospel of John, present a common story and relate substantially the same incidents in the life of Jesus.

Gospels

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

Historical

Acts

Pedagogical

Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus

Philemon
Hebrews
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John 2 John
3 John
Jude

Prophetic
Revelation

The Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls

One of the most dramatic discoveries of all times, in the opinion of a great many, is the discovery of *the Dead Sea Scrolls*. They were found in 1947 by two Arab boys searching for their lost goat in the Judean wilderness. They threw stones into the caves to scare the animal out, but instead of hearing the bleating of their goat, they heard the sound of breaking pottery. Inside the earthen jars the boys found scrolls tightly rolled up and bound with a pitch-like substance. Believing they found something old and of value, the boys took some of the scrolls to an antique dealer in Bethlehem. They asked twenty pounds in exchange. Twenty pounds in 1947 was worth a lot more than it is today, but for understanding the dollar equivalent today about \$34.58. The antique dealer turned them down. No doubt this was one of his greatest life regrets! Next the boys traveled to Jerusalem where after bargaining for weeks, they finally managed to sell four of the scrolls to an Archbishop of St. Marks' Syrian Monastery and three to a professor of Archeology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Ultimately the scrolls were taken to D. John Trever, Acting Director at the American School of Oriental Research, Jerusalem who studied them and sent photos to Dr. W. F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Albright tentatively dated them to be about 100 B.C. and declared them "an amazing discovery," which is a tremendous understatement!

From Original Manuscript Translation

Specific to the Old Testament, the oldest *Masoretic Hebrew* manuscripts that existed before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls are dated no earlier than the late ninth century AD. These Hebrew manuscripts are the *Cairo Codex* of the Prophets (AD 895), the *Aleppo Codex* of the whole Old Testament (AD 925), and the *Leningrad Codex* (completed AD 1108). According to *The New Unger's Bible Handbook*, the Dead Sea Scrolls, together with fragments of all but one of the Old Testament books (Esther), were discovered in 1947 and date from the second to the first century BC. They give us a Hebrew text a millennium earlier than any previous discovery! In addressing the question of human error in the hand copying of ancient manuscripts, we now have factual evidence against which to compare, revealing that the Bible we have today is substantively the same as the oldest known manuscript.

There are three principal copies of the original manuscripts that exist and have been used in the translation of the Bible. As listed in *The New Unger's Bible Handbook* and *The Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible*, they are:

The Codex Sinaiticus: In this fourth-century codex of the Greek Bible, on display at the British Museum in Great Britain, the New Testament is complete on 148 leaves and also contains fragments of the Old Testament in Greek. It was discovered by Tischendorf in the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai in 1844 and 1859 and purchased from the Soviet Republic of Russia in 1933.

The Codex Vaticanus: Also suspected to be a fourth-century document, this codex exists in the Vatican library at Rome where it has been on display since 1481. Though the original codex contained the whole Bible, parts have been lost. It contains almost the complete Old and New Testament, except for Hebrews 9:14-13:25, the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon, and the Revelation.

The Codex Alexandrinus: Believed to be a fifth-century document and also on display in the British Museum, this codex contains most of the Old and New Testament and the whole Greek Bible with the exception of forty lost leaves. It was presented by the Patriarch of Constantinople to Charles I of England in 1627, and transferred to the British Museum in 1757.

From these magnificent archeological finds and many others, we have factual evidence of the historical reliability of the Bible most dramatically confirmed as recent as the twentieth century. Christian Research Institute in its *CRI Perspective* CP1009 states:

All sorts of details have been confirmed through the discovery of ancient documents, through the examination of artifacts, and, in some cases, through excavations of entire ancient cities. These findings have consistently supported the historicity of the Bible. In fact, it's safe to say that with every turn of the archaeologist's spade, the historicity and accuracy of the Bible is further confirmed." The article goes on to explain that it would be an overstatement at this point in time to claim that archaeology has proven that everything the Bible says is true. But it is accurate to say that, with the factual discoveries made through archaeology, the Bible has not been proven to be false or with error!

In fact, skeptics laughed at the biblical assertion that *Nineveh* was a real city and that the *Assyrians* were in fact a real people. Their skepticism was based on the discovery of a brick on the Tigris River with the name *Sargon* on it—the name of one of Syria's great kings. It was sent to a Paris museum where it was determined to be fraudulent. Later, however, Laird, the great Assyriologist, dug up the entire city of Nineveh with its temples and palaces, once again disproving the critics and proving the Bible reliable.

The fact is that known manuscripts and archeology both continue to confirm the reliability of the Bible down through the ages. But that's not all. The Bible itself confirms its reliability in terms of prophecy. Throughout Scripture there are various specific predictions of events that could not have been known or predicted by chance or common sense. Claims that the prophecies were actually written after the fact and created to appear as

predictions, have been proven incorrect. The June 1993 issue of the CRI publication DB-011 states: “The many predictions of Christ’s birth, life, and death were indisputably rendered more than a century before they occurred, as proven by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah and other prophetic books as well as by the Septuagint translation, all dating from earlier than 100 B.C.”

Facts, facts—and still more facts. Statistical probability that supports prophecy is more evidence proving the reliability of the Bible. Again, from CRI’s publication DB-011, “The probability that any or all of the Bible’s very specific, detailed prophecies could have been fulfilled through chance, good guessing or deliberate deceit is statistically impossible! The Bible was written over a span of 1500 years by forty different human authors in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), on hundreds of subjects. And yet there is one consistent, non-contradictory theme that runs through it all—God’s redemption of humankind. Clearly, statistical probability is a powerful indicator of the trustworthiness of Scripture.”

The reliability of manuscript translation has been supported by the factual existence of ancient documents. Considerable factual historical evidence has been discovered which can only further convince us of the reliability of the many historical claims in the Bible. But it is not only through this tangible evidence that our doubts and questions are satisfied. Intangible evidence such as the predictive ability of Scriptures through prophecy and the statistical probability of fulfilled prophecy leads us further to a most reasonable conclusion—the Bible is not only factually reliable as a document, it is reliable in all its claims. How else can it all be explained except to conclude that the Bible, as we know it, was indeed penned by men and wholly inspired by a holy God?

So many argue that because these sixty-six books we know as the Bible were penned by fallible men capable of error, they cannot be the Word of God. Yet several of the biblical writers state that they were moved or inspired by the Holy Spirit to write as they did (2 Peter 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:16, Acts 1:16, Galatians 1:11, and others). They were convinced it was God who was directing their thoughts as they wrote. *Contemporary Faith* published an article titled “Can We Trust the Bible?” The article essentially states that none of the writers contradict each other, and the basic teachings about God as our *Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier* agree throughout all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.

Documents that comprise the Bible were penned over a period of fifteen hundred years, creating sixty-six different books, written by forty different human authors who did not consult one another. Yet, they record the same essential ideas, often supplementing and adding to previous information, but never contradicting each other even about prophetic events yet to be fulfilled. Though we may not be able to prove scientifically that it was God who inspired the writing, there is surely enough factual and circumstantial evidence to warrant proof.

Chapter two has provided you with a cursory look at the Facts about the Bible. Just as we’ve considered all the facts to substantiate the Bible, we need to consider all the facts as we study it. This second step, Facts, is critical in the total observation process. As you carefully study the text, initially look for all the facts you can find. Look for all the Who’s and What’s, and don’t forget the When’s and Where’s. But, as tempting as it may be, don’t

yet look for the Why's. We'll address that in the next step, Represent, when we transition from observation to interpretation.

Before we can make any attempt at interpreting, we must be certain we've discovered all the facts accurately. Hopefully, even at this early stage in the process, you have greater cause to agree that the:

Who: is God, the one true God who intervenes in humanity out of His love.

What: is the Bible, written by men under His inspiration to create a means for us to verify truth.

When: is yesterday, today, and forever for the truth is eternal.

Where: is here on this earth where we most need God's intervention.

It is my prayer that you will embrace the truth and long to know how to live it for yourself, beginning first by faith—believing and receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior so that you can benefit from God's promises.

F is for FACTS, the four W's we need to find before we can understand truth.

People – Places – Predicaments

Chapter Three

Represent: Getting the Whole Point

Jesus answered them and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29 NKJV)

Having considered the factual evidence for the reliability of the Bible, let’s study more to get the whole point of the Bible. Though we’ve concluded that the Bible is reliable as a sacred document inspired by God, the question remains, *Couldn’t there be other documents also inspired by God, or is only the Bible exclusively inspired?*

The only way to conclude this is to examine the documents. Just as the Bible has been put to the test of canon to determine if it is inspired by God, so must other documents that claim divine inspiration be tested. Every major religion points to their own document of authority as proof-positive that their faith is “of God.” However, though they all claim to be divinely inspired, they have serious conflicts with each other. If all of these documents are correct, then there must be more than one God, a premise which the Bible clearly rejects. Is the Bible the only religious document of authority that is divinely inspired?

Consider this: if the document of authority for a given religion can be found in error, then the religion itself can easily be concluded as faulty.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls provides proof that the Bible as we know it today is substantively unchanged from its earliest known manuscript copies. This simple claim is not something any other religion can make about its own so-called sacred documents of authority.

The three major world religions today are Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. Hinduism is an utterly diverse conglomerate of doctrines, cults, and ways of life that in principle incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any. As explained in the Encyclopedia Britannica macropædia, Volume 8, 1975: “Hinduism recognizes *the Veda*, the most ancient body of religious literature, as an absolute authority revealing fundamental and unassailable truth. At the same time, however, its content has long been practically unknown, so that even though it is venerated from a distance by every traditional Hindu, and even though those Indians who reject its authority (such as Buddhists and Jains) are regarded as unfaithful to their tradition, it is, in fact, hardly drawn upon at all, not even for edification.” So much for the reliability of the Veda.

Islam is a religion that arose in Arabia in the seventh century AD as a result of the preaching and teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. It relies upon four sources: the *Qur’ān*,

the *sunnah*, *ijmā*, and *ijithād*. But the Qur'ān (or *Koran*) is the document claimed to be the *Speech of God* delivered to Muhammad, and it is the fundamental source of Islāmic teaching. A comparative study of the Koran and the Bible is most fascinating. Two Internet sites to explore are <http://debate.org.uk> and <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/01/what-is-the-koran/304024/>. The latter site will produce an article that appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* titled “What is the Koran?” by Toby Lester. The article reports specific manuscript research conducted by Gerd-R. Puin, a specialist in Arabic calligraphy and Koranic paleography, based at Saarland University in Germany. From his research, Puin believes that the Koran has been an evolving text rather than simply the Speech of God as revealed in its entirety to the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century AD.

In short, the manuscript, documentary, archaeological, and historical research evidence, substantiated by various experts, doctors, and scholars, reveals that the Koran has continually undergone significant textual variations since its origination, the date of which is also in question. Understandably, this is something that is offensive and vehemently rejected by most who practice Islam.

Dan Story addresses religious documents of authority in his book *Defending Your Faith* (Kregel Publishers, 1997). In this excellent book, which provides invaluable insight he writes, “Every organized religion has its own so-called sacred writing. Islam, Hinduism, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the New Age movement, Christian Science, the Unification Church—all have one or more documents of authority they rely upon to substantiate their faith and they all believe their writings are superior to the Bible. They may even include portions of the Bible in their writings, or include the Bible on their list of ‘acceptable’ religious books. They hold on to their belief that their writings significantly expand on, if not correct what the Bible teaches. Are they right? Is it possible that the writings of other religions are inspired by God and thus equal in authority to the Bible?”

Christian Research Institute reports that we need to realize that the claims of the Bible conflict seriously with the works that many people deem to be inspired by God. For example, the *Upanishads*—part of the Hindu scriptures—teach that the world is God while of course the Bible says exactly the opposite. Also, while the *Tripitaka*, the sacred writings of Buddhism, prescribe morality, meditation, and wisdom as solutions to suffering, the Bible points to Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross as the only real answers to man’s deepest problems, including suffering. And while the Bible centers on Christ’s death on the cross and His resurrection, the Koran denies Christ’s crucifixion and Christ’s deity altogether.

Stand To Reason, a ministry founded by Greg Koukl, is an excellent organization for Christian *apologetics* (meaning a defense of the Christian faith) that is accessible on the Internet at <http://www.str.org>. In response to my question regarding the validity of the Bible, Stand To Reason wrote: “You have brought up one of the major distinctives between Christianity and other world religions. The accuracy of our Scriptures (relative to the earliest known manuscripts), has been consistently attested to by scholars of textual

criticism, around the world. Our Scriptures stand in sharp contrast to virtually all of the other religious scriptures.”

And Christian Research Institute wrote in its publication:

As it stands, the Bible is clearly at odds with the sacred writings of the world’s religions. And while, of course, it’s logically acceptable for someone to believe that one of the writings are inspired, it makes no sense at all to believe that they’re all inspired, since their claims and statements are in many cases mutually exclusive. If we are to regard the Bible as being truly inspired by God, we can only conclude that He had no hand whatsoever in these other writings. To profess otherwise is to mischaracterize God as someone who Himself is full of contradictions and inconsistencies.” (CRI publication CP0208).

The Bible is the only religious document of authority that has remained substantively unchanged as compared to its earliest manuscripts—a claim no other religion can make. No other document from antiquity has influenced the Western world as much as the New Testament. Nor is the text of any ancient document so well attested. It exists in almost five thousand Greek manuscripts (original handwritten copies), in more than ten thousand manuscripts which are copies of the early versions, as well as in thousands of quotations from the church fathers. As for the Old Testament, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls provides irrefutable evidence for its textual reliability. Without much effort, it is easy to affirm that the Bible is exclusively inspired, which means that the claims contained in the Bible about God, creation, sin, Jesus Christ, and redemption are exclusive. This then disproves any claim that there is more than one way to God. The Bible is crystal clear that there is only one way, and that is by believing faith in Jesus Christ.

In chapter two we considered the reliability of the translation of the Bible. In this chapter we’ve considered the exclusivity of the Bible and therefore the Christian faith. In his article “Methods of Bible Study,” Rev. R. A. Torrey writes, “The Bible is an entirely unique book. It is what no other book is—the Word of God. This can be easily proven to any candid man. The Bible ought then to be studied as no other book is. It should be studied as the Word of God.” (As quoted from Bible Explorer®, Epiphany Software *Methods of Bible Study* by Rev. R. A. Torrey)

When we properly appreciate the Bible for what it is, our desire to study it is profoundly impacted. Our approach becomes submissive, trusting, and accepting—without question. Our will to obey its instructions is greatly increased as we seek to benefit from all its promises. James 1:6 instructs us that unwavering faith is essential to receive anything from the Lord.

It is my hope that you have developed a much deeper appreciation for the study of God’s Word. To know that the Bible is unique, that it is the one and only inspired Word of God, makes the study of it explode with meaning and purpose. We have the written Word of God in our hands! To realize that we can study God’s Word to gain insight, direction, instruction, assurance, and so much more is tremendous. Clearly, it is not a matter of dry academic study rather it’s the privilege of embracing the very Word of God, communing with holy eternal God, our Creator, our heavenly Father.

Rev. Torrey also states, “The Bible is good only because of the truth that is in it, and to see this truth demands close attention. Make up your mind to *study* the Bible. It is astounding how much heedless reading of the Bible is done. Men seem to think that there is some magic power in the book, and that, if they will but open and skim over its words, they will get good out of it.”

Which Bible Version is Best?

Attention to the particular version of the Bible we select for study is important for determining sound doctrine. Many ask, “Which Bible version is best?” That depends upon your objective for study. There are multiple versions from which to choose, with more, it seems, being written each week. However, I ardently recommend that you choose a Bible translation that is proven rather than popular. All versions can be characterized in one of two ways—either as a *translation* or a *paraphrase*. Translations are those versions where great effort has been taken to translate the exact meaning from the original language. Paraphrases rephrase the text, adding or omitting words to communicate the original meaning in a personal manner.

Bible scholars have serious opinions on the question “Which Bible version is best?” As a student and lay-teacher I have concluded that translations are best for study, whereas paraphrases can be helpful for application. To be certain one is standing on solid ground, a translation is by far best for primary use. Paraphrased versions can help develop the understanding and whole meaning of a passage or point. Referring to several translations will help prevent an error commonly made during this observation phase of study. If we approach a particular passage believing we already know exactly what it says, we won’t examine it very closely. This results in our missing significant subtleties and at times major points. Consider a familiar passage to many: “...every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” But is that what the text actually says? Comparing different versions as well as comparative or parallel passages reveals the following:

	Study Passage	Parallel Passage
	Philippians 2:10-11	Romans 14:11
Living Bible	shall	shall
New American Standard	should	shall
New International Version	should	will
King James	should	shall
New King James	should	shall

Both these New Testament passages are reflective of an Old Testament passage, Isaiah 45:23. Looking at Isaiah 45:23 in the various Bible versions also reveals usage of the words “will” and “shall.” There is significant difference between the words “should” and “shall.” What was the original author’s intent? In this example, it would be wise to look up the meaning of the original language using *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* or another reliable reference.

Bible versions published in the 1990s are of particular concern to me. In many of these, the Word of God is blatantly restated in an attempt to be less offensive and more politically correct. This is an effort to transform God's Word to make it comply with contemporary Western sensitivities. This is humanism being played out. Rather than changing the Word of God to suit our sensibilities, we ought to be transformed to comply with the universal sensitivities of God's Word.

Many newer versions of the Bible are in reality a Westernization of the universal Word of God. Attempts to rewrite God's Word to make it non-gender specific is unique to the English language. Consider that other languages attribute gender identity to virtually everything: plants, tables, doors, clothing, and so on. We must be very careful not to get caught up in divisive movements. The Christian faith is universal according to the Word of God.

Arguments are made that the intent of the Word of God is not altered by these recent versions. But comparing these new versions to proven translations reveals otherwise, as exposed by *World Magazine*, a leader in the effort to alert people about the NIV gender-neutral Bible. According to their website, their first article ("Femme Fatal" by Susan Olasky, March 29, 1997) regarding this issue was followed by over thirty subsequent cover stories, articles, and readers' comments, providing an excellent record of the controversy and backlash over the publisher's and distributor's attempt to circulate this new version. *World Magazine's* website is accessible at <http://www.worldmag.com> and is highly recommended.

Changing the Bible to satisfy contemporary climates seems most risky considering what the Scriptures say: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands for-ever" (Isaiah 40:8 NKJV). "You shall not add to the word which I commanded you nor shall you take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2 NKJV). "Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:6). And, most especially, in considering Jeremiah 23, God declares that He will utterly forget forsake, cast out and bring an everlasting reproach upon those who pervert the Word of God and mislead people.

Even among popular versions we find substantial differences when comparing one passage to another—sometimes enough difference that the meaning is actually altered. The New International Version has come under criticism for this. However, the NIV is a very popular book used for study because it is written at a literary grade level that is comfortable for many. Still, for serious study and to conclude matters of doctrine, it is best to refer to several translated versions. A number of good computer software programs allow comparison of several translations, and there are parallel Bibles published that commonly display four translations side by side. Bible Explorer® by Epiphany Software is one such source, more fully listed in the Addendum Six.

Exercise

Compare 2 Corinthians 5:17 in the various versions below and note the many differences.

“If anyone belongs to Christ, she is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new.” (New Century Version, Translation) “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (King James Version, Translation)

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (New King James Version, Translation)

“Therefore, if any man is in Christ he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (New American Standard, Translation)

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (New International Version, Translation)

“Therefore if any person is [in-grafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!” (Amplified Bible, Translation)

“When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand-new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!” (Living Bible Version, Paraphrase)

The King James Version uses the phrase “are become” which is the continual-current tense meaning, because of the use of the word “are.” The Living Bible paraphrase is consistent with that. However, all the others use wording that reflects something of a past-tense event. This may not seem significant until you experience the “old nature” at work in your life even though you’ve placed your faith in Jesus Christ. Have you become or are you becoming? What does Scripture teach? Careful study of the passage and the topic is essential to determine doctrine. More on this in the next chapter.

It is most helpful and highly recommended to refer to several translations, using the paraphrased versions to aid in overall understanding. *The New Unger’s Bible Handbook* (page 686-687) contains information about the various English versions of the Bible and how they came to be developed. Reputable Bible translations are produced by careful scholarship in textual criticism, linguistics, translation, grammar, vocabulary, style, and history. Each version was created with a purpose, to meet a different objective. When selecting a version for primary study, take time to learn how it came to be developed, what goals or objectives it was developed to meet, and the denominational influence upon the author(s).

Bob and Gretchen Passantino, published with *Answers In Action* on the Internet at <http://www.answers.org>, provide good insight with their article “Is the Bible Reliable?” I have provided a brief overview below:

The New American Standard favors a “formal equivalence,” whereby the authors worked to preserve much of the original language structure and vocabulary equivalence. This version is a revision of the American Standard Version that was generated by a group of American scholars under the direction of William H. Green of Princeton Seminary.

The New International Version combines formal equivalence with “dynamic equivalence” for culturally or historically obscure texts. This version presents the

text in a manner that aids the reader in understanding cultural references that are otherwise completely foreign. It was developed by transdenominational committees from the Christian Reformed Church and the National Association of Evangelicals.

The New King James is a revision of the Authorized King James Version. While maintaining the literary beauty of the original version, developers wanted “to make a good translation better.” Their objective was to provide a version more suitable to modern English.

The Amplified Bible is a version that attempts to add clarifying shades of meaning to the single-word English equivalent of key Hebrew and Greek words. Zondervan Bible Publishers and The Lockman Foundation originated this version. It is most useful for study because of the applauded effort to go beyond the traditional “word-for-word” concept of translation to bring out the richness of the Hebrew and Greek languages.

It’s good to understand and be comfortable with the development, goals, and intentions of the version you select as your primary study Bible. Beyond a good translation and comparative versions, other aids and materials are most helpful for the study of God’s Word. Suggestions are offered below:

Topical Books—These are books that organize Scripture by topic, making it very helpful to study the whole of Scripture on any given topic. Books in this category include *Nave’s Topical Bible*, *Thompson’s Chain Reference*, and *Torrey’s New Topical Textbook*, just to name a few. *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* also provides a commendable topical section.

Concordances—These are books that arrange Scripture using key words, allowing you to find a scripture based on one or more words you recall contained within that scripture. *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* is excellent. The Bible Explorer® software from Epiphany Software also provides an excellent concordance.

Dictionaries—A standard English dictionary is helpful. Again, there are many from which to select. Two that are popular are *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* and *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, which contains a concise Hebrew and Greek dictionary.

Text Comparatives—Depending upon your budget and desires, you may also want to invest in books or software designed to allow study in the original languages. Again, there are many available. Lexicons for Hebrew or Greek provide an alphabetical arrangement of the words and their definitions. Or you may want to go directly to the text source. In that case the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls for Hebrew and *Nestle’s Text for Greek* are worth looking into.

Pen or Pencil and Paper—This may seem an obvious inclusion for many, but this Bible study method relies on the use of personal notes, sentences, summaries, and outlines that you will create—more on this in subsequent chapters. Further, having pen and paper allows you to jot down those distracting thoughts that interrupt your study. By writing them down

as they come to mind, you have your reminder and need not stop your study for something like defrosting the evening's dinner, which can easily wait until your study time is complete.

Prayer Journal – Study of God's Word is to be done prayerfully, so it makes good sense to have your prayer journal handy. You may find that you are moved to pray for specific people or situations during your study as the Word of God is illuminated. Pray, write the prayer down, then be alert to God's answering that prayer! You'll have the record and date of your prayer to look back upon to actually see the faithfulness of God.

Commentaries – These are mentioned last for a reason. While it is good to glean from the wisdom, experience, and counsel of those who've gone before us, care must be taken not to allow your personal relationship with God, through faith in Christ, to come from men. It must come by the Holy Spirit. In my workshop, I stress the importance of completing a thorough passage study, first by using this Bible study method, and then, once you feel you've successfully concluded the passage, by seeking to learn how others did.

With a personal desire to study God's Word, and being properly equipped, you next need to decide where to begin. There's no rule that says you must study the Bible in the order in which it is published. You should study the topic of the greatest personal interest for you each day. Study for study's sake will not keep you nearly as interested in what you're studying as will personal interest and desire. Rev. R. A. Torrey says, "The topical method of Bible study is simplest, most fascinating and yields the largest immediate results. It is not the only method of Bible study, and the one who pursues it exclusively will miss much of the blessing God has for him in the Bible. But it is a very interesting and fruitful method of study." Personal passion is by far the most successful motive for Bible study.

His Word Afresh, My Life Anew! is a method that requires the study of complete sections of text. Chapters and verses, as they are indicated in the Bible, were not part of the original manuscript. They were inserted as useful references to assist scribes in their manual copying of these precious documents. Do not be influenced by these visual divisions. Even chapter sub-headings can be misleading. To be sure to read the whole text for the given topic, look beyond these divisions and references. Connective terms such as *Therefore* and *So then* indicate that there is more on the point in preceding verses. You want to look back until you identify the beginning of the point being made, and then continue on through to the end. This helps to assure that you're studying the topic in context, which helps to assure that you learn the whole point.

Example: Look at the Gospel of John, beginning at chapter 7, verse 37. Read through the end of the chapter and on to chapter 8, verse 1. Note that the conclusion of the event discussed is not the end of chapter 7 but rather the first verse of chapter 8. A new event is discussed beginning with John 8:2 that continues through to verse 59. Within these sections of Scripture many topics are raised. Select your topic, but be sure to read the complete passage of Scripture that contains your topic in context. As explained in chapter two of this Bible study method, you will note natural divisions within complete passages of Scripture and make summary sentences for each division.

In step three, Represent, the objective is to write a single summary sentence for the entire passage. The summary sentence needs to accurately reflect all the major facts of the

text. It must not be interpretative—it must be a factual representation of the whole study text. This step allows us to determine what the passage Represents.

The topic of greatest interest to new believers or to those new to genuine Bible study is their Savior. I suggest beginning in the New Testament with the book of Mark. It is a short, fast-moving biography of Jesus Christ that will give you a dramatic introduction to events that changed the world and can change your life. Study of the other Gospels will enlarge your understanding of Christ's life by providing more historical facts and perspectives. A new Bible student is also often interested in learning how the early church began. The book of Acts picks up where Mark ends and continues the dynamic story of the first Christians and how they spread the Good News. New believers are also generally very interested in how to apply their new faith to their everyday lives. Romans might be chosen for the next study and then onto the other *epistles*—the letters of instruction written to early believers.

The selected topic of study that is of genuine current interest will be determined by many personal objectives. In addition to searching all Scripture passages for a given topic, as previously stated, the topics need to be studied in context. In conducting a complete chapter study, it is essential to gather all the puzzle pieces together to see the whole picture. I suggest conducting your personal topical study during your regular prayer, devotion, and study time. Joining a Bible study group for a chapter-by-chapter systematic study of the Bible is also excellent and considered by many to be essential.

My survey also asked, “What specific things have markedly enhanced your commitment and times of success at Bible study?” The vast majority of respondents stated “accountability” in one form or another: belonging to a group, having the responsibility for facilitating or teaching the group, and accountability as a minister or pastor. A smaller percentage of the respondents, about 25 percent, represented themselves to be self-motivated, but everyone benefits from being a member of a group of like-minded believers who study together, serving one another.

Betty Southard, an international speaker and author, and most certainly among the self-motivated, included this with her response to the survey question: “I love getting totally alone...away from home and pressures. So times of personal retreat are very dear to me. The other thing is just the commitment to set aside a regular time of reading the Word and following some structured program to keep myself on track.” Structured programs and accountability are essential for the vast majority of us, even the self-motivated types.

Study of the Old Testament is best done after a sufficient foundation of understanding is established about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Then, as you study the Old Testament and are able to recognize types, foreshadows, and prophecies, the Old Testament will be properly meaningful to you. As you study the Old Testament, look for the things concerning Christ in all the Scriptures and you will be humbled again and again at God's faithfulness, mercy, and goodness, in spite of man's disobedience and rejection of Him.

Carefully observing all the facts and what they represent is essential for establishing sound doctrine to conclude any matter of truth. This third step moves us from Observation

into Interpretation. To properly interpret the whole truth we need to consider all the facts. In this way we identify what the passage actually Represents. Don't try to interpret the facts prematurely. Press in a bit further to discover even more facts in the text, asking questions such as:

- How did the people of the time respond to the action in the text?
- What is the relationship between the text and the chapter or book as a whole?

Look up geographical information and view maps or pertinent archeology. Maps and geography alone can prove most enlightening considering present-day geography, government, and world affairs. Consider social, political, and government factors for that day. Look up words and phrases about which you're unclear in order to arrive at a complete, concise *factual* understanding of the passage.

Another safeguard to help prevent a premature interpretation is to look at the facts from different vantage points:

- Imagine you're one or more of the characters in the text. How do you view the facts then?
- Imagine you're a "political prominent," observing the action in the text. How then would you view the facts?
- Imagine you're a child in the time and place of the text.
- Imagine you're a new believer coming to the study of this passage. How does this perspective impact the way you view the facts?
- Imagine you're a pastor, a pastor's wife, an unbeliever, a homeless person, a wealthy businessperson, a battered wife...

Linda Jewell, a respondent to my survey, explains how considering the text from the perspective of one of the characters made the stories come alive in a letter she wrote to Jim Metcalf, her adult Sunday school teacher:

Dear Jim, thank you for making our Sunday school lesson a personal touchstone instead of an academic exercise. When we read about Jesus' response to the hemorrhaging woman (Luke 8:40-56), your questions forced me into Jairus' sandals. For the first time I saw Jairus as a flesh and blood man with one focus, to bring Jesus to his daughter. To the question, I asked myself, "What would I do if my own child lay dying and someone else's need delayed the Great Physician?" My first frantic reaction might be to tug at Jesus' tunic and urge, "Come on! Come on!" I might try to shoo the sick woman away because I felt my dying child's need was more immediate than hers.

If I were to interview Jairus, there are so many questions I could ask. Did Jairus feel relief when Jesus started toward his house? Frustration that the press of the crowd slowed them? Anxiety and despair at the delay? Did Jairus' faith and hope waver when he was told that his daughter was dead? When Jesus called back the spirit of

the daughter, the Bible says that Jairus and his wife were amazed. In the following days and years, did Jairus ponder all that he had witnessed? Did he see the joy and thanksgiving of his daughter's revival as a shadow of things to come?

Literally, my hands opened my Bible at the beginning of Sunday school class. However, your questions opened my mind and heart that morning. And from that the people in the Bible became real and personal to me. Your question changed the way I study the Bible.

Our personal life experiences are determinants in our Observation. Getting outside of ourselves by considering other perspectives is most valuable. It will evoke additional questions, permitting you to glean even more from the study passage and to better experience what the passage actually Represents.

A systematic approach to Bible study is essential. Willy-nilly study will result in willy-nilly reliance upon God's Word. (And we've already considered the warning of James 1:6.) Make a list of subjects you want to learn about and study them in the order you need. Be intentional about studying the whole of Scripture on the selected topic so that you don't miss an important point or nuance and then base your life's actions on a partial truth. Don't be content to study just a few passages and assume you've got it figured out. Study diligently and thoroughly. Study with the intent to be exact. It is your life and the lives of those around you that will be impacted. Be exact. Find the exact meaning of every passage on your subject of study. Rev. Torrey suggests that there are some subjects every Christian should study as soon as possible. He suggests:

- The atonement (of the blood of Christ)
- Justification
- The new birth
- Adoption
- Sanctification
- Holiness
- Assurance
- The flesh
- Cleansing faith
- Repentance
- Prayer
- Thanksgiving
- Praise
- Love: for God, for Jesus Christ, for Christians, to all men
- The future destiny of believers
- The future destiny of the wicked: punishment of the wicked, death of the wicked
- The character of Christ
- The ascension of Christ
- The second coming of Christ

The reign of Christ
The Holy Spirit
God
Grace
Messianic prophecies
The church
The Jews
Joy
The judgment
Life
Peace
Perfection
Persecution

To this list I add specific topics and issues about which Christians seem to disagree, as well as matters of contemporary concern: forgiveness, Christian service, spiritual gifts, women in church leadership, psychology and counseling, prosperity, Christian involvement in politics, homosexuality, abortion, divorce, euthanasia. But you, dear reader, need to identify your own list. This is your faith, your relationship, and your life in Christ.

As you study the topics of personal interest, take care not to shortchange the Observation process. Again, it is the foundation upon which your whole doctrine will rest. In this critical first phase, if you have an open mind and a heart to learn the truth, you are likely to discover some misconceptions you've had for a long time—conclusions and convictions you've adopted that your study of God's Word now reveals to be based on fallacy.

Many people's initial reaction to this is a sense of agitation. If you experience agitation, which could be expressed as upset, anger, frustration, or any number of emotions, realize that this is a good thing. Rather than deny or explain away the facts of the Bible text, examine your convictions and conclusions. It's most uncomfortable when we realize that we've held wrongly to something for a long period of time, especially if we adopted it through the instruction of a beloved parent, pastor, or respected authority in our life. But, unless we have the courage to examine why we believe what we believe in the light of God's Word, we will operate throughout our lives in willful ignorance, upon the shifting sand of denial and deception.

If you feel yourself becoming agitated because of information you've discovered in God's Word, simply pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the root cause of your distress. Careful observation requires a relaxed setting, plenty of time, a focused mind, and lots of paper! Careful observation naturally creates questions—questions that we'll address in the Evaluation and Application steps of this Bible study method.

As you prayerfully study the Word of God, search out the whole point of the topic and seek all texts that address your topic, including parallel concerns that might provide deeper insight. Learn all that God's Word has to say on the subject. As you consider a

passage of Scripture, pray, asking the Holy Spirit to direct you to a thorough understanding of the whole of what the facts Represent.

R is for REPRESENT; look for the whole truth to uncover the
Purpose – Precedent – Point

If you've enjoyed this sample of the first few chapters of this book, I invite you to purchase the entire book in print form for a 15% discount. Just use NEWSUB as the discount code upon checkout.

About the Author



Pamela Christian, founder and director of Pamela Christian Ministries, has an unstoppable passion for presenting and promoting the study of God’s Word. In 1990 she carried that passion into her local community, using her skills and experience as a business owner to establish a class for an interdenominational Bible study, serving as its lay leader and teacher for nearly seven years.

Being asked to serve as the keynote speaker for a church retreat, Pam found God opening a new door allowing her to provide inspirational and probing messages that have sparked new interest and deeper commitment for God’s Word among women coast to coast. Her candid, reflective, and interactive speaking style has challenged audiences to ask what they believe, why they believe it, and learn how they can live it!

Pam’s abilities as a radio talk-show host were realized in 2003 when she hosted the weekly two-hour live interactive program “The Pamela Christian Show.” Following, Salem Communications recognized her talent and hired her to host a daily two-hour evening drive-time talk show, “Life Line with Pam Christian,” on KFOX in San Francisco. Pam continues to pursue additional ministry work in radio and television.

Writing credits are varied and include the first in a three-book series, *Examine Your Faith! Finding Truth in a World of Lies* (WestBow Press 2013), and various e-books, her own bi-monthly e-newsletter, “Transformed Living,” and stories printed in compilation books, magazines, and several self-published workbooks and study guides for her various retreat and conference topics.

Pam is a member of Advanced Writers and Speakers Association, a staff member with CLASServices Inc., and a member of Christian Women in Media.

She holds a certification in apologetics with Biola University. She and her husband, David, reside in Southern California with their two adult children living nearby.

If you are looking for a way to spark growth and commitment for your group, contact Pam to speak at your next seminar, retreat, or conference.

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What others say about this book and workshop...

“Pam Christian has compiled into one complete booklet all you need to know to really make *His Word Afresh, My Life Anew!* Her hours of research and organizational ability will save you weeks of work. If you are serious about making God’s Word come alive in your life, you will find wonderful help in this material.”

Betty Southard, an international speaker and author of two books, has over thirty years of Bible teaching experience. She holds a Master of Theology degree from Fuller Seminary and is a staff member for CLASServices Inc., professor at Biola University, and minister of caring for the Hour of Power (Crystal Cathedral Ministries). She and her husband have three grown daughters and live in Southern California.

“Reading *His Word Afresh, My Life Anew!* made me stop and evaluate whether I was getting all I could from my own study of God’s Word. Though I have always maintained some sort of personal or formal study, and have been a Bible study small group leader for years, Pam’s materials added new dimensions of possibility to the ways in which I might expand my study and deepen my understanding. I especially love the way she has intertwined the interactive and intellectual aspects of study to enhance the intimacy we can have together with God when we meet Him in His Word.”

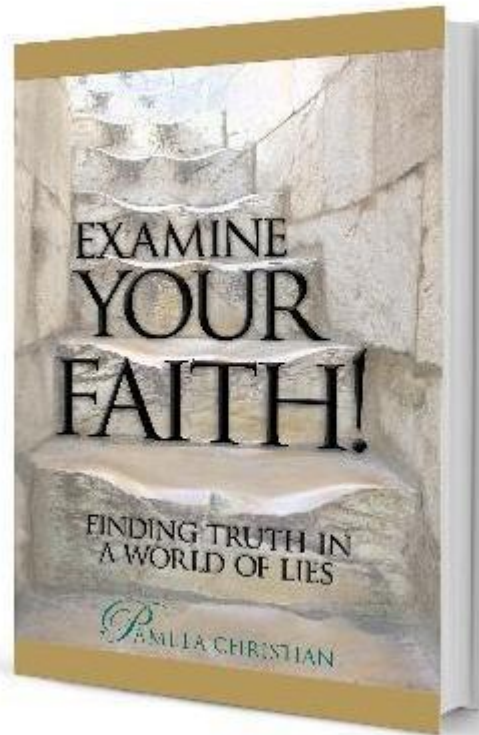
Armené Humber is a freelance writer, career counselor, and instructor at the Women’s Opportunities Center at University of California, Irvine. As a student of the Bible for thirty years, she has led small groups and trained small-group leaders for inductive Bible studies. She is currently a part-time student at Fuller Seminary as well as a wife and mother to two grown sons.

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