

# A Book Like No Other

By Dr. Ward Patterson

For 65 hours last October, students at Central Michigan University (Mount Pleasant, Michigan) read the Bible aloud at a crossing in the heart of the university campus. Standing under a tent and reading into a microphone in 30-minute shifts, they read from Genesis to Revelation.

Erica Wothen, a senior student and member of His House Christian Fellowship, led more than 200 students in the event. Erica said, "We came together to read the Word. We didn't worry about what we would say or do. We just read and watched God move."

God's Word accomplishes God's purposes. "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10, 11).



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## A Message that Circles the World

The Bible has been translated into more than 400 languages. Portions of it have been translated into nearly 2,500 languages. In many cases, Bible translators not only translate the Scriptures, but they also develop written languages for tribal groups that have not had them before.

Over 100 million Bibles are sold each year. In the year 2000, the United Bible Society distributed 633 million portions of Scripture throughout the world. In 2001, Gideons International distributed more than 56 million complete copies of the Bible worldwide. That is 106 copies every minute.

Since the invention of the printing press, approximately 12 billion Bibles and New Testaments have been published and distributed. To get some feeling for the enormity of that figure, their publication would take nearly nine million tons of paper. This would fill approximately 495,240 railroad cars or a train 4,716 miles long. The paper would require the cutting of 120.6 million trees, the tree production of 241,200 acres. The Bibles and New Testaments would require approximately 30 million gallons of ink, enough to fill 9,372 truck trailers, a truck convoy that would be nearly 600 miles long.

James Macdonald wrote, "More books have been written about the Bible than any other subject, and more authors quote the Bible than any other source."

## Timely and Timeless

Isaiah wrote, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8). Though the Bible is an ancient book, it remains relevant to the issues and problems we face today. It transcends the times and cultures in which it was written.

Fundamentally, the Bible is God's autobiography. The Bible tells us who God is, what he has done, and what he likes and dislikes. It tells us who we are and what we can be. It tells us of past things and provides for our understanding of the present. Further, it gives us insight into what is yet to be. A.W. Tozer expressed it well when he wrote, "The Holy Scriptures tell us what we could never learn any other way: they tell us what we are, who we are, how we got here, why we are here, and what we are required to do while we remain here."

I find it hard to improve on the words of an anonymous writer who observed,

The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are unchangeable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is a traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here Paradise is restored, Heaven is opened, and the gates of Hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened in the judgment, and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who tamper with its holy contents.

### Many Do Not Believe

As impressive as the Bible's circulation and influence are, many still question its authority, inspiration, credibility, and relevance. About one in five of our neighbors never read the Bible. Many would say they believe the Bible is out of date, that it is filled with errors, and it is neither reliable history nor relevant morality. Yet, there are many reasons to believe the Bible is God's Word.

### Special Claims

Paul wrote to Timothy, "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).

Over 3,000 passages in the Bible present it as the Word of God. Scripture is portrayed as the work of both God and human writers. God, through his Holy Spirit, directed the writing, but he did it with human writers who revealed themselves as well as God in their writing. Peter wrote, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20, 21).

The Word of God has the reproductive power of seed (1 Peter 1:23, Luke 8:11), the cleansing power

of water (Ephesians 5:26), the nourishing power of food and drink (Jeremiah 15:16, Hebrews 5:12-14, 1 Peter 2:2), the revealing power of mirrors (James 1:23-25), the consuming and refining power of fire (Jeremiah 5:14, 23:29), the illuminating power of light (Psalm 119:105, 130), the cutting power of swords (Hebrews 4:12, Ephesians 6:17), and the irresistible power of hammers (Jeremiah 23:29).

Jesus declared, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). He quoted from Scripture in his teaching. He saw his work as the fulfillment of the inspired Scriptures. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17, 18).

### Fulfilled Prophecies

The Bible is filled with prophecies that have come true. For example, it is said that in the Old Testament there are 61 major prophecies concerning



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Jesus Christ. They were written long before he came into this world, but they came true. The prophet Micah predicted he would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Isaiah predicted he would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).

### Archaeology's Confirmation

An inscription at Caesarea bears the name of Pontius Pilate who figures so prominently in the crucifixion of Jesus. Recently, an ossuary, a limestone burial box, was found with an interesting Aramaic inscription that may date to the first century. The inscription identified the body that was placed in it as that of "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Was this the James who was an active leader in the church in Jerusalem? We cannot know for sure, but there seems to be that possibility.

### Wonderfully Preserved

The Jewish scribes were meticulous in their copying of the Old Testament Scriptures. They counted the number of letters in each line of the text and guarded it against error.

Then too, we have more than 5,300 ancient manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. There are also more than 10,000 ancient Latin manuscripts and 9,300 copies of early versions or translations. Thus we have nearly 25,000 early sources establishing our text for the New Testament. Then too, the New Testament was completed about A.D. 100 and our earliest New Testament manuscripts date from A.D. 125.

### Objectivity and Brevity

Bible heroes are portrayed with both strengths and weaknesses. Moses was reluctant to lead the Israelites. Jacob was a deceiver. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged the death of her husband. John the Baptist, in prison, questioned whether Jesus was truly the Messiah.

The restraint of the writers of the Bible is often striking as well. Matthew, for instance, records the crucifixion of Jesus at Calvary in 23 brief verses. His account is factual and objective. He does not include his feelings about the event.

Such objectivity and brevity demonstrate the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit in the creation of the historical accounts.

### Changing Lives

The truths of the Bible are both simple and profound. There are truths that a child can

understand and respond to. There are also truths that a lifetime of study and experience will not exhaust. Sir Walter Scott wrote, "The most learned, acute, and diligent student cannot, in the longest life, obtain an entire knowledge of the Bible. The more deeply he works the mine, the richer he finds the ore."



Every Sunday, people assemble for worship whose lives have been transformed by the Word of God. They are living proof of the truth proclaimed by Paul to the Romans that "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). They have learned the Bible is addressed to them. They have heeded its warnings and accepted its promises. They have built their lives on its teaching. Praise God for his Word! ■

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