

## Preface

Almost fifty years ago (1941) Alfred North Whitehead lamented the crumbling moral values of his day with the observation, “There is no doubt of it. One sees it in two obvious ways: the generation now growing up does not recognize either quotations from or allusions to the Bible; and the classical tradition is equally on the wane.” A Gallup survey conducted in 1978 showed that matters had not since improved. Although 84 percent of the general public thought the Ten Commandments are still valid, more than half could not name even five of them. When asked which of four listed statements Jesus made to Nicodemus, 44 percent did not know and 14 percent said, “Take up thy bed and walk.” More than half the general public read the Bible less than once a month or not at all.

Why is this? No doubt the increasing secularization of our society, with the attendant loss of faith in the church, is a large part of the answer, but there is more to it than that. To many people the Bible is just too hard to understand—both the language and the concepts are out of reach for them. The problem of language has largely been solved by the many modern translations that are now available. The phenomenal success of the *Living Bible* is testimony to the hunger that people have to read a Bible in simple, everyday language. The problem of making ancient concepts understandable to moderns is a bit more difficult. To begin with, the Bible itself was not all written at the same time, but spans at least a thousand years. Add to that the passage of the last two thousand years, and one sees the difficulty. How can concepts drawn from ancient civilizations, written in

obsolete languages, in the context of cultures long dead, be made vibrant and understandable for today's world?

This Bible encyclopedia is an attempt to solve that problem. It is designed to be a bridge between the past and the present, a mine, a source of information about those days long past that opens them up to us. It is not meant to replace the Bible; far from it. It is meant to be read alongside the Bible to clarify and illuminate the text of Scripture for the modern reader, so that its truths can be assimilated by the people of today. They might still choose to ignore its teaching as Whitehead lamented and Gallup observed, but it need not be any longer for the reason that the Bible cannot be understood.

There is yet another compelling reason for producing a Bible encyclopedia of this sort. To the writers of this encyclopedia the Bible is not just a collection of ancient writings, parallel to those of Hammurabi or Aristotle. It is the very word of God himself. Surprisingly, the same Gallup poll that revealed the appalling ignorance of the Bible also disclosed that only 23 percent of the general public thought the Bible is simply a collection of ancient religious writings, with 42 percent willing to say that it is the "word of God and is *not* mistaken in its statement and teachings." But whether the idea is popular or not, the fact remains that to the orthodox Christian believer the Bible is the Word of God, being our only infallible rule of faith and practice. This compels us to learn all that we can about it so that what God communicated to his people of old and through his Son Jesus Christ may be fully understood today.

The editors of this encyclopedia asked themselves what kinds of information are needed to accomplish the task of making the Bible understandable for today. Many answers

were given—far more than could be incorporated into a two-volume work—so the list was narrowed to a dozen:

1. It was felt that the contents of all the books of the Bible should be discussed. Consequently, there are mini-commentaries on each book, dealing with the author, background, data and place of writing, purpose, theological teaching, and content. Not all the books require all of this, but the essential information is there.
2. There is a heavy emphasis on the theological content of the Bible, comprising virtually a textbook of biblical theology. Articles in the encyclopedia cover such topics as the being and attributes of God; the names of God; the life and teaching of Jesus Christ; Christology; the Holy Spirit; eschatology; the church; sin; salvation; and the doctrine of creation.
3. Comprehensive articles cover the general life and times of the biblical world, including civil law and justice; criminal law and punishment; courts and trials; coins; money and banking; trades and occupations; travel and transportation; writing and books; medicine and medical practice; music and musical instruments; arms and warfare; and homes and dwellings. In addition, there are extensive general articles on animals, birds, plants, and minerals, metals, and precious stones.
4. The nations surrounding Israel and the cities that played a significant role in biblical history are discussed: Egypt, Syria, Babylon, Assyria, and Rome. This provides the background information needed to understand what was happening in Israel or the church at any given time.

5. Persons mentioned in the Bible are discussed, from the most significant to the least important. All of this was done from scratch, using the Hebrew and Greek texts, and it turned out to be an incredibly complex undertaking. In some cases almost a week was spent trying to unravel just one relatively small family. Significant people who are not mentioned in the Bible are also discussed, but such references are kept to a minimum.
6. Extensive historical entries are also included, covering every phase of Israel's and Judah's history and chronology. In addition there are biographies of significant people, such as Paul, Peter, John, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Herod and his family, and the Caesars.
7. Religious practices and groups are treated at length—feasts and festivals, priests, prophets, Sadducees, Pharisees, sacrifices, offerings, Judaism, the temple, the Law, the religion of Israel, and various pagan religious practices.
8. The Bible as a document is surveyed. This includes canon, text, languages, inspiration, writing, and hermeneutics.
9. Selective current scholarly opinion is presented. It is not possible to deal with everything, but such current theories or problems as redaction criticism, form criticism, the synoptic Gospels, the documentary hypothesis, and tradition criticism are covered.
10. The social customs of Bible times are discussed, including burial customs, family life and relations, fashion and dress, marriage customs, food and food preparation.

11. Geographical information is included, much of it to be found in the articles dealing with cities and countries, but some of it standing on its own, such as articles about Palestine, the Mount of Olives, Sinai, the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, and the Wilderness.
12. Archaeology, both as a subject in its own right and the results that derive from it, is treated.

Needless to say, the preceding list does not include everything that is treated in this encyclopedia, but it does give the reader a good idea of what will be found here. The editors tried to touch upon every significant thing that would be of any consequence in understanding the Bible.

A few of the additional distinctives that characterize this work could be mentioned at this point. Select bibliographies of works in the English language are included for further study, if the reader is so inclined. A system of cross-references moving from minor to major articles will aid the reader in pursuing a given topic in full. One feature that we trust will be helpful is the inclusion of more than thirty omnibus articles, where many related items are discussed in one place so the reader will not have to leaf through numerous pages to cover a specific topic. Let a single example, that of trades and occupations, suffice; every item related to this topic is to be found in one convenient place. Subjects that are secondarily related to them, such as industry, commerce, travel, transportation, and money are indicated (with cross-references) for further study. Extensive Scripture references are to be found so that the biblical testimony can be examined at length. Appropriate illustrations accompany many of the major articles to provide visual enrichment of the topic. These illustrations range from geography, archaeology, and animals to persons, religious artifacts, and documents. The entire work is written so that laypeople can

understand it. For this reason technical jargon is avoided wherever possible; Greek and Hebrew words are transliterated; extensive scholarly argumentation is kept to a minimum; and unobtainable or foreign language journals and books are not cited. It was the editors' desire that what is found in this encyclopedia be accessible to the average layperson, in such a way that it can be readily assimilated. It is hoped that scholars will find the work satisfactory for their purposes as well, but the encyclopedia is not written with them primarily in mind; except insofar as the content was scrutinized for accuracy. Finally, the entire project is written from an evangelical point of view. This means that a conservative stance is taken on critical issues and that the biblical text is handled in such a way as to reflect its verbally inspired nature.

Special care was exercised in the production of this encyclopedia in order to make it as accurate as possible. The editors established a system whereby each article went through a lengthy series of both writing and editorial steps. In some instances it was no longer possible to assign only one name to an article. When this happened, any attribution was left off; the reader may assume that article is the joint product of several writers and editors. When only one or two individuals were primarily responsible, their names were retained at the end of the article. As a matter of course, brief articles are not attributed, although they are the work of a single author.

It is not possible to mention all of the people who had a hand in this project during ten years, but some names stand out and we are deeply grateful for all of the time and energy they have put into this over the years—Allan Fisher, Edythe Draper, Chandler Barnes, Dr. William Kerr, Barbara Dismeier, Martha Myers, Mary Lou McCurdy, David Hall, Donald

Keeney, Maria Bulgarello, Dan Malda, Lisa Ramsey-Hersberger, and Randy Tucker.

It is with humble thanks to God that this Bible encyclopedia is now presented to the public. If it helps anyone to understand God's Word better, to love God more fervently, to serve Christ more single-mindedly, or to experience the truth of the Christian faith in a more vital way, then the prayers of the editors and writers will have been answered. We are better people for having done this work, and we trust that the reader will similarly benefit by entering into our labors.

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