

Chapter One

Knowing God's Word

I would like to begin this book with a prayer.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, awesome is Your majesty;
all glory to Your name. Guide us in the study of this book.
Awaken our minds to Your glory, open our hearts to Your love,
and help us to dedicate our wills to Your service. In the name
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a great famine in our world today. It sweeps through the nations like a hot desert wind. But the famine we face is not a famine of food or water. It is a famine of the knowledge of God. We do not face a famine of religions or of philosophies of life. People are starving for the greatness of God.

It has been said that the most important thing we can learn about in life is ourselves, and that until we know ourselves we know little of life. But I have discovered that our greatest need is not in learning about ourselves but in knowing who God is. We need to know what God is like, what He desires for us and what He requires of us. In the study of God there is something exceedingly improving to our minds, comforting to our hearts and challenging to our wills. Without an accurate knowledge of God our world is a strange, mad and painful place. And life is often a series of disappointing experiences. With an accurate knowledge of God, however, we find true life and we find it more abundantly.

But where can we go to learn about God? The answer is a simple one. God has revealed Himself in a book that we call the Bible or the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is the revealed Word of God that communicates His will to us. To put it even more simply; the Word¹ of God is the will of God. In the fourth chapter of the gospel or good news of Matthew we have the account of Jesus Christ being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Let's read what it says.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4 But He answered and said, "It is written, '*Man shall not live by bread*

¹ This author will capitalize "Word" when it refers to the Bible to distinguish it from man's word.

*alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”*²
(Matthew 4:1-4)

After forty days and nights of fasting Jesus Christ was hungry. In fact, I am sure that this is an understatement. He was probably ravenous! But instead of giving in to the temptation to turn the stones into bread to satisfy his gnawing hunger, Jesus said, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*” In the face of a temptation, to meet a genuine need, Jesus quoted Scripture from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy.³ And in doing this He lifts our vision from the purely material side of life to the more important spiritual perspective. You and I are to live, not merely exist, but live life to the full by taking heed to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God—that is the Bible.

Sadly though, too many times we have stuffed ourselves full of everything but the Word of God. We have fed on false religions, and the opinions and philosophies of men. We develop our ideals by what we read in magazines or by what we see on the internet or television. Perhaps we have even dabbled in low calorie Christianity⁴ but our deep hunger remains.

Those who study society tell us that we are living in an age of high anxieties. People are more disillusioned with what life is all about than perhaps at any time in world history. Our homes are filled with technologies and appliances. Our spare time is filled with great entertainments. But like rows of shiny new cars we are perfect in every way except that there is no gas in the tank. Life was different however for an Old Testament prophet named Jeremiah. Much like our own day, Jeremiah lived in a land filled with political and moral corruption. His country faced many dangers. But Jeremiah’s heart was filled with joy. How did this happen? Here is Jeremiah’s answer.

Your words were found, and I ate them,
And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;
For I am called by Your name,
O LORD God of hosts.
(Jeremiah 15:16)

Even when his life was under great stress Jeremiah’s heart was full of joy and rejoicing because it was filled with God’s Word. Jeremiah didn’t actually eat the scrolls upon which God’s Word was written. But he read the Scriptures filling his heart and mind with it and it changed his life for the better. God’s Word brings us comfort and strength and solid hope even in the

² All Scripture unless otherwise noted is from The New King James Version of the Bible (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN). Scriptures that are printed in italics indicate either a quotation from the Old Testament or that there is not a corresponding Hebrew or Greek word in the text. Therefore the translators of the NKJV have added a word or words indicating this by italic print. Often these italic additions are helpful. At other times they confuse the Bible’s original intent. This author will point that out when the information is needed.

³ Deuteronomy 8:3

⁴ This is the Christianity that denies the necessity of the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ and only emphasizes positive thinking and a watered down morality.

midst of our deepest trials. In the midst of his own terrible ordeal, the Old Testament hero of the faith, Job, declared concerning the holy Scriptures,

I have not departed from the commandment of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth
More than my necessary food.
(Job 32:12)

Food is essential for sustaining life. But Job knew that he needed more than physical food to overcome in life. He needed the revealed will of God that we find in the Bible.

The Word of God is the will of God and when we learn it, understand it and apply it in our lives we will be filled with joy and great hope. God said to Jeremiah,

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD,
thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.
(Jeremiah 29:11)

God has a plan for us—for you! And it is not a plan for evil. It is a plan to give you peace and a future filled with a good hope. And we learn about this plan in the Bible, the written Word of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, revealed what this future hope is when he began His ministry.

Now after John⁵ was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel⁶ of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:14, 15)

When Jesus Christ began His ministry he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God. One of the most important subjects associated with God’s plan of salvation is this future kingdom that will dominate our world. God never intended for our world to be filled with sin, sickness, heart-ache, sorrow, tragedy and death. In the beginning, when God first created our world it was a paradise. And the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, lived a life of joy and peace with God and then with one another. But then Adam sinned against God bringing sin, corruption and death to both humanity and our world.⁷

But God is going to cleanse and transform our world back to its original purity when He sets up His kingdom upon this world. This kingdom is what Jesus referred to when He taught us to pray saying,

⁵ John the Baptist

⁶ The word “gospel” is an old English word that means good news.

⁷ Genesis 1-3; Romans 5:12-19

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
10 Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
(Matthew 6:9, 10)

This kingdom will be established over the entire earth when Jesus Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords.⁸ The question before us now is this: how do we enter this coming kingdom? We are given the answer in the gospel of the apostle⁹ John.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”
3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
(John 3:1-3)

Nicodemus was a leader within the Jewish community of his day. And Jesus knew that the longing in his heart was for the hope of the coming kingdom of God. Therefore Jesus Christ immediately begins to speak about the kingdom and said that no one can enter the kingdom without being born again; in other words, without being saved from sin and its penalty which is death.¹⁰ Therefore Christ declared,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting
life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the
world, but that the world through Him might be saved.
(John 3:16, 17)

It is through faith in the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we gain the hope of everlasting life in the future coming kingdom of God. In the Old Testament book of Isaiah, there is a prophecy about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We tend to read this prophecy at Christmas time, when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. But the prophecy has very little to do with the birth of Christ. Instead it concerns His return to this earth to rule over it.

For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;

⁸ Revelation 19:16

⁹ An apostle is a sent one, a representative. The apostles are therefore men who represent Jesus Christ whom He sends out into the world to make known the good news.

¹⁰ The specifics of what it means to be born again and how it occurs will be explained in a later chapter.

And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,¹¹
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of *His* government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.
(Isaiah 9:6, 7)

Since the time of His death and resurrection for our salvation, Jesus sits exalted in heaven at God's right hand.¹² But there is a day coming when Jesus Christ will return to this earth and rule as king over all and our world will be full of peace¹³. Those who put their faith in Christ now for the forgiveness of their sins will enjoy everlasting life in this coming kingdom, as well as a foretaste of that future glory even now. Jesus said,

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.
I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.
(John 10:10)

So often in life our dreams are stolen, our hopes are killed and lives are destroyed. But when we come into salvation by faith in Christ we can have life and have it more abundantly.

¹¹ Jesus is not God. He is the Son of God divinely conceived in Mary's womb (Luke 1:26-38). Each of these titles foreshadows in exalted and royal terms the coming human Messiah. Isaiah 9:2-7 together with Isaiah 11:1-9 "describe ... the enthronement of the king of salvation and the equipment of the new shoot [or descendant] of David's line with the gifts of the Spirit of God. At his exaltation to sonship, his father confers upon him names that promise salvation ... The king is none other than *God's representative on earth*. With his coming, man's history of woe is at an end; he will bring salvation to the whole world" (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 637, emphasis mine). The name "Wonderful Counselor" is a term that "points to the Messiah as king ... the coming son of David will carry out a royal program that will cause all the world to marvel" (*The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1030. Zondervan Publishing House). The term "mighty God" is a kingly designation and is defined by the leading Hebrew Lexicon as a "mighty hero" or "divine hero, reflecting the divine majesty" (*Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Brown, Driver and Briggs, p.42, Oxford University Press). This mighty hero is "a warrior and defender of his people, *like God himself*" (*The Catholic Study Bible*, p. 888). The title "Everlasting Father" means one who is "ever devoted to his people" (*The Catholic Study Bible*, p. 888). According to some Septuagint texts (i.e., a 2nd or 3rd century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament) this title should be rendered "father of the age to come" (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1. p.326). The title "Prince of Peace" means that his reign will be characterized by peace and that "his rule will bring wholeness and well-being to individuals and to society" (*The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1030).

¹² Acts 2:32; Ephesians 1:20-23

¹³ Here are some predictions of this coming new age: Psalm 2; Daniel 7:13, 14; Luke 1:32, 33; Revelation 11:15; Isaiah 2:4; 32:17; 35:1-7; Micah 4:3; Ezekiel 36:33-35; Acts 3:20, 21; Romans 8:19-22; Revelation 21:1-4

We can live lives full of God's wisdom, power, love and joy. The apostle John wrote in his first letter,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.
(1 John 1:1-4)

John wrote his letter so that you and I could know that we have fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. When you are in fellowship with someone you share something fully with that person. When we have faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we share fully in his resurrected life and glory; we share fully in the love and goodness and mercy of God. Therefore our lives can be filled with joy!

The Bible was written so that we might know God; that we might understand His Word, His heart, His will. The Bible was written so that we might know God's plan of salvation centered in His Son, Jesus Christ. In the Bible God reveals Himself to us and gives us promises, principles and commandments that cover every area of life. The Bible is truth about life; truth that makes us free.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
(John 8:31, 32)

Everyone wants to be free. But there is only one way to be truly free and this is by knowing, believing and being obedient to the Word of God. The apostle Paul wrote to his young associate Timothy and declared,

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:14-17)

The Scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation. The Bible is essential to teach us sound doctrine; the right things to believe. It will reprove us where we are wrong and correct us back to the truth. The Scriptures will equip us for every good work. And we can be sure that the Scriptures are God's Word and will testify to us for "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

Take careful note of this phrase "given by inspiration of God." The original Greek word from which this phrase is translated is theopneustos. This Greek word literally means "God breathed." This is a figure of speech that puts the emphasis on the source of Scripture. All Scripture, the whole Bible, is "God breathed." In other words it comes from God. Do you remember what Jesus Christ said about how life is to be lived? He said, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*"

When we understand, believe and obey the Bible we know what life is truly all about. We understand why we need to be born again and saved from our sins. When we understand the Word of God we have a firm anchor for all of the storms of life. We can separate truth from error; we can have God's wisdom and power for all of life. We can have hope for the future. And we can live a truly blessed life.

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.
(Psalm 1:1-3)