



*the bible*

Scott Petty

· Little Black Books ·  
*books that get to the point*

# *the bible*

On one hand, millions of people turn to the Bible for guidance of some kind; on the other, just as many dismiss it, mock it or ignore it. How can a book that's thousands of years old still be relevant today?

Scott Petty writes on what the Bible is and the place it should have in the lives of Christians today, and answers some common questions about the Bible:

- Hasn't science disproved the Bible?
- Doesn't the Bible contradict itself?
- Can I trust the Bible when I'm making decisions?

Like all the Little Black Books, this is a fun read and gets straight to the point.

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Scott Petty

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*Little Black Books: The Bible*

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Email: [info@matthiasmedia.com.au](mailto:info@matthiasmedia.com.au)

Internet: [www.matthiasmedia.com.au](http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au)

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Matthias Media (USA)

Email: [sales@matthiasmedia.com](mailto:sales@matthiasmedia.com)

Internet: [www.matthiasmedia.com](http://www.matthiasmedia.com)

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# *Introduction*

What would you do if you wanted to leave a message for someone who was going to live many years in the future from now? Would you send them a text message? Probably not.

What would you do if you needed someone across the other side of the planet to know an important piece of information? Would you hire one of those guys who write messages in the sky with their planes? Probably not.

What would you do if you had a timeless message that was the only cure for the oldest disease of mankind—a disease called death—and you wanted to pass it on to all peoples, in every generation and in every land? I'm guessing you wouldn't just write in to your local newspaper about it.

But you might want to put it into a book. After all, books are easily transportable, can last a long time if cared for, and can be readily copied, multiplied and distributed. God has committed his life-giving and guiding message of the gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the pages of a book: the Bible.

The Bible is the book of books, outselling every other book in history. They reckon that somewhere near five billion copies have been printed and distributed in the last 200 years (and they don't even know about the six Bibles I have in my house). That works out at about one Bible every one and a quarter seconds.

There is clearly something to this book of books. People have devoted their lives to translating it, printing it, smuggling it, studying it and writing about it. Many have even been killed protecting it. But for most of us, the Bible sits on our shelves next to that Britney CD we bought, both desperate to be used more. So if you want to know what is so incredible about this book of books, put this one down and start reading your Bible. Go ahead! But if you want to know more about what makes the Bible so special, feel free to read on.

## CHAPTER I

# *The Bible is the breath of God*

The first thing that most people want to know about a book is what it's about. When it comes to the Bible the first thing you need to know is not what it's about, but who wrote it—that is, who the author is and where the words in the Bible come from.

Some people dismiss the Bible as the uneducated ramblings of primitive and unscientific men and women. Perhaps the thinking is that anyone who grew up in a time before you could send a text message has nothing to contribute to sensible discussion. But this is a mistake. Sure it's true that real men and women, at least some of whom were well-educated, wrote the words down on the page.<sup>1</sup> Yet the Bible actually comes not from men and women but originally from God himself. It is one of his great acts of grace that God 'speaks' and in so doing reveals himself to us. Otherwise, we would be unable to know him with any certainty.

Just as God revealed himself to Adam by speaking to him in the



garden of Eden, just as he spoke to Abraham when he was looking at the night sky, and just as he spoke to Moses from a burning bush that didn't burn up, he speaks to us today through his Scriptures. The Bible may appear to be the words of men, but the truth is that something more significant happened when the men and women who penned the Bible wrote things down. 2 Peter 1:20-21 makes this pretty clear:

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.

The apostle Peter, a one-time coward (he denied even knowing Jesus when quizzed by a waitress) who turned into a hero of the Christian faith, says that when it comes to thinking about the Bible (here given the codename "prophecy of Scripture"), the most important thing is that it doesn't come from the prophet (the human writer) himself. Instead, "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit". The words are from God the Father, spoken and written by men who were carried by God the Holy Spirit.

## **The Bible is inspired**

You might ask: In what way is the Bible from God? Serious Christian thinkers (called theologians) say that the Bible is ‘inspired’ by God, which sounds fair enough because God is a fairly inspirational guy. But there have been songs and poems and essays and paintings and sculptures that have also been inspired by God, yet you don’t see Christians carrying a painting or sculpture under their arm on the way to church.

So what makes the Bible more important then? When theologians say ‘inspired’, they actually mean that God breathed the words out himself. It’s not just that God’s love and mercy and greatness filled some people with the creative urge to start writing the Bible, in the same way that it might cause some people to start writing a song. The answer is that the Bible actually comes from within God and he breathed it out. 2 Timothy 3:16 says just this: “All Scripture is God-breathed”.

Normally when you think of someone’s breath, you think of bad breath if they haven’t brushed their teeth, or minty fresh breath if they have. But when we say “God-breathed”, we are just making the close connection between breath and speech. Or, to put it another way, if you stop breathing, you stop talking. In the same way as our

breath carries our speech, so God's breath carries his words from within his heart, inside himself, to the pages of the Bible.

This happens by the Holy Spirit through the human authors of the Bible. But because the Holy Spirit is in charge, it means that the words the human authors used were those that God intended to be used (and those words are not subject to error in the way that so many human words contains mistakes—but more about this in the next chapter).

We are not saying at this point that God dictated the Bible to the human authors and that the Holy Spirit was checking their work, like an over-enthusiastic English teacher. This is clear once you start reading the Bible. There are different styles of language: poetry in the psalms; historical narrative in the Old Testament, in the Gospels and in Acts; prophecy in Isaiah; and personal letter writing in the New Testament epistles. They cover different time periods. There are different writers who use different languages and different modes of expression. Paul is not the same as Peter or David or Isaiah or Matthew. We are just saying that the guys and girls who penned the Bible didn't just make it up themselves. Their writing originated from God and was carried along by the Holy Spirit.

## Precious words

The people who actually wrote the Scriptures realized that because God had inspired or breathed out the words in the Bible, there was something special about them. For instance, in Psalm 19 King David says:

The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right,  
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever.

The ordinances of the LORD are sure  
and altogether righteous.

They are more precious than gold,  
than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey,  
than honey from the comb. (Ps 19:7-10)