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July 27, 2001

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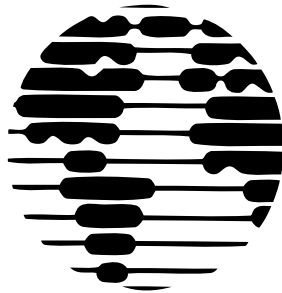
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Holy Bible

Easy-to-Read Version



Translated from the original languages



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Fort Worth, Texas

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Hard Cover ISBN: 1-885427-28-X
Leather ISBN: 1-885427-29-8
Soft Cover ISBN: 1-885427-43-3

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Books of the Old Testament

Book	Abbreviation	Page	Book	Abbreviation	Page
Genesis	<i>Gen.</i>	1	Ecclesiastes	<i>Ecc.</i>	755
Exodus	<i>Ex.</i>	60	Song of Solomon	<i>S. of S.</i>	766
Leviticus	<i>Lev.</i>	113	Isaiah	<i>Isa.</i>	774
Numbers	<i>Num.</i>	152	Jeremiah	<i>Jer.</i>	853
Deuteronomy	<i>Deut.</i>	203	Lamentations	<i>Lam.</i>	942
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Judges	<i>Judges</i>	276	Daniel	<i>Dan.</i>	1015
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1 Samuel	<i>1 Sam.</i>	314	Joel	<i>Joel</i>	1047
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Nehemiah	<i>Neh.</i>	562	Zephaniah	<i>Zeph.</i>	1084
Esther	<i>Esther</i>	581	Haggai	<i>Hag.</i>	1088
Job	<i>Job</i>	591	Zechariah	<i>Zech.</i>	1091
Psalms	<i>Ps.</i>	630	Malachi	<i>Mal.</i>	1102
Proverbs	<i>Prov.</i>	728			

Books of the New Testament

Book	Abbreviation	Page	Book	Abbreviation	Page
Matthew	<i>Mt.</i>	1109	1 Timothy	<i>1 Tim.</i>	1389
Mark	<i>Mk.</i>	1156	2 Timothy	<i>2 Tim.</i>	1395
Luke	<i>Lk.</i>	1185	Titus	<i>Titus</i>	1399
John	<i>Jn.</i>	1232	Philemon	<i>Phm.</i>	1402
Acts	<i>Acts</i>	1265	Hebrews	<i>Heb.</i>	1403
Romans	<i>Rom.</i>	1311	James	<i>Jas.</i>	1419
1 Corinthians	<i>1 Cor.</i>	1330	1 Peter	<i>1 Pet.</i>	1424
2 Corinthians	<i>2 Cor.</i>	1347	2 Peter	<i>2 Pet.</i>	1430
Galatians	<i>Gal.</i>	1358	1 John	<i>1 Jn.</i>	1434
Ephesians	<i>Eph.</i>	1365	2 John	<i>2 Jn.</i>	1439
Philippians	<i>Php.</i>	1372	3 John	<i>3 Jn.</i>	1440
Colossians	<i>Col.</i>	1377	Jude	<i>Jude</i>	1441
1 Thessalonians	<i>1 Th.</i>	1382	Revelation	<i>Rev.</i>	1443
2 Thessalonians	<i>2 Th.</i>	1386			

Preface

This version of the Bible has been prepared to meet the special needs of the deaf. Whether it is published as the *English Version for the Deaf* or the *Easy-to-Read Version*, the text is the same. People who can hear are not usually aware of the particular problems that the deaf face in reading standard English. Hearing persons learn English largely through oral conversation. The deaf do not have this advantage, so their experience with the language is severely limited. It is this limited experience with the spoken language that causes most of the problems the deaf face in learning to read. But the deaf are not the only ones with limited language experience. Children, people who learn English as a foreign language, and many others face similar difficulties in reading. This specialized English version is designed to help such people overcome or avoid the most common obstacles to reading with understanding.

One of the basic ideas that guided the work on this version of the Scriptures was that good translation is good communication. The main concern of the translators was always to communicate to the reader the message of the Biblical writers as effectively and as naturally as the original writings did to people in that time. Faithful translation is not just matching words in a dictionary. It is a process of expressing the original message in a form that will not only have the same meaning, but will sound as relevant, attract the same interest, and have the same impact today as it did thousands of years ago.

Effective communication, then, was very important to the translators of this text. This desire to communicate did not make accuracy any less important, but “accuracy” was understood to be the faithful representation of ideas, not the exact correspondence of formal linguistic features.

The writers of Scripture, especially those who produced the New Testament writings, showed by the language style they used that they were interested in good communication. The translators of this English version considered this an important example to follow. So they worked to convey to their special audience the meaning of the Biblical text in a form that would be simple and natural. They used language that, instead of working as a barrier to understanding, would provide a key to unlock the truths of the Scriptures to a large segment of the English-speaking world.

Several special features are used in this translation to aid understanding. Brief explanations or synonyms sometimes follow difficult or ambiguous words in the text. These explanatory words are italicized within parentheses. Words or phrases that need fuller explanation are followed by an asterisk (*) and explained in footnotes at the bottom of the page. In addition, Scripture quotations are identified and variant readings are frequently given in the footnotes. Words or statements that are implied by the context are often supplied in the text to make the meaning clear. Such explanatory words or phrases are usually marked by half-brackets _ _.

In the gospels, the first four books of the New Testament, the section headings are sometimes followed by cross references. These identify where the same material is found in one or more of the other gospels.

Introduction

The word Bible comes from a Greek word meaning “books.” The Bible is actually two collections of books, often referred to as the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament.” The word translated “testament” was used to mean a “covenant” or “agreement.” It refers to God’s promise to bless his people. The Old Testament is the collection of writings that relate to the agreement God made with the Jewish people (Israel) in the time of Moses. The New Testament is the collection of writings that relate to the agreement God made with all people who believe in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament writings give an account of God’s great acts in dealing with the Jewish people and reveal God’s plan for using those people to bring his blessings to the whole world. Those writings look forward to the coming of a Savior (or “Messiah”) that God would send to accomplish his plan. The New Testament writings are a sequel to the Old Testament story. They describe the coming of that Savior (Jesus Christ) and the meaning of his coming for all people. The Old Testament is important for understanding the New Testament, since it provides the necessary background. And the New Testament completes the story of salvation that began in the Old Testament.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament writings are a collection of thirty-nine different books produced by many different authors. They were written mainly in Hebrew, the language of ancient Israel. There are a few sections in Aramaic, the official language of the Babylonian empire. Portions of the Old Testament were written over 3,500 years ago, and more than 1,000 years passed between the writing of the first book and the last. In this collection there are books of law, history, prose, songs, poetry, and wise teachings.

The Old Testament is often divided into three main sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings. The Law contains five books called “The Five Books of Moses.” The first book is Genesis. It tells about the beginning of the world as we know it, the first man and woman, and their first sin against God. It tells about the Great Flood and the family God saved through that flood, and it tells about the beginnings of the nation of Israel, the people God chose to use for a special purpose.

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM

God made an agreement with Abraham, a great man of faith. In that agreement God promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation and to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan. Abraham was circumcised to show that he accepted the agreement, and circumcision became the proof of the agreement between God and his people. Abraham did not know how God would do the things he had promised, but Abraham trusted God. This pleased God very much.

God told Abraham to leave his home among the Hebrews of Mesopotamia and led him to the promised land, Canaan (also called Palestine). In his old age Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob (also called Israel) had twelve sons and a daughter. This family became the nation of Israel, but it never forgot its tribal origin. It continued to refer to itself as the twelve tribes (or “family groups”) of Israel—descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. The three main ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel)—are known as the “fathers” or “patriarchs” of Israel.

Abraham was also a “father” of another kind. Many times in ancient Israel, God called certain people to speak for him. These special people, or prophets, were God’s representatives to the rest of his people. Through the prophets God gave the people of Israel promises, warnings, laws, teachings, lessons drawn from past experiences, and lessons based on future events. Abraham “the Hebrew” is the first prophet mentioned in the Scriptures.

ISRAEL FREED FROM SLAVERY

The family of Jacob (Israel) grew to include about 70 of his direct descendants. One of his sons, Joseph, became a high official in Egypt. Times were hard, so Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, where food was plentiful and life was easier. This tribe of Hebrews grew to a small nation, and the Pharaoh (the king of Egypt) made slaves of these people. The book of Exodus tells about how finally, after 400 years, God used the prophet Moses to free the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and take them back to Palestine. The price for freedom was high; but it was the Egyptians who had to pay. The Pharaoh and all the families of Egypt lost their firstborn sons before the Pharaoh finally agreed to let the people go free. The firstborn had to die so that the people could be freed—and the people of Israel later remembered this in many ways in their worship and sacrifices.

The people of Israel were ready for their trip to freedom. They had dressed for the escape from Egypt. Each family killed and roasted a lamb. They put the blood from the lamb on their doorposts as a special sign to God. They hurriedly baked bread without yeast and ate their meal. That night the Angel of the Lord went through the land. If the blood of the lamb was not on the doorposts, the firstborn of that family died. The people of Israel were freed. But as the slaves were about to leave Egypt, the Pharaoh changed his

mind. He sent his army to catch the Israelite slaves and bring them back, but God saved his people. God split the Red Sea, led his people through to freedom on the other side, and destroyed the pursuing army of Egypt. Then, somewhere on the Arabian peninsula, at a mountain in the Sinai desert, God made a special agreement with those people.

THE LAW OF MOSES

God's rescue of the people of Israel and his agreement with them at Sinai set this nation apart from all others. This agreement contained promises and laws for the people of Israel. A part of this agreement, known as the Ten Commandments, was written by God on two stone tablets and given to the people. These commands contain the basic principles for the kind of life God expected the people of Israel to live. They cover an Israelite's duty to his God, his family, and the other people in his life.

The Ten Commandments and the rest of the rules and teachings given at Mount Sinai became known as "the Law of Moses" or simply "the Law." Many times these terms are used to refer to the first five books of the Scriptures and often to the entire Old Testament.

Besides the Ten Commandments and other rules of conduct, the Law of Moses contains rules about priests, sacrifices, worship, and holy days. These rules are found in the book of Leviticus. According to the Law of Moses, all priests and their helpers came from the tribe of Levi. These helpers were called "Levites." The most important priest was called the High Priest.

The Law includes instructions for building the Holy Tent ("tabernacle"), or Meeting Tent, the place the people of Israel went to worship God. It also has instructions for making all the things to be used in their worship. This prepared the Israelites for the building of the temple, the holy building in Jerusalem on Mount Zion, where the people would later go to worship God. The rules about sacrifices and worship forced the people to see that they sinned against each other and against God. But they also gave the people a way to be forgiven and reunited with one another and with God. These sacrifices prepared the way for a better understanding of the sacrifice God was preparing to give for all the people of the world.

The Law contained instructions for celebrating a number of holy days or festivals. Each festival had its own special meaning. Some festivals were happy occasions to celebrate special times of the year, such as the harvest festivals of First Fruits, Shabuoth (Pentecost or the Festival of Weeks), and Succoth (the Festival of Shelters).

Some festivals were for remembering the wonderful things God had done for his people. Passover was such a festival. Each family relived the escape from Egypt. The people sang songs of praise to God. A lamb was slaughtered and

the meal prepared. Each cup of wine and morsel of food reminded the people of the things God had done to save them from a life of pain and sadness.

Other festivals were very serious. Every year, on the Day of Atonement, the people had to remember the many bad things they had done to others and to God. This was a day of sadness, and the people did not eat. But on that day the High Priest offered special sacrifices to cover over, or atone for, their sins.

The agreement between God and Israel was very important to the writers of the Old Testament. Almost all of the books of the Prophets and Holy Writings are based on the fact that the nation of Israel, and every citizen of Israel, had made a very special agreement with their God. They called it the "Agreement of the Lord" or simply "the Agreement." Their books of history interpret events in light of the Agreement: If the individual or nation was faithful to God and the Agreement, then God rewarded them. If the people abandoned the Agreement, then God punished them. God sent his prophets to remind the people of their agreement with God. The poets of Israel sang of the wonderful things God did for his obedient people, and they mourned over the pain and punishments that came to those who disobeyed God. These writers based their concepts of right and wrong on the teaching of the Agreement. And when innocent people suffered, the poets struggled to understand why.

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

The story of ancient Israel is the story of the people abandoning God, God rescuing the people, the people turning back to God and eventually abandoning God again. This cycle began immediately after the people accepted God's Agreement, and it was repeated again and again. At Mount Sinai the people of Israel agreed to follow God, and then they rebelled and were forced to wander 40 years in the desert. Finally, Moses' helper, Joshua, led the people into the promised land. There was an initial conquest and a partial settling of the land of Israel. For the first few centuries after this settlement, the people were governed by local leaders called judges.

Eventually, the people wanted a king. The first king was Saul. Saul did not obey God, so God chose a shepherd boy named David to be the new king. The prophet Samuel came and poured oil on his head, anointing him king of Israel. God promised David that the future kings of Israel would be his descendants from the tribe of Judah. David conquered the city of Jerusalem and made it his capital and the future site of the temple. He organized the priests, prophets, song writers, musicians, and singers for the temple worship. David even wrote many of the songs (or psalms) himself, but God did not let him build the temple.

When David was old and about to die, he made his son Solomon king of Israel. David warned his son to always follow God and obey the Agreement. As king, Solomon built the temple and expanded Israel's

borders. At this time Israel was at the height of its glory. Solomon became famous. Israel became strong.

JUDAH AND ISRAEL—THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

At Solomon's death there was civil strife, and the nation was divided. The northern ten tribes called themselves Israel. The southern tribes called themselves Judah. (The modern term "Jew" comes from this name.) Judah remained loyal to the Agreement, and David's dynasty (family of kings) continued ruling in Jerusalem until Judah was finally conquered and its people led away into exile by the Babylonians.

In the northern kingdom (Israel) several dynasties came and went, because the people did not follow the Agreement. The kings of Israel had several capital cities at various times, the last of which was Samaria. In order to strengthen their hold on the people, the kings of Israel changed the way to worship God. They chose new priests and they built two new temples: one at Dan (on the northern border of Israel) and the other at Bethel (along Israel's border with Judah). There were many wars between Israel and Judah.

During this time of civil war and troubles, God sent many prophets to Judah and Israel. Some of the prophets were priests; others were farmers. Some were advisors to kings; others lived a much simpler life. Some of the prophets wrote their teachings or prophecies; many others did not. But all the prophets came preaching of justice, fairness, and the need to depend on God for help.

Many prophets warned that the people would be defeated and scattered if they did not turn back to God. Some of these prophets saw visions of future glories as well as future punishments. Many of them looked forward to the time when a new king would come to rule the kingdom. Some saw this king as a descendant of David who would lead the people of God into a new Golden Age. Some spoke of this king as ruling forever over an eternal kingdom. Others saw him as a servant who would suffer many things in order to bring his people back to God. But all of them saw him as the Messiah, the one anointed (chosen) by God to bring in the new age.

THE DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

The people of Israel did not listen to God's warnings, so in 722/721 B.C. Samaria fell to the invading Assyrians. The people of Israel were taken from their homes and scattered throughout the Assyrian empire, lost forever to their brothers and sisters in Judah. The Assyrians then brought in foreigners to re-settle the land of Israel. These people were taught about the religion of Judah and Israel, and many of them tried to follow the Agreement. These people came to be known as the Samaritans. The Assyrians tried to invade Judah. Many cities fell to the invaders, but God saved Jerusalem. The defeated king of Assyria returned to his homeland, and there he was assassinated by two of his sons. So Judah was saved.

For a short time the people of Judah changed. They began to obey God for a short time, but they too were finally defeated and scattered. The nation of Babylon rose to power and invaded Judah. At first they took only a few important people away as captives. But a few years later, in 587/586 B.C., they returned to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. Some of the people escaped to Egypt, but most of them were taken as slaves to Babylon. Again God sent prophets to the people, and they began to listen. It seems that the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon brought about a real change in the people. The prophets spoke more and more about the new king and his kingdom. One of the prophets, Jeremiah, even spoke of a New Agreement. This New Agreement would not be written on tablets of stone, but would be in the hearts of God's people.

THE JEWS RETURN TO PALESTINE

Meanwhile, Cyrus came to power over the Medo-Persian empire and conquered Babylon. Cyrus allowed people to return to their homelands. So after 70 years of exile, many of the people of Judah went back home. The people tried to rebuild their nation, but Judah remained small and weak. The people built the temple again, although it was not as beautiful as the one Solomon had built. Many of the people truly turned to God and began studying the Law, the writings of the prophets, and the other holy writings. Many men became scribes (special scholars), who made copies of the Scriptures. Eventually, these men organized schools for studying the Scriptures. The people began meeting together on the Sabbath (Saturday) to study, pray, and worship God together. In their synagogues (meetings) they studied the Scriptures, and many people began looking for the Messiah to come.

In the West, Alexander the Great gained control of Greece and soon conquered the world. He spread the Greek language and the customs and culture of Greece to many parts of the world. When he died, his kingdom was divided, and soon another empire grew and gained control of a large part of the known world, including Palestine, where the people of Judah lived.

The new rulers, the Romans, were often cruel and harsh, and the Jews were proud and defiant. In these troubled times there were many Jews who were looking for the Messiah to come in their own lifetime. The Jews wanted to be ruled only by God and the Messiah that God promised to send them. They did not understand that God planned to save the world through the Messiah. They thought that God's plan was to save the Jews from the world! Some Jews were content to wait for God to send his Messiah. But others decided to "help" God establish his new kingdom. These Jews were called "Zealots." The Zealots tried to fight against the Romans and often killed other Jews that cooperated with the Romans.

THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS GROUPS

By the first century B.C., the Law of Moses had become extremely important to the Jews. The people had studied and argued over the Law. The people understood the Law in different ways, but many Jews were ready to die for that Law. There were three major religious groups among the Jews, and there were scribes (lawyers or scholars) in each group.

The Sadducees

One of the groups was called the Sadducees. This name probably comes from the name Zadok, the High Priest in King David's time. Many of the priests and the people in authority were Sadducees. These men accepted only the Law (the five books of Moses) as their authority in religious matters. The Law taught many things about the priests and sacrifices, but it did not teach about life after death. So the Sadducees did not believe in people being raised from death.

The Pharisees

Another group was called the Pharisees. This name comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to interpret (explain)" or "to separate." These men tried to teach or interpret the Law of Moses to the common people. The Pharisees believed that there was an oral tradition going back to Moses' time. They believed that people of each generation could interpret the Law in a way that would allow it to meet the needs of that generation. This meant that the Pharisees could accept not only the Law of Moses as their authority, but also the Prophets, the Holy Writings, and even their own traditions. These men tried very hard to follow the Law and their traditions. So they were very careful about what they ate and what they touched. They were careful about washing their hands and bathing. They also believed that people would be raised from death, because they understood many of the prophets to say that would happen.

The Essenes

The third major group was the Essenes. Many of the priests in Jerusalem did not live the way God wanted them to. Also, the Romans had appointed many of the High Priests, and some of these men were not qualified according to the Law of Moses. Because of this, the Essenes did not think the worship and sacrifices were being done properly in Jerusalem. So the Essenes moved out into the Judean desert to live. They formed their own community, where only other Essenes could come and live. The Essenes fasted and prayed and waited for God to send the Messiah and purify the temple and the priesthood. Many scholars believe that the Essenes were connected in some way with the Qumran Community and the many ancient writings (including the "Dead Sea Scrolls") found at Qumran and other places in that area of the Judean desert.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

God had begun his plan. He had chosen a special nation. He had made an Agreement with those people that would prepare them to understand his justice and his goodness. Through prophets and poets he had revealed his plan to bless the world by establishing a perfect spiritual “kingdom” based on a new and better Agreement. This plan would begin with the coming of the promised Messiah. The prophets had spoken of his coming in great detail. They had told where the Messiah would be born, the type of person he would be, and the work he would have to do. It was now time for the Messiah to come and begin the New Agreement.

The writings of the New Testament describe how God’s New Agreement was revealed and put into effect by Jesus, who was the Christ (meaning “the Anointed One,” the Messiah). They teach that this New Agreement was to be for all people. And they tell how people in the first century responded to God’s gracious offer of love and became a part of the New Agreement. These writings give instructions to God’s people about how to live in this world. They also describe the blessings that God promises his people for a full and meaningful life here and for life with him after death.

The New Testament writings include twenty-seven different “books” by at least eight different writers. All of them wrote in Greek, which was widely spoken in the first-century world. More than half of the total writing was done by four “apostles,” men chosen by Jesus to be his special representatives or helpers. Three of these, Matthew, John, and Peter, were among the twelve closest followers of Jesus during his life on earth. The other writer, Paul, was chosen as an apostle later by Jesus through a miraculous appearance.

The first four books, called “Gospels,” are separate accounts of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Generally, these books emphasize Jesus’ teaching, the purpose of his appearance on earth, and the crucial significance of his death, rather than just the historical facts of his life. This is especially true of the fourth book, the Gospel of John. The first three Gospels are very similar in content. In fact, much of the material in one is found in one or both of the others. Each writer, however, is writing to a different audience and seems to have a slightly different goal in view.

The four Gospels are followed by Acts, a history of the events following the death of Jesus. It describes how God’s offer of love to all people was announced throughout the world by Jesus’ followers. It tells how the proclaiming of this “gospel” or “Good News” resulted in the widespread acceptance of Christian faith throughout Palestine and the Roman world. The book of Acts was written by a physician named Luke, an eyewitness of much that he recorded. Luke was also the author of the third Gospel. His two books make a logical unit, Acts being the natural sequel to his account of the life of Jesus.

Following Acts, there is a collection of letters written to individuals or groups of Christians. These letters were sent from Christian leaders such as Paul and Peter, two of Jesus' apostles. These letters were written to help the people of that time deal with problems they were facing. They serve to inform, correct, teach, and encourage not only those people but all Christians in regard to their faith, their life together, and their life in the world.

The final book of the New Testament, Revelation, is different from all the other books, although its purpose is similar to that of other letters to churches. It addresses groups of Christians in seven different cities of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). But it continues with a picture of spiritual warfare that is of interest to all Christians. It uses highly figurative language and tells of visions seen by the author, the apostle John. Many of the figures and images are from the Old Testament and can best be understood by comparing them to the Old Testament writings. This last book assures Christians of ultimate victory over the forces of evil through the power of God and Jesus Christ, their leader and helper.

THE BIBLE AND THE MODERN READER

Today's reader of the Bible should keep in mind that these books were written thousands of years ago for people who lived in a culture very different from ours today. Generally, the writings focus on principles that are universally true, even though many of the historical accounts, illustrations used and references made can only be understood with some knowledge of the time and culture in which the writers lived. For example, Jesus told a story about a man sowing grain in a field that had different types of soil conditions. Those exact conditions may be unfamiliar to a person today, but the lesson Jesus draws from the example fits people in any time or place.

The modern reader may find the world of the Bible somewhat strange. The customs, the attitudes, and the way people talk may be quite unfamiliar. It is only reasonable to evaluate these things by the standards of that time and place, not by modern standards. It is also important to note that the Bible was not written as a book of science. It was written mainly to describe historical events and present the significance of those events for all people. Its teachings involve universal truths that are beyond the realm of science. It remains relevant even in this modern age, because it deals with people's basic spiritual needs, which never change.

Any person who reads the Bible objectively can expect to gain many benefits. They will acquire knowledge about the history and culture of the ancient world. They will learn about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and what it means to be his follower. They will gain basic spiritual insights and learn practical lessons for living a dynamic and joy-filled life. They will find answers to life's most difficult questions. There are, therefore, many good reasons for reading this book, and people who read it with an open and inquisitive mind will likely discover God's purpose for their life.