

100 BIBLE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR FAMILIES



INSPIRING TRUTHS,
HELPFUL EXPLANATIONS,
AND POWER FOR LIVING
FROM GOD'S ETERNAL WORD

ALEX MCFARLAND
& BERT HARPER

Hosts of the nationally syndicated broadcast Exploring the Word

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INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, it has been our honor to host the radio program *Exploring the Word* on American Family Radio. Every weekday afternoon from three to four central time (four to five eastern time), we communicate spiritual truths and enjoy phone conversations with thousands of people who have shared challenging questions and thoughts regarding the Bible.

After we published our first book containing the top one hundred Bible questions, we were overwhelmed by the responses of the thousands of people who requested copies. Many used the book to grow in their own faith, and others shared it with friends or family members. Still others used the book as an outreach tool to discuss the gospel with those who were still uncertain of their own relationship with God.

As we considered what to do next, we quickly realized that we were unable to include dozens of other questions in our first book. We could easily add a second volume to the series to answer even more of the top questions people have asked us over the years.

Our goal for the first volume was straightforward: define the question, consider the options and evidence, and propose biblical conclusions, leaving room for preferences where the Bible does not offer a direct response. Many people greatly appreciated our attitude of sticking to Scripture, reasoning from the evidence, and offering

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hope and help for the real-life challenges and questions believers and unbelievers face.

Before we dive into this second volume, we want to also share a bit of perspective from our many years of addressing controversial issues as ministers and radio broadcasters. First, a question behind the question often exists. What do we mean by this? Let us share an example. Sometimes a person calls in and says they don't believe in hell. The person seems to believe what the Bible says on other topics but doesn't want to address this issue. In conversation, we often discover the true concern or questions behind the question. Usually, the caller has recently lost a loved one and does not want to consider that the person could be in hell for eternity. This is understandable, and we need to offer compassion in such cases. However, we also must direct these tough questions back to the Bible, allowing it to have authority over our emotions.

Second, fruitful questions and answers come in the context of a trusting relationship. For example, we have had the same person call into the radio show on multiple occasions. As this person has come to know us and discovered our genuine desire to help people grow spiritually, they became more open to our discussions and conclusions. This trust often takes time, with some callers telling us they have listened for years before contacting us with a question.

Third, it's okay to acknowledge gray areas or unknowns in Scripture. Yes, God knows everything. Yes, the Bible is perfect. But no, we do not know everything, and the Bible does not address every detail of life. Instead, God inspired the writers of Scripture to give us the principles we need to address today's issues. When it comes to using technology or responding to cancel culture or even handling relationships with stepchildren or blended

families, we look to what the Bible does say and do our best to apply it to areas that Scripture does not directly address.

Fourth, don't forget the Holy Spirit's role. We have God's Word, but we are not God. As we address questions, we must also pray for those we serve and ask God to intervene in individual hearts and situations. Sometimes the issue is not an intellectual issue; it is a heart issue that only God can change.

We also want to impress upon you the importance of answering the tough questions of others. You may feel inadequate to address the many concerns of others, but Scripture says your efforts are vital. We love the third verse of Jude 3, which says, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Jesus' half brother wrote these words. Jude grew up with the Son of God in his home, and even he believed that it was essential to address tough questions in addition to sharing the gospel with unbelievers.

One of the best ways to share the gospel is by being strong in your own faith. The Great Commandment calls us to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). We are good at teaching people to love God with their heart and soul, but we often neglect the mind. If we are to fulfill the Great Commandment, we must also be committed to loving God with our mind through growth and learning.

As we mentioned in our previous book, we have selected some of the most controversial topics of our time. You might not agree with every conclusion we give, especially regarding topics about which the Bible doesn't give a direct answer. We encourage you to be like the Bereans. Acts 17:11 says, "They received the word with all readiness,

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and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”

In addition, remember that we seek to know the truth in order to live the truth. James 1:22–25 warns, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

You may also notice that we have included a lot of Scripture in this book. This is intentional, as we want God’s Word to serve as our authority in answering tough spiritual questions. However, we also encourage you to look up the passages in your own Bible, make notes, and meditate on the Scriptures to better know and apply them to your own life.

Finally, we also want to encourage you to communicate with us regarding how this book helps you and to ask other questions you have. You can send us a message through AlexMcFarland.com or email our *Exploring the Word* radio program at word@afa.net. We also encourage you to join us live every weekday at AFR.net or on an American Family Radio station near you. May God continue to bless your life as you explore the Word!

SECTION 1

THE BIBLE

1. HOW LONG AGO WAS THE BIBLE WRITTEN, AND WHO WROTE IT?

The Bible is a book that consists of sixty-six works, spanning three continents, three languages, and more than fourteen hundred years of revelation. Approximately forty authors, ranging from a shepherd to kings, completed its writings. Few books of the Bible specifically name their authors, but most clearly identify the main characters or the story they would tell. While we do not have absolute proof of authorship because no original manuscripts exist, we can construct a reliable reference for the books and conclude their authorship. This dating and byline are based on the language they used and repeated in other books, on historical references to kings and nations of their time, and on the biblical characters they describe.

The Old Testament includes thirty-nine books written over the course of one thousand years between about 1400 to 400 BC. Those books were written mostly in Hebrew with some Aramaic. Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, Genesis through Deuteronomy, by approximately 1400 BC. These books are often called the Torah or the Law.

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The Historical Books (Joshua through Nehemiah) cover 1400 to 400 BC, including the history of Israel in the land of Israel and after their return to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah. The likely author of Joshua is Joshua. Judges, Ruth, and 1 and 2 Samuel are attributed to the prophets Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. Jeremiah wrote the books of 1 and 2 Kings, whereas Ezra wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Mordecai is the likely author of Esther and Moses of Job.

The Poetical Books (Esther through Song of Songs) include a variety of times. Job may have been the earliest biblical book written as it references events prior to the law of Moses though its date is unknown. The Psalms mostly cover the time periods of David and Solomon (around 1000 BC) though some psalms were written as early as Moses (1400 BC) or as late as the return to Jerusalem (in the 400s BC).

The book of Proverbs was largely written during the lifetime of Solomon—and mostly by King Solomon. God had answered Solomon’s request for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:10), and as a result, Solomon was able to compose and comprise the wise sayings that make up the first twenty-five chapters of this book. Chapters 25 through 29 are also the Proverbs of Solomon, but Hezekiah’s men are credited with their preservation (Proverbs 25:1). Chapter 30 is credited to one of Solomon’s contemporaries, a man named Agur. Chapter 31 is credited to King Lemuel, but to give credit where it is due, the Word of God specifies that this final chapter of the book contains proverbs Lemuel learned from his mother. We know that the ultimate author of Proverbs (and all Scripture) is God himself through the Holy Spirit (see 2 Samuel 23:2; John 14:26; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 1:20-21). The Triune God—whom the Bible calls “the Spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10)—led Solomon to also pen Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.

The Prophets begin as early as the 800s BC (as was likely the case of Obadiah and Joel), and the last prophetic books (such as Malachi) were completed in the 400s. The Prophets are usually divided into the Major Prophets (Isaiah through Daniel) and the Minor Prophets (Hosea through Malachi). They are named for their main character and also their writer, much like the Gospels.

After a “silence” of approximately four centuries, the New Testament was written in twenty-seven books that cover the life of Jesus and the first generation of Christians that spanned the first century AD. The four Gospels include three books likely written in the 60s (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Theologians usually suggest that the gospel of John was written between AD 70 and 90.

Acts was written as the second part of Luke’s gospel. It covers the period from the ascension of Jesus in either AD 30 or 33 to the imprisonment of Paul in Rome in about AD 62. It was likely written in 62 or shortly afterward.

The Epistles of Paul (through Romans through Philemon) were written during his lifetime. He became a follower of Christ by AD 38, within five years of the resurrection of Jesus, and died in the mid-60s.

Hebrews is the one anonymous book of the New Testament, and it discusses events that likely took place in the AD 60s or 70s. Its mention of Timothy, the recipient of 1 and 2 Timothy, suggests a time of writing in the mid-60s to late 60s.

The Later Epistles (or General Epistles) include 1 Peter through Jude and were all likely composed during AD 60s through the 90s. The authors included Peter (who died in the 60s), the apostle John (who died by the end of the first century), and Jude (the half brother of Jesus).

Some scholars suggest the apostle John wrote Revelation either in the AD 60s or 90s. The best evidence suggests a date of around 95–96, making it the final book

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of the New Testament, produced by the last remaining apostle.

The books of the Bible were copied and collected by the early church, with lists of most books noted together by the second century. The modern order of today's Bible is largely based on Jerome's translation of the Bible into Latin in the fourth century.¹

2. WHAT WERE THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGES OF THE BIBLE?

The Bible's sixty-six books were written in three different languages. The Old Testament, covering thirty-nine of the Bible's books, was mostly written in Hebrew, along with some portions in Aramaic.

The Aramaic portions of the Old Testament include Daniel 2:4–7:28 and Ezra 4:8–6:18 and 7:12–26. Both books were authored during the time when Aramaic had become a more common language among the Jewish people. Aramaic words and influences are found in many additional places in the Bible. In particular, names of people, locations, and selected words in the Old Testament often use Aramaic, as both Hebrew and Aramaic use the same alphabet and are similar in structure.

Aramaic was the commonly spoken language of the Jewish people during the earthly life of Jesus, something that many New Testament accounts reveal, though the original manuscripts of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were all composed in Greek. For example, in Mark 5:41, Jesus told a dead girl to arise with the phrase *talitha kour*. The words mean “Little girl, get up!” (NLT) in Aramaic. *Ephphatha*, used in Mark 7:34, means “be opened.” The word *abba* that Jesus often uses in the Gospels is also Aramaic, indicating that Jesus likely spoke

1 For further reading, we suggest *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible* by Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix.

Aramaic as his main language. Luke 4:17–21 also reveals Jesus reading Hebrew from the book of Isaiah in a Jewish synagogue.

The use of the Greek language in the New Testament is most likely due to its dominant role in the Roman Empire during the first century. Though Latin would later become more common, authors of the Gospels, Paul's letters, and other parts of the New Testament wrote in Greek and gave the works the widest possible audience during its original time period.

The Bible teaches that its words are inspired, but scholars take much work to evaluate the existing early copies to determine the exact wording and to translate those words into modern languages. Until the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s, most languages did not have access to Scripture in their heart language. The work of scholars during and since that time have made great strides to offer access to God's Word to many people worldwide.

Today's translations of the Bible seek to use the best manuscripts of these original language documents to provide comprehensible versions of Scripture. While many readers today likely have access to the Bible in multiple copies or versions, hundreds of languages worldwide have yet to receive even one verse of Scripture in their own language. Of the more than seven thousand languages in use today, more than eighteen hundred languages still need Bible translations started, and many others have access only to portions of Scripture in their language. Further, some tribal languages continue to exist only in an oral version without a written alphabet or symbols, revealing the need for more work to provide God's Word to "all the nations" (Matthew 28:19).

18  100 BIBLE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR FAMILIES**3. HOW CAN WE KNOW THE COPIES OF THE BIBLE WE HAVE ARE ACCURATE?**

The original copies of the Bible's books no longer exist. How can we know that the copies we have today are accurate? The process of providing an accurate Bible translation includes a close study of the existing early manuscripts and a thorough knowledge of the ancient languages.

For the Old Testament, many of its books have copies dating to the Dead Sea Scrolls that were discovered in the last century, proving that the manuscripts were in circulation well before the earthly life of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament. Jewish scribes meticulously copied the first five books of the Bible, called the Torah, to make certain no changes were made to the text. For other parts of the Old Testament, the multiple remaining early copies allow scholars to compare any differences to help provide an accurate original language copy for translators.

For the New Testament, more than fifty-eight hundred copies of handwritten Greek manuscripts containing parts or all of its books remain available today. Textual critics and New Testament scholars have painstakingly analyzed the differences among manuscripts to help determine the likely wording of the original text in all but a few places.

Nearly all of today's modern English versions of the Bible include a team of top scholars in the biblical languages who have worked together under a careful set of guidelines to develop a careful, consistent translation for modern readers. Each version of the Bible may include its own style, but the translations are based on the same key manuscripts.

More literal translations are generally best for detailed Bible study as they use the closest possible words to the original languages. The King James Version of the Bible followed a literal approach and has remained popular for more than four centuries. Modern literal versions include the

New King James Version (NKJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), and the English Standard Versions (ESV). Additionally, a variety of less literal English versions exist. Some popular versions include the New International Version (NIV) and the New Living Translation (NLT).

Over the past generation, a concern has arisen over issues related to some translations being gender inclusive or catering to other political influences. Readers should be aware of these concerns. Details about modern influences and associated changes are usually available in the introduction to particular versions. In addition to reading the introduction or foreword in your Bible, we also encourage readers to note the textual comments at the bottom of the pages (especially in the New Testament).

No translation of the Bible is perfect, but today's versions are generally faithful to the original manuscripts and fulfill the Bible's command to preserve God's Word as intended. The claims of some skeptics who criticize the Bible as being intentionally changed do not stand up to the evidence of centuries of research that affirms the high degree of accuracy of the Bible. As 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

4. WHY ARE THERE SO MANY VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE? HOW DO I KNOW WHICH VERSION TO USE?

There are various reasons behind the many English versions of our Bible. Each version uses a unique translation method, with many versions offering different insights into the understanding of Scripture.

One reason for the multiple versions of the Bible we have today involves changes in the English language. The

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words of Scripture have not changed, but the way we use our language has changed greatly over the past five hundred years. For example, the 1611 King James Version of John 3:16 reads, “For God so loued y^e world, that he gaue his only begotten Sonne: that whosoeuer beleeueth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life.” Most of us would not understand this version today, and we certainly don’t speak this way.

A second reason for different Bible translations is based on translation philosophy. In other words, some versions take the most literal approach possible, but others are mostly literal, with some versions allowing more liberty to translate words and phrases into modern equivalents. This can be good or bad, depending on how the translation is conducted. For example, the English Standard Version is mostly literal and follows the same basic approach as the King James Version in using a team of scholars for translation. On the other hand, *The Message* is one person’s rendering of Scripture in modern English. Both versions may have value for comparative study, but a more literal version by a team of scholars will provide a reading closer to the original meaning of Scripture.

A third reason for multiple Bible versions is theological. For example, a particular denomination may have a preferred translation because its publishing company helped create it (such as the Southern Baptist preference for the Christian Standard Bible). This can be a positive move because it means the translation methodology is consistent with the beliefs of the denomination or publisher. On the negative side, the Bible used by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, called the New World Translation, intentionally changes passages, especially those referring to various names of God, as well as John 1:1 (changing “was God” to “was a god”).

How can we know which version to use? There are many ways. One important method is to read the introduction to the translation you are considering so you can understand how it was translated. Your pastor or church will also usually have a recommended version and reasons for it. Another approach is to use multiple versions and compare verses with one another when studying the Bible. This can be especially helpful when using a more literal version, like the New King James Version, with an easier-to-read version, like the New Living Translation.

We must remember that the inspired Scriptures are those written in the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Our English versions are intended to help us better understand these original languages of God's perfect, inspired Word. As Psalm 119:105 teaches, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 18:30 adds, "As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him."

5. WHAT IS THE BOOK OF ENOCH? IS IT PART OF THE BIBLE?

Many people have asked about the role of the Book of Enoch, an ancient Jewish work quoted in the New Testament book of Jude. Some have even claimed the Book of Enoch, also referred to as 1 Enoch, is a "missing" part of the Bible. What is the real story of this controversial book?

The biblical character Enoch is listed in the seventh generation from Adam. In Genesis 5:24, "Enoch walked with God: and...God took him" (KJV). Enoch apparently experienced a direct departure from the earth to heaven, similar to Elijah in 2 Kings 2.

In verses 14-15 of Jude, we read, "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are

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ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” The verses are quoted from a document known as the Book of Enoch.

The Book of Enoch was not written by the Enoch from Genesis but was a Jewish writing that existed prior to the New Testament. It was known to many people in that time period. Fragments of this work have been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls in Hebrew and Aramaic. However, the only complete copies are in the Ethiopian language of Ge'ez. It is uncertain whether the Ethiopian version is the same as the original version.

The existing version includes 108 sections that cover “watchers,” who were angel and human hybrids called Nephilim (as in Genesis 6, though it is uncertain how much real connection exists between the Genesis account and the descriptions in the Book of Enoch). The book also includes parables, information about astronomy, and various dreams, visions, and instructions.

The book is certainly not a missing book of the Bible. The Book of Enoch was written between the times of the Old and New Testaments. Instead, the case is an example of the Bible quoting from another written source as an example. However, it does not claim that the entire quoted source is inspired. The apostle Paul also quoted extrabiblical sources in the New Testament. In Acts 17:28, Luke quoted Paul, saying, “Also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’” In Titus 1:12, Paul also wrote, “One of them, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’” He certainly did not intend for the work of a non-Christian Cretan prophet to be considered inspired Scripture.

On a related note, it is interesting that the Mormon Church considers Enoch (what they refer to as 1 Enoch) as