

GOD'S
TRUTH
CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

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Good News in a Confusing World

*Your word is a lamp to guide me
and a light for my path.*

—Psalm 119:105, GNT

Taurus (April 20–May 20): Get everything checked off your list today. You'll feel less like doing it tomorrow. There could be a conflict this evening between you and your mate. . . .

“Virgo (Aug. 23–Sept. 22): You need to decide what you want to be, do, and have within five days, five months, and five years. Include your sweetheart or business partner in your discussion and you may get a few more good ideas.”

People everywhere are looking for advice and meaning. The fact that nearly every newspaper carries a daily horoscope column testifies to that fact. And if the advice given in the above counsel isn't specific enough, a note following the horoscope provides a phone number that can be contacted for ninety-five

cents a minute for personal forecasts.

The search for meaning and guidance

From the beginning of recorded history, people have been seeking advice from astrologers, always with the hope that today will be the day of their “lucky star.” But the heavenly bodies were only one place that the ancients looked for meaning and advice. Some examined the livers of sacrificial animals (hepatoscopy) for formations that might reveal hints as to the will of the gods. And other wisdom seekers poured oil into a basin of water and then observed the resulting bubbles and rings in their search for guidance in the affairs of practical life (hydromancy).

Kings of the earth's most powerful nations went to war or stayed at home depending on what readings they found in livers, bubbles, or stars. On a more personal level, individuals decided for or against major business deals or marriages on the strength of such evidence.

But there is a better source for such information than the accidental arrangements of bubbles, stars, or lumps of blood and flesh. That better way is God's revelation in the Bible.

According to Paul, “the sacred writings” found in the Bible “are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” “All scripture,” he indicates, “is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for

reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15–17, RSV). And Peter claims that the Bible is as “a light that shines in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19), while the psalmist proclaims that the Bible “is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Countless millions of people have found the Bible to be just what it claims to be—a provider of perspective on the meaning of life and a fountainhead of principles for the making of daily decisions.

The purpose of the Bible

The Bible reveals truths that we couldn’t possibly know except through God’s revelation. Yet it is not an exhaustive source of knowledge. It was never intended to be a “divine encyclopedia” that seeks to answer all our questions. In fact, it leaves most questions unanswered.

On the other hand, the Bible does provide answers to our most basic and most essential questions. As such, the Bible gives answers to life’s “big questions”: the meaning of life and death, where the world came from, what the future will be, how the problem of sin arose and how it is being dealt with, and so on. Through its teachings on these important issues the Bible provides both a perspective for understanding the universe we live in and principles by which to live our daily lives.

The ultimate authority

We need to remember in our study that the Bible is the ultimate test of Christian truth. Isaiah put it nicely when he wrote: "To the law and to the testimony [the Scriptures of Isaiah's day]! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). Isaiah wrote that counsel about people who claimed to have authoritative knowledge from the supernatural world. He was telling the people of his day that *all such claims to knowledge must be tested against the teaching of the Bible. If such people have true light from God, then their ideas will be in harmony with the teachings of the Bible.*

Isaiah's advice holds true in our day. All too often we bring our ideas to the Bible and find a few passages to support our biases. But such an approach is wrong-headed. We need to get our ideas of spiritual realities and truths from Bible study rather than imposing our views onto God's Word.

That approach is true for both individuals and churches. Some churches and pastors claim to be the only authoritative interpreters of God's Word. Such people and religious bodies at times even teach things contrary to the Bible.

Such claims are out of harmony with the intent of the Bible. According to Isaiah, it is the Bible that is the ultimate authority, not churches, pastors, friends, or

family. The Bible is not to be tested by their ideas but their ideas by the Bible.

Those who desire to be faithful to the teachings of the Bible need to go straight to the source of truth. It is from the Bible itself that we discover if a church or a pastor or a book is on the right track. The Bible as God's Word is the ultimate authority in all spiritual matters. We need to thank God daily for the certainties of His Word.

Good news for today

We can thank God for the Bible as we seek answers to the meaning of life. This chapter is the first of twenty-two that will explore what the Bible says about a variety of themes, including what went wrong with God's perfect world, why our lives are too often lived in frustration, what Jesus is doing now, when He will come again, the nature of heaven and hell, and a host of others. But central to our explorations will be Jesus and God's plan for each of us to live fuller lives both in this life and for eternity. Truly the Bible's answers provide good news for a confusing world.