

CHAPTER ONE

1 PROLOGUE

2 GETTING THINGS STRAIGHT

3 A UNIQUE BOOK

1 PROLOGUE

The year—circa 33 A.D. The sun burned midday hot. All was quiet. Even the birds refused to sing in the oppressive heat. Cleopas kicked a clod of dried mud from the dusty road, drew a large breath and blew out his cheeks in a weary sigh. Squinting into the haze, he could barely make out the next ridge. A few miles beyond lay Emmaus—home. Sunset would be on them before their arrival. Normally they would have left Jerusalem sooner—after all, seven miles is a decent walk—but the events of the morning had kept them hanging back, wishing for more concrete news. Emmaus wasn't much of a town, but today it seemed very attractive. Any place but Jerusalem, with its yelling rabble, its Roman cohorts, its governor—Pontius Pilate.

Cleopas' heavy thoughts were jerked back to the present as his irritated companion asked a question for the second time. The two of them had been discussing the day's events—the last few years' events—until it seemed no detail could be dissected more. Cleopas was tired, but more than that, he was confused by all that had transpired in Jerusalem. These days, it seemed, life held more questions than answers.

Trudging down the hill they rounded a bend. It was then they met the stranger.

Hours later, the same day, the same night, when the two of them stood hot and sweaty before their friends back in Jerusalem—for it was there they had rushed—they couldn't give a good answer as to how the stranger had joined their twosome. At first, Cleopas thought he had stepped out of the shadow of a big boulder, but that didn't jive with his friend's explanation. The bottom line was, they just weren't sure where he had come from. Lamely, Cleopas had said that the stranger had “kinda, well just sort of—appeared.” That had been met with some derisive statements about the heat and too much sun.

But of one thing they were sure. The stranger had taken that ancient collection of books, the Bible,...

...and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Luke 24:27

The stranger's explanation of the Holy Scriptures had made incredible sense. It was also accompanied with a rebuke.

*He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe **all that the prophets have spoken!**"*

Luke 24:25

Though Cleopas and his friend may have been slow to believe the prophets, once the stranger explained the prophet's message to them, all despondency and doubt had fled their minds. So thrilled were they by their new understanding that they had hurried all the way back to Jerusalem to tell their friends about the *Stranger*. Somehow, somewhere, they too needed to hear this message—the message they had heard on the road to Emmaus.

So just what did the *Stranger* say about the Bible—a book that has puzzled so many—that made so much sense?

That is what this book is all about. And to understand it clearly, we will do what the *Stranger* did—we will look at *ALL THAT THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN*.

2 GETTING THINGS STRAIGHT

When you stop and think about it, it's entirely reasonable, indeed, just plain logical to take a few hours out of your entire life to gain an understanding of the Word of God.

After all, the Scripture has some very profound things to say about life ... and about death.

For centuries, the Bible—the collection of ancient Scriptures—has been a best seller. It has been the most read, most translated, most printed book in history. Anyone who claims to be the least bit informed should understand its basic content. Unfortunately, the Scripture has fallen into disrepute, not because of what it says, but because some very prominent men and women, who claim to follow the Word of God, have made some of the worst choices in life.

Even the message of God's Book has been attacked at times, often by well-meaning people who have never taken the time to really understand what it says.

But the Scripture has not changed. And despite what the hypocrites or critics say, it does make good sense to know it for yourself.

A PUZZLE

In many ways, the Scripture is like a puzzle. By this, I do not mean that its message is hidden, but rather, to understand the Word of God accurately, the scriptural pieces must be put together in the right way. We can do this by applying basic principles of learning.

FOUNDATIONS

The first principle is one we use all the time. To learn any new concept, it helps to build from the foundation up—to *move from the known to the unknown*. You don't start children in kindergarten by teaching them algebra. Rather, you begin with basic numbers, and *move from the simple to the complex*. If you skip the fundamentals, even rudimentary algebra will be beyond your grasp.

It's the same way with the Scripture. If you neglect the foundations, your understanding of the Word of God will incorporate some unusual ideas, resulting in the message being confused—the puzzle will present the wrong image.

BUILDING A CLOTHESLINE

The second principle is especially critical when learning history or reading a story. Simply put, it's this—*start at the beginning and move sequentially through to the end*. In this book, we will cover key events, stringing them together in logical sequence—like hanging laundry on a clothesline. Since this overview is far from comprehensive, expect some gaps on the line. They can be filled in later, after you have the overall picture.

Though this clothesline cannot include every story, the events we do study will tie together in one continuous message. If you are a typical reader, by the time you have finished this book, the Scripture will make remarkable sense. Whether you believe it or not is entirely up to you. I sincerely hope you will, but that is your choice. My job is to help you understand it clearly.

MAJOR ON THE MAJORS

This last principle—*major on the majors*—should be applied to any learning situation where the content is unfamiliar to you. The idea is to learn the most important material first.

The Scripture covers an incredible array of topics, but not all are of equal importance. In this book, we will focus on one major theme—the most significant theme in the Word of God. Once you understand it, the Scripture will make profound, but simple sense.

3 A UNIQUE BOOK

There is no doubt about it; the Bible is a unique book. Actually, it's a collection of books, sixty-six in all. One author, in writing of the Scripture's uniqueness, put it this way:

Here is a book:

1. *written over a 1500 year span;*
2. *written over 40 generations;*
3. *written by more than 40 authors, from every walk of life...*
 - Moses, a political leader, trained in the universities of Egypt*
 - Peter, a fisherman*
 - Amos, a herdsman*
 - Joshua, a military general*
 - Nehemiah, a cupbearer*
 - Daniel, a prime minister*
 - Luke, a doctor*
 - Solomon, a king*
 - Matthew, a tax collector*
 - Paul, a rabbi*
4. *written in different places:*
 - Moses in the wilderness*
 - Jeremiah in a dungeon*
 - Daniel on a hillside and in a palace*
 - Paul inside a prison*
 - Luke while traveling*
 - John on the isle of Patmos*
 - others in the rigors of a military campaign*

5. *written at different times:*
 David in times of war
 Solomon in times of peace
6. *written during different moods:*
 some writing from the heights of joy and others from the
 depths of sorrow and despair
7. *written on three continents:*
 Asia, Africa, and Europe
8. *written in three languages:*
 Hebrew . . . , Aramaic . . . , and Greek . . .
9. *Finally, its subject matter includes hundreds of controversial*
 topics. Yet, the biblical authors spoke with harmony and
 continuity from Genesis to Revelation. There is one unfolding
 *story . . .*¹

This *one unfolding story* is what we want to look at—simply and without theological jargon. By far the most unique thing about the Scripture is that it claims to be God's own words.

GOD-BREATHED

We are told in its pages that . . .

*All Scripture is God-breathed . . .*²

2 Timothy 3:16

The whole concept of God *breathing out* Scripture is a study in itself. Just as when one exhales his breath, and that breath comes from his innermost being, so ultimately all Scripture is to be viewed as the very product of God himself. God and his words are inseparable, which is one reason the Scripture is referred to as *God's Word*.

PROPHETS

Highly simplified, it can be looked at this way. God told men what he wanted recorded about himself and those men wrote it down. Most of these men were called *prophets*.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the
prophets . . .

Hebrews 1:1

In ancient times, a prophet was a messenger who passed on God's words to the people. The message usually addressed aspects of daily living, but almost invariably, the prophets

also included things yet to come. This foretelling of the future had a practical aspect to it. It was a potent test to determine whether a prophet was genuine.

If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken.

Deuteronomy 18:21

A prophet's message was validated by the accurate fulfillment of his prophecies. He had to be 100% correct—there was no room for error.

But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.

Deuteronomy 18:20

God guided the prophets in such a way, that what they recorded was precisely what he wanted written. At the same time, God allowed the human writer to record *His Word—God's Word*—in the prophet's own unique style, but to do so without error. These men were not free to add their own private thoughts to the message; neither was it something they dreamed up on their own.

... 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...

2 Peter 1:20,21

God was not putting his stamp of approval on some literary effort of man. The phrase *carried along*³ is used elsewhere in the Word of God in reference to the transporting of a paralyzed man. Just as the paralyzed man could not walk by his own power, so the prophets did not write the Scripture at their own inclination.

EXTREME ACCURACY

The prophets wrote God's words on a scroll, usually an animal skin or paper made from plant fiber. The originals were called *autographs*.

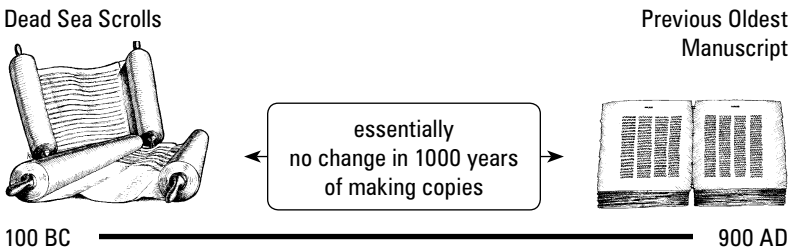
Since the autographs had a limited life span, copies were made of the scrolls. But such copies! And all by hand! The writers' awareness that what was being recorded was God's own *Word*

resulted in one of the most remarkable *photocopy* jobs ever done. In writing the Hebrew text ...

*They used every imaginable safeguard, no matter how cumbersome or laborious, to ensure the accurate transmission of the text. The number of letters in a book was counted and its middle letter was given. Similarly with the words, and again the middle word was noted.*⁴

This was done with both the copy and the original autograph to insure that they were exactly the same.

These scribes were so accurate in their transcription that when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, (written in 100 BC), and compared with manuscripts resulting from centuries of copying and recopying to a period of time 1000 years later, (900 AD), there were no significant differences in the text.⁵



Josephus, a Jewish historian from the first century A.D., summed it up for his people when he stated ... *how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews ... to esteem those books ... divine.*⁶

These men were absolutely convinced that to meddle with the text was to tamper with God. We have ample reason to be assured that what we have today is essentially the same as what the prophets wrote.

TRANSLATIONS

The autographs were originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. Of course, the copies were made using the same speech. Since many of us do not know these tongues, the Scripture has been translated into many other languages.

These translations work from an original text that finds its roots in the ancient past.

For example, translations of the Old Testament, (the Law, Writings and the Prophets) use manuscripts that we can still read today—manuscripts dating from 100 years before the birth of Christ. Jesus quoted from a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that was completed at least 150 years before he lived on the earth. That translation still exists and can be read today. The New Testament (which covers the life of the Messiah) uses over 2700 Greek manuscripts that date from the second century. Any one of these ancient sources can be used to check the accuracy of what we presently read. Once again, it can be safely said, that what the ancient prophets wrote is essentially the same as what we read today.

The prophets themselves testified that God would preserve his written Word in such a way that it would never change.

The grass withers, the flower fades, But the Word of our God stands forever.

Isaiah 40:8 NASB

Jesus, the Messiah, also said,

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law [or The Holy Scriptures] until all is accomplished.”

Matthew 5:18

God is great, and consistent with his character, has preserved his Word in a marvelous way.

GOD'S WORD

Whether you remember the details about translations is not that critical. The important thing to keep in mind is that the Scripture claims to be God's written Word—his message to mankind. We are told that through its pages we can become acquainted with God. Such a claim should cause even the most indifferent person to pause and consider what it has to say.

Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm . . .

Psalms 119:89 NKJV

NAVIGATION AIDS

For those unfamiliar with navigating their way through the Word of God, it may be helpful to know that most editions of the Scriptures are divided into sixty-six books, which are further sub-divided into chapters and verses.

The Scriptures written before the coming of the Messiah are called the *Old Testament*, with the remainder being called the *New Testament*.

Historically, the Old Testament portion was divided into three categories:

1. The Law of Moses: Depending on the person, this section is sometimes referred to as *The Torah*, *The Books of Moses*, *The Law*, *The Taurat* or *The Pentateuch*.
2. The Writings: Sometimes called the *Psalms*, the *Books of Poetry*, the *Psalms of David* or the *Zabur*.
3. The Prophets

The phrase, *the law and the prophets*, is a way of referring to the entire Old Testament, a part that comprises approximately two-thirds of the Scripture.

The remaining one-third is referred to as the *New Testament*. It includes the accounts of the life of Jesus, usually called the *Gospel* or the *Injil* depending on your background.

In many parts of the world, the Scripture is referred to as the *Bible*—a Latin word simply meaning *book*. The usage of the word *Bible* should not be identified with any particular belief group. In this book we will be using terms that are found in the Scripture themselves, such as *Word of God*, the *Word*, and of course the *Scripture*.