

5245 A letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, "THUS  
 The Lord: II Chronicles 21:12

What is the Bible? A library of 66 books written over a period of approximately 1500 years, its most recent book some 1700 years old. That is one answer.

The Bible? It is history, short stories, poetry, primitive science, reminiscence, drama, law codes, letters, prayers and meditation, ethical and spiritual teachings. It is a storhouse of information on customs, beliefs and practices of ancient peoples.

What is the Bible? It is preeminently a book of religion. In it you can trace the development of central religious concepts and ideas. Religious teachers sometimes describe the book as a progressive revelation of divine truth, of God's character and purpose.

The Bible? It is the record of man's search for God. It is the search of man, but particularly man as he lived in ancient Palestine. In his search he uncovered ideas which have been powerful in molding the character of individuals of every land, race, and age.

As a record of man's search for God - for meaning, for understanding of himself and of his world, the Bible is a classic of inspiration.

A mighty danish thinker of the mid-nineteenth century, Soren Kierkegaard stated succinctly the chief Christian reason for reading the Bible. He said, "The Bible is a letter

from God with our personal address on it" To be sure, it is more than a letter. As Dean Bernhard Anderson has said, it is an unfolding drama of all God has done, is doing and intends to do.... Here's how Anderson sees the drama:

For a stage the universe is taken. What a Drama it is.

Act one is the creation. It shows man emerging with a spiritual kinship with God, but becoming a rebel, saying "no" to his creator. Over the stage is moral wreckage.

Act two is the Covenant . . the work of reconstruction. God concentrates on one selected segment of humanity, the people of Israel. Laboriously, stubbornly He teaches them across the centuries/ Triumphs, defeats, good and evil march forward and backward. His special covenant with His people is an agreement which they constantly break, until at last the most clear-sighted see that they cannot keep the covenant by themselves. They need God to help them, a God who can become one of them. They call him the Messiah, the anointed one.

Act three is the Christ. God sends his personal letters thru Jesus Christ. Christ is God's own word on the situation . . God's word to their condition. Words are powerful. This living Word is strongest of all. It recovers, restores, renews, heals and empowers. Few know at the time that he has come; those who ~~did~~ do find newness of life. They know that this new covenant is for the entire world of



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men forever. The violations of the agreement, the rebellion, the sin are all somehow taken on this Man's heart. The chosen people are no longer one nation, but all who perceive, acknowledge, and choose to serve the one whom God has sent.

Act four is community. The community is the new Israel, all who respond in obedience and trust, The new community is the church. And it is the church itself, under God's direction, which composes the human documents which now become holy scripture. Thus the scriptures point backward to creation and forward to Christ and to the time coming, and even beyond time. This is an immensely important way to read the Bible . . . to see it as a drama of what God has done, is doing and intends to do. It has the four acts . . . Creation, Covenant, Christ, and Community.

But there is another way to read the Bible. It catches us unawares. The Bible becomes a personal letter to ourselves from God . . . and we find that we must answer it. And when we answer with our minds, our consciences, and our hearts we become involved. We can't remain mere readers . . . ~~we~~ we have to cease being spectators and we become actors in the drama. When we do that then we begin to move inside the Bible.. . more transforming is the fact that the Bible then begins to move inside us.

Look at three people, somewhat like you, who reading

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this personal letter from God, the Bible, find that it  
reads them...

There is Ann Sothern, mother and TV star. Several years ago she had an illness which left her "emotionally broken.... .." nerves striking sensitive to the slightest disturbance. Ordinary fears were suddenly magnified. "I was so tortured with self-doubt that I was sure I can never again make even normal decisions, much less face the cameras. At that point I had to reach out for something beyond ordinary faith, or perish". She knew that fear was killing her, she knew too that she had to replace fear with faith. Simply, she prayed, asking for faith, strength. Release did not come immediately ...but prayer showed her other steps she could take. One was to engage in spiritual reading. She read in Proverbs words which spoke to her condition: "In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths" She must be honest now, and find God's will. What about her fear of herself, of her inadequacies? "What makes you think He's deserted you when ~~he~~/ you need him?" she said to her daughter, scared over her first serious exam at school. Then she realized that she was saying a word of God to herself as well. She found the word in a letter penned more than 1800years ago: "I can doall things thru Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

So a modern American woman learned what Martin Luther discovered. He found that the Bible was the best book for a



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bad time, looked at it, and said: "Go lay your hand upon  
the Word, and you shall never be alone:.

Then there was the young Cornell student who was conscientious but confused about how to invest his considerable talent when he left Ithaca. He walked to the chapel, stopped to listen and heard the text repeated. He never forgot the words or the location. Altho the message from Jeremiah was written centuries ago, it came to the boy like a personal letter marked: "Urgent, Reply Demanded" "...seekest thou great things for yourself? seek them not . . ." This Cornell boy, John R. Mott, became the best known Christian layman of the Protestant world. As an outstanding YMCA and missionary leader he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He had been changed in direction and motivation by the words in the Bible which contained for him, as for the old Jewish king Jehoram, a Word of God.

Now the third recipient of a personal letter from God lives in our community. Good citizen, good church member, doing well in business, he's often stirred to indignation about the evil in our world. And he knows that the evils are real - people hungry, crushed, lost . . but he thinks "won't a few dollars do?" Christmas is here, there are mortgage payments to make, the new car, the church pledge, the constant demands. Someone reads aloud something said by a man who lived 19 centuries ago in the then and still troubled middle East . . and the familiar words start to crackle and

burn inside of him as if they were suddenly alive:

"Then the king will say to those at his right hand 'Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food . . . I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me' And the righteous shall answer him 'Lord, when did we see you hungry . . . thirsty . . . a stranger . . . naked, sick . . . in prison?' And the king will answer them . . . 'as you did it to one of the least of these my brethern, you did it to me'" (Matthew 25:34=40)

Brother . . . Sister . . . does that Word find you / / ? ?  
It ought . . . in your compassion, in your pocketbook, in you life.

Be careful how you read this Bible. . . but be careful that you read it, expectantly, listening for a word from God.  
"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only"