

Your
BIBLE
QUESTIONS
Answered

Douglas A.
Jacoby



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Introduction

We are born inquisitive. God made us that way. At a young age we begin asking questions. As we mature, we grapple with issues and try to remain intellectually honest, especially in the absence of definitive answers. We are all tempted to jump at the ready answer. Certainty is comforting, but must be rooted in truth. Honesty may entail suspending judgment or admitting, “I don’t know.”

The questions in this book have been submitted by real people, seekers in Africa, Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. They asked, and I did my best to answer by telephone, e-mail, private appointment, and especially the Q&A sessions that follow my presentations worldwide. You may not always agree with my responses—I often even “disagree” with myself, changing my mind on various subjects as I mull over new information and other people’s perspectives—but I am grateful that you are giving me an audience.

Of course we’ll never have all the answers, and fortunately salvation

isn't based on sophistication. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). The search for truth must continue, for this is God's will (Matthew 7:7). Many of our discoveries enrich our faith, supply what is missing in the big picture, and equip us to help others who may be stuck in their own quest.

A crucial challenge in interpreting Scripture is determining whether the author was writing metaphorically or literally. In some cases, this is obvious. For example, if David found rest in the shadow of God's wings (Psalm 17:8), are we to believe God is a bird? Of course not. Or take Jeremiah 51:42-43, where the image of drought is superimposed on the image of flood. A literal meaning is obviously not intended. But the decision isn't always so easy. Are the days of creation in Genesis 1 literal 24-hour days? How many of the vibrant symbols in the book of Revelation are intended to be understood literally? In such cases, we do well to focus on the main point of the passage and not to be distracted by speculative positions.

The point of the search is not to be smarter or biblically savvier than everybody else. I remember a news item about a Bible-quoting contest that ended in murder. The loser was so incensed that he went home, grabbed a gun, and shot his opponent in the face. For many, it is unthinkable that they have got it wrong. Yet if we're mistaken, we need to admit it; if we gain new knowledge, we need to be thankful and humble. As the apostle Paul asked the Corinthians, "Who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

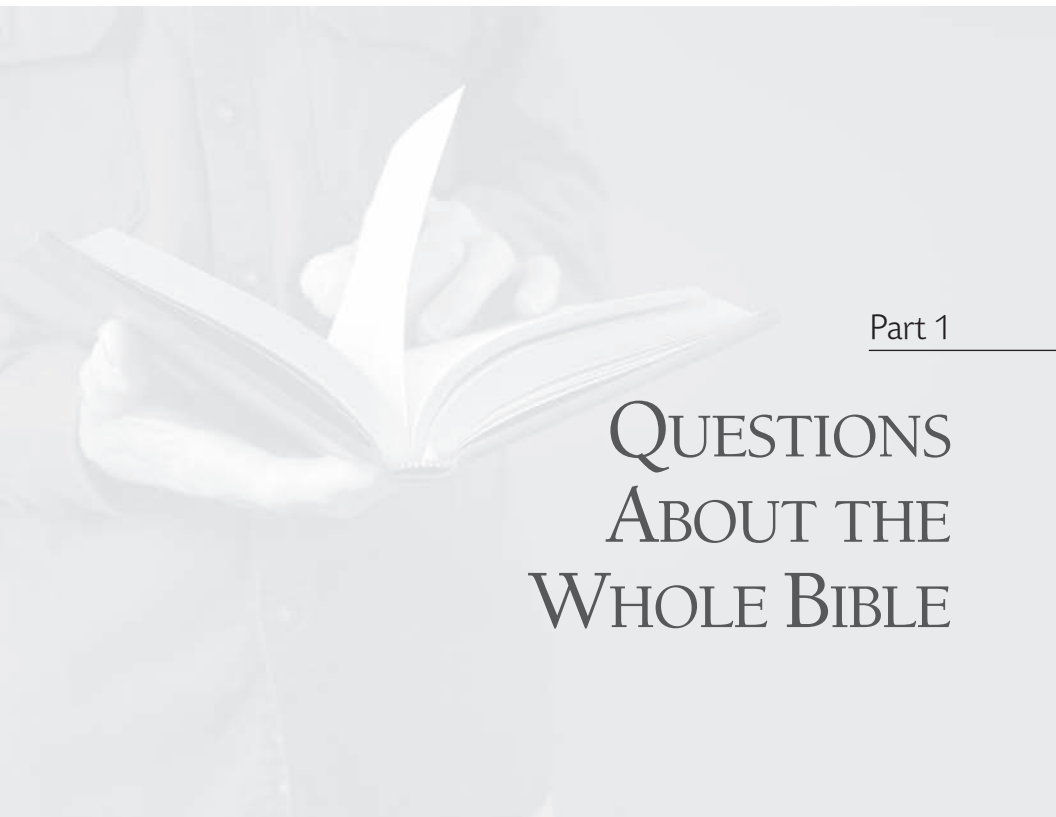
As with individuals, so with churches. A fully biblical congregation won't say, "Don't ask, just believe!" or "We've always done it this way; why question it?" Ultimately, if the Bible is the authority, then the church is not, for the word of God trumps the word of man (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Groups are as unlikely to "arrive" as individuals are.

With this spirit of humility in mind, *Your Bible Questions Answered* makes a stab at a smattering of Bible questions that *can* be answered. To get the most out of this book, be sure to read the Scriptures cited in the

Introduction

questions. The answers assume you are familiar with them. Also, keep in mind that this volume is illustrative, not comprehensive. Some of the selections arise naturally from intriguing topics. Others are suggested by apparent contradictions or difficult passages. None of these, however, disproves or discredits the fundamental message of Scripture. At the end of the day, there are more answers than we have questions, for God has the answer to any and every question we could possibly put to him.

Douglas Jacoby
Marietta, Georgia
January 2011



Part 1

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WHOLE BIBLE



General Questions About the Whole Bible

Where did the title *Holy Bible* come from, and what does it mean?

The word *Bible* does not appear anywhere in Scripture. Its source is the Greek word *biblion*, book, as in *bibliography*. As millions of people can testify from personal experience, the Bible is a library of 66 life-giving volumes.

The Bible is *holy* because it possesses a spiritually pure quality, not because we are to worship it. I like the acronym Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. Yet the purpose of this book is not just to relay information, but to bring about transformation. It is also holy because it connects us with the spiritual world, helping us to know God, as those willing to let the message penetrate soon find out.

What is Scripture?

Scripture is written communication from God to us, the word of God. This includes the sacred writings of the Old and New Testaments.

What is the layout of the Bible?

The books of the Old Testament are arranged in three sections in the Hebrew Bible: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The books in Christian Bibles are the same, but the order is somewhat different. Malachi is the final book, though in Hebrew manuscripts, 1–2 Chronicles closes the canon.

In the Hebrew Bible, the Law is the first five books of our Old Testament. The Prophets include the former prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and the latter prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 minor prophets). The Writings consist of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, Ezra–Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

Hebrew Bible	Christian Old Testament
Law Genesis–Deuteronomy	Law Genesis–Deuteronomy
Prophets 21 books	History and Poetry Joshua–Song of Solomon (17 books)
Writings 13 books	The Prophets Isaiah–Malachi (17 books)

The New Testament is laid out in four parts: Gospels, Acts, letters, and the Apocalypse, with 4, 1, 21, and 1 books in each section, respectively. In some ancient copies, the letters from James to Jude follow Acts; in others, Hebrews follows Romans. I have also inspected collections of the Gospels in which John came first or Mark preceded Matthew. But this hardly matters. It's not the order that is inspired, but the content.

When was the Bible written?

The Old Testament was written, for the most part, between 1000 BC and the late fifth century BC. Genesis 36:31 makes clear that the final version of Genesis, the first book, came sometime after the monarchy

was established in Israel. (Saul was anointed as Israel's first king around 1050 BC.) The New Testament books were written between the 40s and 90s of the first century AD. Thus the entire Bible was written over a span of more than a millennium.

What are CE and BCE?

In an effort not to offend those who are uncomfortable with the claims of Christ, many in academic circles prefer the abbreviations CE (Common Era) and BCE (before the Common Era) over the traditional BC (before Christ) and AD (*Anno Domini*, Latin for “in the year of the Lord”). This book follows the traditional BC and AD convention. The era is presumably “common” because the entire world, even those who are not Christian, share a common calendar. So CE and BCE are the politically correct forms of AD and BC, especially since some world religions (such as Judaism and Islam) have their own calendars.

Yet regardless of whether the abbreviation is changed, the number for the current year (for example, 2011) is still based on the notion that more than 2000 years ago the most significant event of all history took place: Jesus Christ was born—God became flesh.

Has the Bible been changed? Isn't it a translation of a translation...?

Actually, modern translations are made from ancient copies. For example, the original Greek gospel of John was probably written at the end of the first century. Handwritten copies have survived from the second century onward. Today's English Bibles are translated directly from these ancient handwritten copies. So your Bible is a translation, but it's not a translation of a translation. Scholars work from the oldest manuscripts available in the original languages.

What do we mean when we say the Bible is inspired?

Inspired means more than just true. It also means more than

“inspiring.” Many documents are substantially true (invoices, magazine articles, police reports...) but do not qualify as Scripture. Others are uplifting or motivating (poems, sports journalism, war stories...), but this hardly requires divine inspiration. Inspiration refers to the *function* of revelation—its ability to guide, shape, and direct our lives toward God.

Second Timothy 3:16-17 states that all Scripture is both inspired and useful. But in what way? Some believers imagine Scripture somehow addresses every area of knowledge, human and divine. Every verse has a profound meaning, and nothing is incidental. The Bible contains comprehensive knowledge about history, physics, biology, psychology, and so forth. But this turns out to be a restrictive, flat theology; it presses Scripture into unnatural service, making it a mere textbook.

Some go even further and use the Bible as a sanctified Ouija board, flipping through its pages randomly in search of patterns, codes, or clues as to God’s will for their lives. This misguided approach ignores the textured nature of God’s word.

People sometimes confuse inspiration with a particular kind of interpretation. For example, those who interpret a passage literally may feel as if those who interpret the same passage metaphorically do not believe the passage is inspired. This is not necessarily true. Inspired Scripture communicates truth literally (for example, Jesus really will return to earth) as well as metaphorically (he probably won’t have a metal sword sticking out of his mouth—Revelation 19:11-16).

Also, do minor discrepancies between the Bible and clear scientific or historical facts discredit the inspiration of the Bible? Not at all. Not one of these discrepancies affects the clear message of the Bible. And almost all of them are not really mistakes; they simply reflect the way people talked when the Bible was written. As for the nature of inspiration, one helpful viewpoint states that the Bible is “reliable in all that it genuinely affirms, and authoritative for guidance in doctrine and behavior” (the Lausanne Covenant). For more information on the nature of inspiration, see pages 6, 24, and 109.

Why is the Bible so long?

Actually, it isn't—at least not when you compare it to the Scriptures of the Eastern religions, which have many thousands of pages, or when you remember that it is more of a library than a single book. The Bible, at about 1000 pages, is a rich and involved story, and not one that can be told quickly. Novels sometimes reach lengths of 1000 pages, but the biblical story is a true account and infinitely more valuable. Take a few pages a day, and you can easily read it through in a matter of months. If you read it with understanding, it will change your life.

When were the chapter and verse numbers added?

The chapter numbers were not added (or standardized) till the late Middle Ages, and the verse numbers were added in the mid-sixteenth century. Though they are useful for reference, they are not inspired.

When I began reading the Bible, I was taken aback by how short many chapters are—often just a paragraph or two. Yet chapter numbers simply provide a way to find passages. For an example, James 1:27 means the first chapter of James, verse 27. The system takes a little getting used to, though in the end it will help you more efficiently navigate the 1189 chapters and approximately 31,000 verses of the Bible. Rather than read the Bible verse by verse or chapter by chapter, the most efficient way to grow in our comprehension of Scripture is to read book by book.

What language was the Bible originally written in?

Think of the Bible as a library, not a single document. Its books were written and edited over a period of many centuries and originate from many countries. It was written in three languages.

- Ninety-nine percent of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. Most of the Bible is the Old Testament, so Hebrew is the principal language of Scripture.
- One percent of the Old Testament—271 verses out of about 23,000—was written in Aramaic (Genesis 31:47;

Jeremiah 10:11; Ezra 4:6–6:18; 7:12-26; Daniel 2:4–7:2). Aramaic is closely related to Hebrew and uses the same writing system. A few Aramaic words and phrases appear in the New Testament because the first-century Jews of Palestine (including Jesus) spoke Aramaic.

- The entire New Testament was written in Greek.

None of the Bible was written in Latin, though a Latin translation became standard among the Western church in the early Middle Ages.

Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek are well understood by scholars, and as a result we can be confident that we are reading accurate versions of the original biblical documents. We should be profoundly grateful for those who've done the laborious work of Bible translation, including past generations of missionaries, linguistic pioneers, and copyists. (But perhaps we should be a little suspicious of preachers who habitually refer to the Greek or Hebrew without continuing to study these languages. If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.)

What's the difference between a translation and an interpretation?

A translation takes us from the original language to another, such as from Hebrew to Egyptian (Genesis 42:23) or from Persian to Hebrew (Esther 8:9). An interpretation, on the other hand, is our understanding of the text once we have read it in a language we know. (What does it mean? How do we apply it to our lives?) Of course, translation involves some degree of interpretation. (For example, in going from Spanish to English, the translator must decide whether *señor* means “mister,” “sir,” or “Lord.” Usually the context resolves any ambiguity.)

Doesn't the Bible interpret itself? Doesn't individual interpretation cause dissensions?

Second Peter 1:20 reminds us that the prophets did not play fast and loose with the word of God. When we read Scripture, we're not reading

the prophets' opinions. Rather, the word of God is mediated through them. Nonetheless, *interpretation* is not a dirty word. To believe that the Bible interprets itself and that we can understand it without doing any work at all is simply to justify laziness. This is wrong and will lead to simplistic and misguided answers.

Bible study is more than simply reading and obeying. The middle step of interpretation is essential. Some may say, "Don't interpret the Bible; just obey it." This may sound pious, but it is misleading. The *basic* truths of the Bible may be plain for all to see, yet we can understand most of the Scripture only through disciplined study. Interpretation involves comprehending the meaning of a passage in its original context. The Bible never claims that every part is easy to understand (in fact, quite the opposite—2 Peter 3:14-16). It urges us to meditate diligently on God's word (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119), applying ourselves in hope that the Lord will give insight (2 Timothy 2:7,15).

Surely copyists make some mistakes, so how can the Bible be trustworthy?

Yes, copyists occasionally committed minor errors. An illustration will help. Jesus found the demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1) in the region of the Gerasenes—or was it the Gadarenes? Or the Gergasenes? Geographical confusion on the part of an ancient scribe would be understandable. (Similarly, people today might confuse Newark and New York, or New York City and New York State.) Scholars are not sure which reading is original. But does it matter? Nothing essential is lost through a slight geographical shift.

No surviving manuscript is an exact copy of the original New Testament and Old Testament writings, although many ancient manuscripts are extremely close. The alternative readings listed in the footnotes of your Bible are not contradictions. They are simply instances in which translators were unsure.

Inspiration applies to the original text, not to copies. Most Bible believers do not believe the modern translations are perfect; only the

original *autographs* (as scholars call them) are pristine. However, most differences are so minor that to list them would be tiresome. No Christian doctrine is affected.

Do modern translators ever get it wrong?

No modern translation of the Hebrew and Greek text is perfect, though some versions are more accurate than others. The New International Version interprets Psalm 100:3, “It is he who made us, and we are his.” Earlier English versions read, “It is he who made us, and not we ourselves.” In the older translations, the Hebrew word *lo* (his) was mistaken for the word *lo’* (not) because of a widespread spelling variant. Here’s another example: The word translated *disciples* in Acts 11:26 is unfairly softened to *believers* in the paraphrased Living Bible. The original text contains no contradiction.

Variants are bound to occur because Hebrew, the principal language of the Bible, is not as precise as such modern languages as English, Russian, or German. And even New Testament Greek, though more precise than Hebrew, often permits more than one way to translate a word or phrase. People who are unfamiliar with these ancient languages may find what they erroneously assume to be a discrepancy when they compare one modern version to another.

Here are some abbreviations of popular translations:

NIV—New International Version
 NASB—New American Standard Bible
 KJV—King James Version
 NKJV—New King James Version
 ESV—English Standard Version
 NET—New English Translation
 HCSB—Holman Christian Standard Bible
 RSV—Revised Standard Version
 NRSV—New Revised Standard Version

When translators note, “The meaning of the Hebrew for this word is uncertain,” how can we clearly understand the passage in English?

First, let’s commend the translators for honestly admitting uncertainty. Translation from one language into another is not an exact science because a single word in the original language may have a range of meanings and may be accurately expressed in many ways in the translation language. Fortunately, relatively few words in the Bible have meanings that elude us, though there are a handful.

Consider Job 21:24: “...his body well nourished, his bones rich with marrow.” The sense of the verse is clear enough: The person is physically healthy. But the meaning of the Hebrew word translated *body* is uncertain, and it appears only once in the Old Testament, so we have no other instances to compare. Here is how some other translations read:

- “His sides are filled out with fat, and the marrow of his bones is moist” (NASB).
- “His breasts [or milk pails] are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow” (KJV).
- “His body full of fat and the marrow of his bones moist” (RSV).
- “His entrails are full of fat and the bones of this one are moistened with marrow” (Latin Vulgate).

All translations yield the same general sense. Confusion centers around only one word, the Hebrew *’atin* (milk pail or bucket). We are dealing with figurative language. (Nearly the entire book of Job is poetry, as the NIV indentations and stanzas indicate.) The NIV clearly follows the RSV, avoiding the wooden translation of the medieval Latin. The NASB similarly uses a broad word—*sides*. The Latin *viscera* conveys the same sense as the NASB, while the KJV humorously over-interprets, leading to a biological implausibility.

But regardless of which translation is right, no doctrine of Scripture depends on it, nor is the gist of the passage substantially affected. This is typical of verses that contain obscure words. And though I read every footnote, nothing is wrong with skipping them entirely. Little will be missed.

Why doesn't my Bible have the Apocrypha? And what is the Septuagint, or LXX?

Tradition holds that 70 Jews translated the Old Testament into Greek a couple of centuries before Christ. (*LXX* is Roman for 70, and the Latin word for 70 is *septuaginta*.) This translation included the Apocrypha—a collection of works that were written during the 400-year gap between the Old Testament and New Testament. Some of these apocryphal works contain valuable historical information, but others are of little value as sources. The theology is sometimes inferior, including such doctrines as penance, purgatory, almsgiving for forgiveness, sex for procreation only, prayers to and for the dead, and a host of other objectionable notions.

By the time of the Counter-Reformation, the Apocrypha had been familiar to believers for 1500 years or more and had been included in Bibles for more than a millennium, though it hadn't always been considered to be fully scriptural. (Thus Protestants err if they claim the Apocrypha was added to the Bible in the sixteenth century.) In April 1546, the Roman Church declared these books to be inspired and imposed severe penalties for regarding them as less than authoritative. Moreover, the Orthodox churches have always had these books in their Bible. At the end of the day, little rides on whether or not they are included in the canon; Christians have differing opinions, but the core message of the Bible and the gospel remains unaffected either way.

Is the King James Version the only accurate English version?

No. At the turn of the seventeenth century, the translators' understanding of Hebrew grammar was satisfactory but not great. You may

recall that their translation enterprise (1605–1611) was three centuries before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered (1947) and two and a half centuries before the great papyrus finds in Egypt in the late 1800s that shed so much light on New Testament Greek. (Before this time, some scholars and churchmen supposed that Koine Greek was a divine language because no examples had been found outside of Scripture. As it turns out, this was the everyday language of the home, street, and marketplace!)

The second edition of the KJV corrected some 500 errors. A number of problems still remain, such as the 11 references to unicorns and satyrs.

In addition to the much-improved understanding of Greek and Hebrew since the seventeenth century, the textual basis of modern English translations has considerably broadened. Many of the manuscripts the KJV translators consulted were only a century or two old. Now we have complete New Testament manuscripts from the fourth century, and the Old Testament manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls are more than a thousand years older than those available in the early 1600s.

The original KJV included the entire Apocrypha. So when people say, “If it was good enough for Jesus and the apostles, it’s good enough for me,” I wonder if they mean the original KJV, with the Apocrypha, or a later version. Few KJV advocates are willing to accept the inspiration of the apocryphal books.

I also wonder if they understand the meaning of Elizabethan words, such as *conversation*. In 1611, it meant “lifestyle.” Today’s reader of the KJV will predictably interpret *conversation* as “talk.” Languages evolve; they move on. Fresh translations must continually be made. Otherwise the old ones, less and less understood by contemporary readers, will become obstacles to understanding. More than 120 English translations are available today, many of them recently translated and easy to read.

Why do so many numbers in the Bible end in zero? Were people just guessing?

The Bible often uses round numbers and other approximations, especially where large quantities are involved. In Matthew 14 we read of the feeding of the 5000. The passage itself informs us that this is a round number. Further, biblical counting and censuses include only adult males. Acts 2:41 and 4:4 not only record only the male church members but also round the number to the nearest thousand. Further, many numbers in Scripture are symbolic, including 7, 40, and 1000.

In addition, numbers were difficult to copy in ancient manuscripts. They were represented by letters of the alphabet, and they weren't easy to read. (The Hindu-Arabic numbering system that most of us use today evolved slowly and was adopted many centuries after the last New Testament book was written.) For example, 42,360 in Ezra 2:64 is *tessares myriades dischilioi triakosioi hexekonta* in the Greek Septuagint. Such unwieldy expressions meant greater chances of copyist errors, which did occur in some manuscripts. But despite occasional manuscript discrepancies, no biblical doctrine is controverted.

Do God and the Bible view men and women as equals?

Sometimes the New Testament uses the Greek word *adelphē* (sister). More often, it uses *adelphos* (brother or either brother or sister). *Adelphoi* means brothers or siblings, and *adelphai* means sisters (females only). When the writer must choose a pronoun, according to standard practice then (and now), the masculine pronoun is normally used. This does not reflect a sexist bias; it is just a convention.

The Bible strongly upholds the honored place of women. Consider the Ten Commandments. The fifth commandment is conspicuous: "Honor your father and your mother." In the ancient world, mention of the father would not normally be accompanied by a reference to the mother. But there it is, in the Law of Moses, well over a millennium before the time of Christ. Both Testaments include many similar examples.

As we read the Scriptures, we find perspective and encouragement and react less to perceived inequities.

Why does the Bible have two Testaments?

The biblical story unfolds in an amazing plan of fulfillment as God's promises to the patriarchs are inherited by the people of Israel and then by the church of Christ. The Law showed us God's love, wisdom, power, justice, and mercy. Yet it could not deliver us from our sins. Only the new covenant could do that. Note that the Greek *diatheke* means both "testament" and "covenant." The writer to the Hebrews pursues the important connection between a covenant and a testament. See, for example, Hebrews 8:6-13 and 9:15-17.

The Old and New Testaments contain old and new covenants, and these have major differences. Under the Torah (the first five books of the Bible, which record the old covenant or Law), the people of God sacrificed animals. Not so under the new covenant; Jesus himself is the Lamb of God (Leviticus 1; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7). The change itself was predicted in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and other passages. The Law tolerated polygamy (but never commended it), made more allowance for divorce and war, included oaths, and of course made Sabbath days and years central. Under the new covenant, much has changed. Matthew 5:21-48 stresses this in striking terms. This update, or covenantal modification, is not a contradiction.

Just as we see a transition from the old to the new covenant, numerous biblical doctrines that appear embryonically in the Hebrew Scriptures are well developed by the time of the Greek New Testament. The doctrine of Satan was partially worked out in the Old Testament but completed in the New. The person and role of the Messiah become clearer in the later books of the Old Testament and are revealed and explained in the New. God's presence progresses from the Garden of Eden to the tabernacle to the temple to the church to the heavenly city, which is symbolically depicted in Revelation. These are examples of progressive revelation.

Consider this analogy. My first-grade teacher never told us about

long division; the concept is beyond most six-year-olds. And my algebra teacher did not explain trigonometry. Was this deception? Of course not. Each stage progressively builds on the previous level. I eventually took three years of calculus, but even then I realized that my professors knew more than they told. A good teacher does not get too far ahead of the students (Mark 4:33). In the same way, God revealed his will in the pages of Scripture gradually.

Are we to read the Bible literally or figuratively?

The answer is yes. Read literally when dealing with straightforward language, figuratively otherwise. Is it really “raining cats and dogs” when heavy precipitation falls to the earth? Of course not; we understand what figures of speech really mean. In the same vein, are we to literally believe in rivers clapping their hands, stones crying out, or stars plummeting to the earth (Psalm 98:8; Luke 19:40; Revelation 6:13)? We need to distinguish the medium from the message. Sometimes the medium is colorful and poetic; at other times it is prosaic. And sometimes a biblical writer picks up a familiar theme or reshapes a preexisting piece of literature to tell the truth about God. A few examples are the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the flood narrative, and the destruction of the primeval monster Rahab, all of which circulated in one form or another in the ancient world (Luke 16:19-31; Genesis 6:9-9:17; Psalm 89:10).

Once we discern the type of literature we are reading—and usually this is not too difficult—we can take the passage at face value. That is the best way to fully appreciate the inspired word of God.

If we should read every passage in the Bible literally...

- Even Australian Aborigines bought grain from Joseph during the famine (Genesis 41:57).
- The crocodile (leviathan) breathes fire (Job 41:20).

- God has feathers (Psalm 91:4).
- Solomon's bride had birds in her head (Song of Solomon 4:1).
- Edom is still on fire, and the smoke is visible in the Middle East today (Isaiah 34:9-10).
- There will be more widows in Judah than humans on the planet (Jeremiah 15:8).
- We can make the Matterhorn jump into the Mediterranean (Mark 11:23).
- Anna *never* left the temple. Never (Luke 2:37).
- Paul died more than 12,000 times between his baptism and beheading (1 Corinthians 15:31).
- Dogs performed circumcisions in the first century (Philippians 3:2).
- Godless men are made of salt water (Jude 13).
- Jesus is made of wood. Or is it burning hydrogen? (Revelation 22:16).

What's the best way to learn biblical Hebrew and Greek?

The best advice I can give is to study the biblical languages in a university language class. To master any language—especially an ancient one—requires structure and accountability (including classes, assignments, quizzes, and exams). You can buy do-it-yourself books, and these may provide a helpful introduction as long as they are followed by college-level instruction. Otherwise, “half-learning” is the best you will do—which is worse than knowing nothing. Alexander Pope said, “A little learning is a dang'rous thing / Drink deep, or touch not the Pierian spring.”

Is today's Bible complete?

The subject of canonization (how the Bible came together) is probably the most complex subject in all of Christian history. Here is a brief introduction.

- Jesus himself affirmed the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27,44).
- The old covenant anticipates the new, particularly in such books as Isaiah (59:19-21), Jeremiah (31:31-34), and Ezekiel (36:24-27).
- The inspiration of the New Testament is also guaranteed by its apostolic connection to Jesus Christ (John 14:26; 16:12-13; Galatians 1:11-12; 2 Peter 1:12-18). Jesus explained that the Spirit would enable his followers to relay the gospel message and its implications.
- The New Testament expresses confident assurance that the Old Testament is inspired (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:14-17) and that it is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17-20; Acts 1:16; 3:18).
- Jews and Christians produced far more writings than the few that were considered canonically inspired. But the Jewish works were penned later than the close of the Old Testament canon, and the Christian ones came generations after the apostolic period.

The message of the Bible is presented multiple times and in various ways. Even if a few books of the Bible were removed or further words of the prophets or apostles were discovered, no substantive revision to the faith would likely be necessary.

Fear that something might be missing is similar to a fear that the *Mona Lisa* would be forever lost if a couple of brush strokes were undone or an extra one added. This would likely make little difference, if any. Everyone knows the original was not bearded or horned. And so, through the ages she smiles at her admirers.

Do any Bible passages tell us to read the Bible every day?

Daily study is a healthy spiritual discipline, but we must not legislate when the Lord has not spoken.

One passage intimates the blessing of daily study (Proverbs 8:34), and another mandates it for the king (Deuteronomy 17:18-20), though not for every Israelite. And God commanded Joshua to meditate on the law day and night (Joshua 1:8). We also have the wholesome example of the Bereans (Acts 17:11), who were examining the Scriptures every day to see if Paul's message was true. But no Scripture explicitly requires daily Bible study. Of course, we are to delight in and meditate on the word of God (Psalm 119).

In our day, when Bibles are relatively inexpensive, why wouldn't anyone want to read daily? It is such a privilege. I know of no better way to study and appreciate the Scriptures. The lack of zeal for the Scriptures prevalent among so many wearing the name of Christ is truly shocking. We need to be sobered by the biblical illiteracy of our generation—and I refer not only to those outside the community of Christ. Verses like Hosea 4:6, Hosea 8:12, Jeremiah 8:7, and Jeremiah 15:16 challenge us to the quick. Knowing the word of the Lord is essential to knowing the Lord himself (1 Samuel 3:7).

Although the Bible does not require daily study, it is a life-giving habit, a good one to commit to for the rest of your life.