

## Help from the Bible

**Y**ou should be encouraged that you are not the first person to ask, “What is God’s will in this situation?” I assure you that people have been asking this question long before you were ever born. As proof of this, here are some examples from Scripture.

The first is from Matthew 19:1–12. A Jewish religious group, the Pharisees, were the most influential ecclesiastical class of Christ’s day. Their driving ambition was to strictly obey, down to the minutest detail, all of the ordinances and observances of the Old Testament law. But they rejected and despised Jesus, the One who came to fulfill that law.<sup>1</sup>

Out of their hatred of Jesus, the Pharisees laid a theological trap for Him. They came to Jesus and asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?”

To fully appreciate their question, it’s helpful to know that there were two schools of thought among the Jews of that time. The school of Rabbi Shammai held that adultery was the only God-honored grounds for divorce, while the school of Rabbi Hillel believed that God would honor any grounds for divorce. Therefore, whichever answer Jesus gave would cause Him to lose favor with some of the Jews.

Even taking the Pharisees’ underhanded motivation into account, their question was a good one. The issue of marriage and divorce has always been a relevant one. That’s why the rabbis Shammai and Hillel had been forced to deal with it in the first place.

Interestingly, Jesus answered with a rebuke of the Pharisees. He said, “Have you not read?” then quoted an Old Testament Scripture. Had they not read what the Old Testament taught about marriage and divorce? It was as if Jesus was saying to them, “Boys, don’t you know that the *will* of God is wrapped up in the *Word* of God?”

Following that rebuke, Jesus quoted from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 and explained that the only scriptural grounds for divorce was sexual immorality. The Greek word for “sexual immorality” is *porneia*, which is a broad term that refers to any kind of sexual sin, not just adultery. Even when the Pharisees argued that Moses had allowed divorce among the Israelites, Jesus didn’t change His answer. He simply explained how Moses’ actions fit into the answer. (For the record, after the church age began, the apostle Paul wrote that a Christian who is abandoned by a non-Christian spouse also has grounds for divorce.<sup>2</sup>)

Our next example is from Acts 17:10–12. Here we have a group of Jews in the Macedonian city of Berea. Like all other Jews, these people were born and raised in Judaism. They did their best to keep the Old Testament law and to live by what their rabbis taught concerning the law. They faithfully attended synagogue on Sabbath, and they sincerely tried to do God’s will in every aspect of their lives.

One day, however, Paul and Silas came to the local synagogue and taught that Jesus was the Messiah the Jews had long awaited. They told the congregation that He had died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world and that He had risen from the dead on the third morning after His death. They explained that a person’s salvation rested upon believing in Him as Savior.

And how did the Jews of Berea respond to such a new line of teaching? Acts 17:11 says: “They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”

Wow! Those Berean Jews got it right, didn’t they? They said to Paul and Silas, “We’ve given you a fair hearing, and we are open-minded to what you have taught, but we must consult the Scriptures before we go along with you.” Oh, how I

wish that everybody held the Scriptures in as high a regard as those Bereans! Can you imagine the discernment those Jews would have had if they had lived in a time when the New Testament was completed? That would have given them even more scriptural revelation from which to base their decisions.

And please note that those Jews searched the Scriptures *daily*. They didn't call a group meeting and have a one-time Bible study. They didn't say, "We've got one hour to figure this out." They kept their noses in the Scriptures, consulting passage after passage to discern if what Paul and Silas taught really was God's will concerning salvation.

Our third example is Jesus Himself when he was tempted by Satan (see Matthew 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13). Rather than getting into specifics of Satan's three crafty temptations designed to get Jesus to miss God the Father's will, let's focus on Jesus' response to them. He answered each temptation by quoting portions of Scripture found in the book of Deuteronomy. This makes the point of the story clear: When Satan lays something before you and says, "Do this," you must ask yourself, "Is there anything in the Bible that would prove that this can't possibly be God's will for my life?" Putting it another way, don't ever let yourself forget that the will of God will *never* go against a right understanding of the Word of God.

Also, hunting and picking a few verses here and there won't get the job done. You must consider the whole of Scriptures. Frankly, you can hand select a verse or two and make the Bible teach about anything you want. Maybe you've heard the old story about the man who tried to use the Bible to discern God's will. Since he didn't know anything about the Bible, he let the book flop open to wherever it would. Then he closed his eyes and laid his finger on a verse. His finger came to rest on the last part of Matthew 27:5, which says that Judas "went and hanged himself." The man thought, "That can't be God's will for me. I'd better try again." He then went through the process one more time. This time he laid his finger on the last part of John 13:27, which says, "What you do, do quickly." You see, you can hunt and pick a few verses and "prove" that you should rush out and hang yourself!

The good news is, when you have done your homework, studied the Word and know what the Bible says about a subject, you can wield God's Word as a sword against Satan's temptations,<sup>3</sup> which is what Jesus did when Satan tempted him. I once heard the nationally known preacher, Dr. Tony Evans, say, "One of the reasons you ought to learn the Word is so that you can have a Bible study with the devil."

In case you are wondering why so much rises and falls with the Bible, understanding the divine inspiration of the Bible is crucial. 2 Timothy 3:16 says: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The Greek word that is translated "inspiration" is *theopneustos*. It is built from two words: *Theos* means "God" and *pneo* means "to breathe." Therefore, *theopneustos* literally means "God breathed." All Scripture from both the Old Testament and the New Testament is "God breathed." Every single letter of every single word is inspired by God. The Bible was penned by humans but authored by God.

Of course, the skeptic will rant, "Yeah, right. Just because the Bible claims to be God inspired doesn't make it so. Isn't that just the Bible bragging on itself?" Admittedly, on the surface this charge seems to have some validity. Think about it, if there was a sentence in the Mark Twain classic *Huckleberry Finn* that claimed divine inspiration for the book, wouldn't we need some *outside* verification to back up that claim? Well, the same is true of the Bible.

I am happy to report that such outside verification exists. We find it in at least four categories of evidence. Giving proof of the Bible's inspiration is a major subject matter, and an entire book could be written about each category, but I will give only the barest basics.

### **Archaeological Finds**

In scores of digs, archaeologists have unearthed evidence that verifies the Bible's record of human history. In many instances, these finds went against the commonly held beliefs (archaeological, anthropological, scientific, and others) of the day. For example, critics once claimed that bronze mirrors could not have been used to make the bronze laver of Israel's tabernacle (see Exodus 38:8). The charge was that such mirrors were not available until centuries after the tabernacle was built. However, digs in Egypt eventually brought forth many such mirrors that dated from the time of Moses.<sup>4</sup>

This much is clear: If the world of archaeology had ever presented irrefutable evidence that the Bible's record of history is wrong, the Bible would have been discredited long ago. It hasn't happened, though. No Bible believer should ever be afraid of an archeologist with a pickaxe and a shovel.

### **Fulfilled Prophecy**

It's one thing for a book to predict future world events, but it's quite another thing for *all* those predictions to come to pass. Some classic cases of these predictions are the book of Daniel's prophecies concerning the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (see Daniel chapters 2, 7, and 8). These prophecies were fulfilled to such a precise degree that skeptics now argue that the book of Daniel must have been written *after* the fact.

The Bible currently holds a perfect record in the fulfillment of its prophecies. The only prophecies that haven't come to pass yet are those that involve the so-called "end times." Based upon the Bible's track record, though, the fulfillment of those prophecies will surely take place right on schedule.

### **Internal Consistency**

Logically speaking, the Bible should be filled with contradictions and errors. The book was written over a period of fifteen hundred years by forty different writers. These writers came from vastly different walks of life and wrote on highly controversial subjects. Many of the writers did not have access to the others' writings. To further complicate things, the Bible's books weren't written in the same language. Ninety-nine point nine percent of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew (with the remaining .1 percent being written in Aramaic), while the New Testament was written in Greek. Then, to make matters worse, the books were written on three different continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe).

Obviously, all of these problems should be killers of internal consistency. But in spite of everything, the words of the men who wrote the Bible are in one hundred percent agreement. This raises the question, how did those men pull that off if they weren't writing under the inspiration of God?

### **Changed Lives**

No other book ever written has impacted lives as powerfully as the Bible. People with Bibles in hand have crossed oceans to share the book with strangers. People have abandoned civilizations to live among backward tribes just so they could learn their languages and translate the Bible so they can read it. People have chosen execution rather than say that the common people didn't need the Bible. People have gone to hotel rooms to commit suicide, only to read Bibles they found in nightstands and then leave with a new outlook on life. Truth be told, even the skeptic probably knows deep down that the Bible is somehow different from all other books.

A boy listened intently as an atheist criticized the Bible. The atheist said, "The book is nothing but a collection of fairy tales and quaint sayings. It has no basis in reality, and it can't possibly have any real effect upon an individual." The boy replied, "Sir, if that's true, then how do you explain my mother?" Obviously, the woman lived her life by the Bible.

And so, this brings us to how the Bible can aid you in discerning God's will for your specific decision. I will offer five hypothetical situations and show you how the Bible clearly reveals God's will concerning them.

#### *Situation 1*

A Christian businessman wants to start a new business with a man who is not a Christian. The Christian thinks, "I know this fellow is not a Christian, but he is a good guy who has a great skill for making money. Maybe I can even convert him to Christianity. Starting this business must be God's will for my life."

What does the Bible say? It teaches that Christians are not to enter into personal, binding relationships with people who aren't Christians (see Amos 3:3; 2 Corinthians 6:14–15; Ephesians 5:8–11).

#### *Situation 2*

A husband wants to have an affair with a coworker. He and his wife have drifted apart over the years and now all they do is fight. The coworker, on the other hand, seems so understanding, kind, and even open to the affair. The husband thinks, "Since God loves me and wants me to be happy, having this affair must be His will for my life."

What does the Bible say? It teaches that adultery is never God's will (see Genesis 20:1–7; Exodus 20:14; Proverbs 5:15–23; Mark 10:17–19; Galatians 5:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:35).

### *Situation 3*

A teenage daughter has been forbidden to date a certain boy. She believes she can't live without seeing him and gets one of her friends to arrange a late-night "Romeo and Juliet" meeting. The daughter plans to sneak out of the house and meet the boy. She thinks, "My parents just don't understand me. I love this guy and want to spend my life with him. Surely God knows how unfair my parents are being and won't mind if I meet my boyfriend tonight."

What does the Bible say? It teaches that children (and that includes teenagers) are to honor and obey their parents (see Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 23:22; Matthew 15:1–6; Ephesians 6:1–3; Colossians 3:20).

### *Situation 4*

A husband and wife have had a difficult year financially. Now it is time to file their annual income tax return. They certainly don't want to pay taxes this year, and they'd love to get a refund, but that would require some "fudging" of the numbers. They think, "God wants us to be financially solid, and the government doesn't need our money. Maybe a little dishonesty would be okay this year."

What does the Bible say? It teaches that both lying and cheating on your taxes is sin (see Psalm 119:29; Proverbs 3:3–4; Proverbs 12:20; Proverbs 13:5; Ephesians 4:25; Matthew 17:24–27; Luke 20:20–25; Romans 13:1–7).

### *Situation 5*

A woman has been wronged by another woman who never apologizes. This causes the offended woman to harbor a deep grudge. She wishes bad things upon the other woman, and even devises a scheme to get revenge. She thinks, "God is a God of justice, and I have been done an injustice. He must want me to settle the score."

What does the Bible say? It teaches that we should forgive others, turn the other cheek, and leave vengeance to the Lord (see Psalm 34:14; Matthew 5:43–48; Romans 12:17–21; Ephesians 4:31–32).

From these five situations, you can see how instructive the Bible is. It's no wonder the psalmist called God's Word "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). A lamp to your feet shows you where you are standing, and a light to your path shows you the way forward. When it comes to God's will, He doesn't want you to stand or walk in darkness. He wants your way to be illuminated by His Word. Will you take advantage of the light?