

About the Bible

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This text was transcribed from lectures given about 1969 by Fr. D. W. Martin, C.M. Though some expressions are dated, Catholic Information Service has judged it helpful to reprint it without change because it is theologically solid and the questions it addresses are still current.

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Text page from Matthew 15:38-16:17, from Greek language *Codex*
Petropolitanus, probably 6th century Syria.

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ABOUT THE BIBLE

I ITS MESSAGE

I am sure that you want to read about the Bible so that you can read the Bible itself with profit. There are many reasons why you may have taken this up. Perhaps you have seen that the Bible contains most sublime ideals and holds the key to successful living. Perhaps, too, you are curious why this Bible, written centuries ago, still has such a hold as it does on people today. Or you may have taken up this reading in order to know just how completely divine is this book of all books.

Whatever your immediate reason for this study, you will find it most profitable because of your sincere and earnest desire to learn of God; for God is not far from you. Your desire to know Him in the routine actions of your daily life, in fulfilling your duties to your neighbor as well as to God – this desire is one that comes from God, and will lead to Him.

God deals with us as only God can. God has fashioned us out of nothing. God sustains us in every act of daily life.

Because God has also fashioned the world, God teaches us something of Himself through these things. But He also teaches man through His own personal word that we are going to speak about in the Bible. Even more, God teaches us from within man himself, by giving to the mind of man light to understand about the things of God.

For anyone to be God's pupil, he must be willing to live for God as best he knows how. To do this, you don't have to know everything about God; only God Himself knows everything about Himself. But what you do know calls for action. God expects you to find peace and happiness where alone it can be found: in God. With your good intention of doing what you can to make your life lead to God, you can confidently expect that God will not leave you alone; He will come to you.

The Bible has different names: *the Bible, the Scriptures, the Scripture, the Word of God*. The name "Bible" means *the Book*, that is, the book that stands alone among all other books written by man because of the excellence of this book and its profit for us; it was written by God as well as by man. The names "Holy Scripture" or "the Scriptures" describe the fact that this writing (this "scripture") excels any other writing among men. It is also called "the Word of God" because it is chiefly God's word that is expressed through the agency of human authors.

FORM OF THE BIBLE

The Book, which is the Bible, is made up of many little books. They were written by many different authors, and over a period of at least 500 years, were put into the form in which we now have them. But they can rightly be grouped under one title, the Bible, because they have in view the one end for which man lives, because all of them have the one chief and responsible author, God Himself.

In the form in which we now have them, these books were assembled during a period of at least 500 years. But the events they relate extend over a much longer period – from more than 1800 years before the coming of Christ to about 100 years after His birth. The first events in the call of Abraham took place at a time when writing with letters of an alphabet had not come into customary use; the last events took place when Imperial Rome had already gathered the ancient world around the Mediterranean Sea into one worldwide empire.

Because God comes to man in the circumstances in which he lives, we can learn much about the development of civilization in the Bible; but the Bible is not the history of civilization. Because God comes to man, His creature, He teaches man what he really ought to be as a creature of God. From the Bible, you will learn that the only worthy purpose of existence in our world is to bring all the powers of your life to bear on the reason for your existence as God's creature. A man is truly and perfectly a man when he lives his life generously among others with whom he is bound by ties of common creation, by likeness of being, by his final purpose in life. The Bible reflects the fact of our experience: that we can achieve our true happiness and security in life only in union with others.

This is man as God has made him – a being who is to live and succeed in the company and by the mutual efforts of other human beings. This is man as he is reflected in God's dealings with him in the Bible. For God deals with him both as an individual and as bound to others with whom he lives and with whom he attains happiness.

But the Bible is not just the history of man as God first made him, or as he ought to be according to that first creation. These truths about man that are made known in the Bible are truths that man could have discovered by himself, through his God-given intellect. The fact that he didn't get all of them together, easily, quickly and surely is the result of the state in which he placed himself by turning away from God. The freedom of man from this state of confusion and the freedom of man so that he can live with God right here and now is the important subject that runs throughout the whole Bible. All else that is taught is taught in view of this one purpose – the salvation or eternal freedom of man from sin so as to live for God.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH

The basic and most important truth taught throughout the Bible is that God is our Savior. It is as the God of our salvation that He first makes Himself known to man; it is also as the God of our salvation that He comes among us as one of us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, true God and true man. God has come to save us from ourselves and from our slavery to the passions and greed and pride that are at the root of our evils in this world. He saves us from ourselves so that we can be free to live with Him; so that through our life with others we can bring others also to find Him; in order, therefore, to bring peace and harmony right in the midst of those very conditions of life which are humanly the source of our unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

The Bible is the record of how God has taken a hand in our world. He has involved Himself in our daily lives, so as to bring good out of the very things that we have spoiled. As our Savior, He

