



REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

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REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:11a-12

As a boy, I was raised in a Catholic Church. Rather than carrying a Bible to church, most everyone just picked up the books that were in each pew containing some Scripture readings, prayers, and songs. These books were left at the church building, and so my assumption as a child was that those things were for church, but not for the rest of life outside the church.

At home, our family had an enormous Bible that sat on our coffee table, but it was large enough to serve as its own coffee table. On the front was a picture of Jesus with long beautiful hair wearing a white dress and sensible sandals and, if memory serves me correct, hanging out with sheep. Despite seeing that Bible every day, I never remembering opening it as the Jesus on the cover was, frankly, not a depiction of any man I wanted to follow or become like. I assumed I knew the gist of what the Bible said – be a good person and you will be fine and go to Heaven – so I did not feel any urge to dig deeper.

In high school, I considered myself to be a moral young man who did believe in God but did next to nothing to grow spiritually other than uttering a rote memorized prayer when I felt bad to lift some of my guilt. Things started to change when I met a pastor's daughter. We became friends, and she was quickly my most favorite person. Since our first date on March 12, 1988, I am happy to report that she remains my favorite person on the planet.

Grace bought me a really nice Bible as a graduation present. It had a genuine leather cover with my name embossed on it. Some months later in college at a state university, seemingly every professor and class referenced the Bible, Jesus, and Christianity – negatively. Out of curiosity, I started reading the Bible. In all honesty, I disagreed with a lot of what I read. The good religious folks like me were the bad guys who killed Jesus. Furthermore, considering myself a good person, the thought that all people were sinners, not essentially good, and could only be saved from hell by

DOCTRINE

God's help was offensive. The rules against things like sex outside of marriage also seemed like boring, outdated rules that we'd moved past.

Like many people, I did not know the Bible but assumed I knew the gist. Reading it for myself, I did not agree with much of it. Eventually, I concluded that my real problem with the Bible was one of authority. Since the Bible and I disagreed on a lot of things, one of us would need to change. Kind of like the kids game "chicken" where two kids run at each other to see who is the bravest, the chicken is the one who jumps out of the way at the last moment to avoid the collision. I was in a game of chicken with the Bible. Either I would try and ignore it or edit it in an effort to move it out of my way. Or I would be the one to change position, move, and let the Bible have authority to determine my life course.

Eventually, I was the proverbial chicken. I concluded the Bible was right, and when I disagreed, I was wrong. I accepted the Bible as perfect revelation from God and that I had no right to change it, as its' purpose was to change me. Since that decision, every day of my life I have been devoted to studying and teaching the Bible not as a word about God from people, but rather the Word of God that is from God and for people. In the remainder of this chapter, it is our hope to help you understand the concept of divine revelation in general, and the Bible in particular.

WHAT IS REVELATION?

People have a seemingly insatiable appetite for information and communication. From cell phones to televisions, e-mail, radios, smart phones, Websites, blogs, social media, meetings, online video chats, books, magazines, newspapers, movies, songs, text-messages, face-to-face conversations, etc., people want to know and be known. Why? Our God communicates, as Genesis 1 tells us no less than ten times, "God said" and made us in His likeness to communicate with Him and each other.

In our deluge of data, the daunting question is, how do we hear the voice of God? Does God speak internally through our spirit? Does God speak externally through a holy man such as a guru or prophet? Does God speak through ancient wisdom or collected

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

tradition? Or, perhaps God does not speak at all because God is not a person but a mute force, distant and disinterested in us?

Core to Christianity is the belief that God speaks through revelation, teaching us perhaps the two most important things we can learn: 1) Who God is and 2) Who we are. The opposite of divine revelation from God is human speculation about God. As we receive and believe God's revelation by faith, the power and presence of God are unleashed to transform us to become more like Jesus Christ. Revelation culminates in mission to tell the world about God in the same way that someone who has fallen deeply in love cannot stop talking about the person they enjoy and introducing him or her to everyone they know.

HOW DOES GOD REVEAL HIMSELF?

When talking with someone, generally the best way to understand what they are saying is to see their face and hear their words. This is because people communicate meaning in multiple ways at once. In the same way, God communicates to us in two ways all the time. These are called general revelation and special revelation.

General Revelation

God reveals himself to everyone everywhere through general revelation. General revelation includes creation, common grace, providence, and conscience.

Concerning creation, Psalm 19:1,4 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork...Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." Isaiah 6:3 proclaims, "The whole earth is full of his glory!" Romans 1:19-20 adds, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." Through creation—the heavens and earth, flower and fly, galaxy and quark—God has made himself and his power, love, and glory known. People everywhere see his wisdom,

DOCTRINE

majesty, power and divine nature, justice, and goodness.^a

Among the most awe-inspiring aspects of creation is the human body. Every doctor, mother who births a child, grandparent who holds a grandchild, and person reading this with eyes God made sending data to the brain God designed should be brought to worshipful wonder. Psalm 8:3–4 says, “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”

Regarding common grace, among the first to use the term was Augustine (AD 354–430) because it is for everyone and therefore common to all human beings. Through common grace, God reveals His love to all people, though not in a saving way. God’s common grace includes the water we drink, food we eat, sun we enjoy, and rain we need, as God is good to the sinner and saint alike.^b

God’s common grace allows even those who despise him to learn and make gains in science, philosophy, technology, education, medicine, etc. God’s common grace allows societies to flourish, families to exist, cities to rise up, and nations to prosper.^c Common grace also allows people who are not connected to God to live decent, moral lives as Good Samaritan(s), though their deeds are not in any way done to God’s glory as acts of worship. The result of God’s common grace is that life is far better than would otherwise be possible if sinners were simply left to themselves. Everyone experiences the grace of God to varying degrees, no matter how sinful they are, because God is loving, good and is determined to do good in love. Anyone who has laughed, held a baby, enjoyed the warmth of the sun on their face, gone for a swim, eaten a good meal, or watched a sunset has enjoyed a measure of God’s common grace.

Externally, God’s common grace is experienced in providence and miracle. God is good, sovereign, and the good things we enjoy in our life are from Him. Just as you get work done with two hands, consider God as metaphorically also working with two

^a Psalm 104; Ps. 8:1; Rom. 1:20; Rom. 2:14–15; Acts 14:17

^b Ps. 65:9; 104:14; Matt. 5:45

^c E.g., Ex. 31:2–11; 35:30–35

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

hands. On one hand, God works through miracles that are visible revelations of His person and power. Many people have God show up supernaturally in their lives at some point – something often not understood until we have been saved and look back in faith.

On the other hand, God works through providence that are invisible revelations of His person and power. Some people wrongly attribute the cause of God's providence to luck, fate, chance, or karma. The truth is, God is at work in the lives of people who do not know it and do not know Him. Acts 14:17 says, "he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

Internally, God also reveals himself generally through the conscience he gave us. Most everyone knows it is wrong to murder, lie, and commit adultery, because God has written His morality on human hearts.^a Additionally, God the Holy Spirit convicts the whole world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.^b Even sinners know to give good gifts to their children because God created us as His image bearers with a conscience that serves as a moral compass.^c While some people ignore or break their conscience, the fact that others see their violation of what is right and good serves only to reinforce the fact that through the conscience God has revealed himself as holy and just. Additionally, people innately appeal to conscience every time they want justice or decry something as wrong or unfair.

Positively, general revelation means that all people know God in a general way. As a result, Romans 1 says that those who "suppress" the truth of God made known through general revelation are "without excuse"; subsequently, their damnation is deserved.^d His goodness and kindness shown to all should lead people to repentance of sin and relationship with Him.^e Those who follow the truth path of general revelation can enjoy further special revelation

^a Rom. 2:14–15

^b John 16:8–11

^c Matt. 7:11

^d Rom. 1:18–32; 2:5–6, 8–9; John 3:19

^e Rom. 2:4

DOCTRINE

about God that can lead to eternal life.^a Innumerable examples could be given, but some include God bringing missionaries to an unreached people group open to the gospel, God sending dreams and visions of Jesus to Muslims in countries otherwise closed to the gospel, and even sending an angel to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. In short, we trust the goodness of our sovereign God to deal justly with all people and find creative ways to reveal Himself to them.

Special Revelation

For anyone to have a saving knowledge of God requires that, in addition to general revelation, they also must receive and believe special revelation. While general revelation is good and true, it is not sufficient for someone to know that God became a man and died on a cross in our place for our sins.

Christians have always believed that God is real, personal, and relational. We believe it is only by God's gracious self-revelation that anyone comes to know him. God revealed himself supremely through the incarnation, where the second person of the Trinity humbly entered into human history as the God-man Jesus Christ. During his earthly ministry, Jesus was led and empowered by the third member of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. That same Holy Spirit also inspired the writing of the Holy Bible to speak to us about Jesus Christ and regenerate Christians to receive special revelation from the Bible about Jesus.

God continues to reveal himself today, primarily through the divinely inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Bible. The Bible is uniquely and solely God's completely trustworthy revelation to us today. Scripture is the court of highest authority for Christians and their leaders, by which any alleged revelation from God is to be tested.

Christian belief stands or falls with the Bible. New Testament scholar Darrell Bock puts it like this in an interview I conducted with him:

^aActs 10:1-7; Rom. 2:7, 10; 10:15-18

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

You can't talk about Christianity without the Scripture. If you take Scripture away, you won't have much left. Although you might have a belief in God and might know a little bit about who Jesus is, you wouldn't know very much. That's a starting point and a reference point for all of us. Not that we're worshiping the Book, but we're engaged with the concepts that put us in proper relationship to God.¹

Because the Bible is so central to what Christians believe, at some point each of us has to settle what we think about the Book. Most disagreements between Christians and non-Christians come down to whether or not we think the Bible is true. A non-Christian might consider a few parts of the Bible curious. They might write some of its words on a sticky note for inspiration. They accept some points but not others. They approach the Bible like a salad bar: "I'll take that, I'll leave that, I'll take that, I'll leave that." But for Christians, the Bible is fully true. It is not a salad bar. It is a boxed lunch—take it or leave it.

When Christians make enormous claims about the Bible, they are in fact simply restating what the Bible says about itself. The Bible asserts that God authored the entire book down to every word. It also claims God did this through human authors. These authors retained their own style, voice, perspective, and cultural distinctives, yet God uniquely inspired them to write down what He wanted recorded with complete accuracy. This is different from the Koran or Book of Mormon, for example, which adherents of Islam and Mormonism claim were the result of someone taking dictation. This makes the Bible unique from, superior to, and in authority over everyone and everything else on the earth, because when the Bible speaks God speaks.²

WHAT ARE THE SCRIPTURES?

Scripture is God speaking his truth to us in human words. The New Testament writers claim that the Old Testament is sacred

DOCTRINE

Scripture, which literally means “writing.”^a The word Bible comes from the Greek word for book. Holy Bible means “Holy Book.” It was written in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and a bit in Aramaic) over a period of more than fifteen hundred years by roughly forty authors (of varying ages and backgrounds) on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe).

The Protestant Canon of Bible contains sixty-six separate books. Thirty-nine books, approximately three-quarters of the Bible, are in the Old Testament, which is a record of God’s speaking and working in history from when he created Adam and Eve, up until about 450 BC. In the period between the two testaments, people waited for the coming of the Messiah into human history. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament begin with the four Gospels, which record the life, death, burial, resurrection, and return to heaven of Jesus, and then proceed to instruct Christians and churches about how to think and live for God.

The Bible is a library of books compiled as one Book, showing a divine unity and continuity. This point is illustrated by the fact that the New Testament has roughly three hundred explicit Old Testament quotations, as well as upwards of four thousand allusions to the Old Testament. In many ways, the Old Testament is a series of promises that God makes, and the New Testament is the record of their fulfillment, and the anticipation of the final fulfillment of the remaining promises at Jesus’ Second Coming.

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time. The Old Testament was originally written on papyrus—a form of paper made out of reeds. By the time the New Testament was written, parchments (prepared animal skins) were also used.^b The pages were put together into scrolls.^c

Chapters and verses were added to provide addresses (not unlike those on our homes) that help us find particular sections.

^a Matt. 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Luke 24:25–32, 44–45; John 5:39; 10:35; Acts 17:2, 11; 18:28; Rom. 1:2; 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; 15:4; 16:26; 1 Cor. 15:3–4; Gal. 3:8, 22; 4:30; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; James 4:5; 2 Pet. 1:20–21; 3:15–16

^b 2 Tim. 4:13

^c Ezra 6:2; Ps. 40:7; Luke 4:17, 20

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

In 1205, Stephen Langton, a theology professor who became the archbishop of Canterbury, began using Bible chapters. In 1240, Cardinal Hugo of St. Cher published a Latin Bible with the 1,189 chapter divisions that exist today. Robert Stephanus, a Protestant book printer, was condemned as a heretic for printing Bibles. As he fled with his family to Geneva on horseback, he arbitrarily made verse divisions within Langton's chapter divisions. His system was used for the first English Bible (The Geneva New Testament of 1557) and became today's system of 31,173 verses. The Bible's chapters and verses were not applied with any consistent method and, while helpful, they are not authoritative. Because the Bible was not intended to be read in bits and pieces, reading verses out of context can lead to serious misunderstanding. Thus, rightly interpreting particular sections of Scripture requires paying attention both to the immediate context and the overall context of all of Scripture.

HOW IS JESUS THE HERO OF THE BIBLE?

The opening line of Scripture introduces us to its Hero, God, who is revealed throughout the rest of the pages of Scripture. In the closing line of the New Testament we are reminded that our hope is in "The grace of the Lord Jesus". Thus, the written Word of God reveals to us the incarnate ("in human flesh") Word of God, Jesus Christ. Without the written Word, we cannot rightly know the incarnate Word.

The Old and New Testament are about Jesus Christ – anyone can read the Bible, but only someone who reads it in the Spirit comes to this rightful conclusion. Some prefer the New Testament to the Old Testament because they wrongly believe that only the New Testament is about Jesus. However, Jesus himself taught that the Old Testament was primarily about him while arguing with the theologians in his day. In John 5:39-40 Jesus says, "You search the Scriptures [Old Testament] because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." The Bible is not just principles to live by, but a Person to live with.

Following his resurrection, Jesus opened the Old Testament to teach about himself: "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,

DOCTRINE

he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”^a Likewise, in speaking to his disciples, Jesus said, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”^b We then read that he “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”^c Jesus’ own words about himself as the central message of the Old Testament are pointedly clear. He said in Matthew 5:17-18, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Jesus repeated this fact throughout his ministry by saying he “fulfilled” particular Scriptures.^d To correctly interpret Scripture you will need to connect its verses, concepts, and events to Jesus.

The Old Testament predicts the coming of Jesus in a variety of ways to prepare people. The New Testament reflects back on the life of Jesus, particularly in the four Gospels, and reports the results of Jesus’ life and ministry, particularly in the Epistles.

The Old Testament uses various means to reveal Jesus, including promises, appearances, foreshadowing types, and titles. First, the Old Testament teaches about Jesus in the numerous prophetic promises given about him. More than one-quarter of the Old Testament was prophetic in nature, promising future events. No other world religion or cult can present any specific prophecies concerning the coming of their prophets. However, in the Old Testament we see hundreds of fulfilled prophecies extending hundreds and sometimes over a thousand years into the future, showing God’s foreknowledge of and sovereignty over the future.

Second, the Old Testament teaches about Jesus through appearances that He makes before His birth, also called Christophanies. Examples include walking with Abraham, wrestling with Jacob, appearing to Moses, joining Shadrach, Meshach, and

^a Luke 24:27

^b Luke 24:44

^c Luke 24:45

^d E.g., Matt. 26:56; Luke 4:20–21; 22:37

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

Abednego in the fiery furnace, and calling Isaiah into ministry.^a Other examples may include “the angel [messenger] of the LORD,” who is sometimes identified as God.^b This angel provided the sacrifice in Isaac’s place and spoke and journeyed with Moses.^c

Third, types are Old Testament representative figures, institutions, or events that foreshadow Jesus. Examples include Adam, who foreshadows Jesus the second Adam; the priesthood, prefiguring Jesus as our high priest; David and other kings, prefiguring Jesus as the King of kings; Moses and the prophets, prefiguring Jesus as our ultimate prophet; animal sacrifices, prefiguring Jesus as the sinless Lamb of God slain for our sins; the temple, prefiguring God’s presence dwelling among us in Jesus; shepherds reminding us sheep that Jesus is our Good Shepherd; judges, foreshadowing Jesus as the final judge of all people; and many others, such as Jesus the true bread, true vine, and true light.

We also see people in the Old Testament who perform various kinds of service that is analogous to the service that Jesus performs perfectly. Unlike the first Adam, Jesus Christ is the Last Adam who passed his test in a garden and in so doing imputed his righteousness to us to overcome the sin imputed to us through the sin of the first Adam. Jesus is the true and better Abel who, although he was innocent, was slain and whose blood cries out. When Abraham left his father and home, he was doing the same thing that Jesus would do when He left heaven. When Isaac carried his own wood and laid down his life to be sacrificed at the hand of his father Abraham, he was showing us what Jesus would later do. Jesus is the greater Jacob who wrestled with God in Gethsemane and, though wounded and limping, walked away from his grave blessed. Jesus is the greater Joseph who serves at the right hand of God the King and extends forgiveness and provision to those of us who have betrayed him, using His power to save us for loving reconciliation. Jesus is greater than Moses, standing as a mediator between God and us, bringing us the new covenant.

^a Genesis 18; cf. John 8:56; Gen. 32:30; Ex. 3:2–6; cf. John 8:58; Dan. 3:24–25; Isa. 6:1–5; cf. John 12:41

^b Judg. 6:11–21; 13:22

^c Gen. 22:9–14; Ex. 3:14; 23:20–21; cf. John 8:56–59

DOCTRINE

Like Job, innocent Jesus suffered and was tormented by the Devil so that God might be glorified, while His foolish friends were no help or encouragement. Jesus is a king greater than David; He has slain our giants of Satan, sin, and death, although in the eyes of the world He was certain to face a crushing defeat at their hands. Jesus is greater than Jonah in that He spent three days in the grave, not just in a fish, to save a multitude even greater than Nineveh. When Boaz redeemed Ruth and brought her and her despised people into community with God's people, he was showing what Jesus would do to redeem his bride, the church, from all the nations of the earth. When Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem, he was doing something similar to Jesus, who is building for us a New Jerusalem as our eternal home. When Hosea married an unfaithful wife that he continued to pursue in love, he was showing us the heart of Jesus, who does the same for His unfaithful bride, the church.

We also see various Old Testament events preparing people for the coming of Jesus Christ. For example, in the Exodus account of Passover, the people placed blood over the doorframe of their home with hyssop (a common herb bundled for cleaning) and no one was to leave their home until the morning. Death would not come to any home marked with lamb's blood. Peter says our salvation is given by Jesus Christ and "sprinkling with his blood."^a

Fourth, there are many titles for God in the Old Testament that refer to Jesus Christ as God. In Daniel 7:13-14, God is called the "son of man," and Jesus adopted that as his favorite title, using it some eighty times in the four Gospels. Jesus is the Suffering Servant that was promised in Isaiah.^b Jesus is also known by many other Old Testament titles for God, including first and last, light, rock, husband or bridegroom, shepherd, redeemer, savior, and the Lord of glory.^c

To properly understand the Old Testament, we must connect

^a 1 Pet. 1:2

^b Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 52:13-53:12; cf. Phil. 2:1-11

^c Isa. 41:4, 44:6, 48:12; cf. Rev. 1:17, 2:8, 22:3; Ps. 27:1; cf. John 1:9; Pss. 18:2, 95:1; cf. 1 Cor.10:4, 1 Pet. 2:6-8; Hos. 2:16, Isa. 62:5, cf. Eph. 5:28-33, Rev. 21:2.; Ps. 23:1, cf. Heb. 13:20; Hos. 13:14, Ps. 130:7, cf. Titus 2:13, Rev. 5:9; Isa. 43:3, cf. John 4:42; Isa. 42:8, cf. 1 Cor. 2:8

it to the person and work of Jesus. This should not be done in an allegorizing manner where arbitrary meanings foreign to Scripture are assigned to Old Testament words and images, thereby changing their meaning. Rather, the meaning of the Old Testament includes symbolism and identity that are most fully revealed in Jesus.

Unless Jesus is the central message of the Scriptures, errors abound. The most common is moralizing. Moralizing is reading the Bible not to learn about Jesus but only to learn principles for how to live life as a good person by following the good examples of some people and avoiding the bad examples of others. That kind of approach to the Scriptures is not Christian, because it treats the Bible like any other book with moral lessons that are utterly disconnected from faith in and salvation from Jesus and life empowered by the same Holy Spirit of Jesus.

WHO WROTE THE BIBLE?

As part of his teaching ministry, Jesus often taught his students (disciples) about the future. On a few occasions He promised the day He would leave them and send the Holy Spirit to perfectly remind them of his life and teachings, so that they could write and teach accurately and truthfully to complete the Bible.^o

The human authors of the Bible include kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, a doctor, and scholars. The books of the Bible cover history, sermons, letters, songs, and love letters. There are geographical surveys, architectural specifications, travel diaries, population statistics, family trees, inventories, and numerous legal documents.

Unlike any other book, the Bible is a book written by both God and man. Hundreds of times the Bible says, "thus says the Lord", and uses similar statements nearly four thousand times. It was not coauthored, however, as is what you are reading. It was not God and humans collaborating, or a human writing a draft with God making revisions, or God giving ideas that the human authors put into words. They were not words dictated to humans, as is falsely claimed with the Koran. The Bible is not human writings that become

^o John 14:25-26; 16:12-15

DOCTRINE

divine when the reader discovers spiritual meaning in them, as it is said of many Eastern religious writings. It is not one of many books containing the religious insights of ancient sages, as many liberals teach.

People who were providentially prepared by God, and motivated and superintended by the Holy Spirit, spoke and wrote according to their own personalities and circumstances in such a way that their words are the very Word of God.^a God's supernatural guidance of the writers and their situations enabled them to perfectly receive and communicate all God would have us know for his glory and our salvation.

We call this divine inspiration. Putting it a bit more technically, the writings themselves have the quality of being God-breathed. It is not the authors or the process that is inspired, but the writings.

The belief that God wrote Scripture in concert with human authors whom he inspired to perfectly record his words is called verbal (the very words of the Bible) plenary (every part of the Bible) inspiration (are God-breathed revelation).^b Very simply, this means that God the Holy Spirit inspired not just the thoughts of Scripture but also the very details and exact words that were perfectly recorded for us as Scripture.

When we say verbal, we believe that the very words are inspired and important, chosen by God, so every word does matter. That's why Jesus can say "not an iota, not a dot" of the Bible can be ignored.^c We cannot limit the divine inspiration to concepts that God put in the mind of human authors who did their best to put those ideas into words. Rather, his revelation comes to us in those exact words.

When we say plenary, we mean there are no parts of the Bible we don't believe or won't teach, preach or obey. We cannot be like Thomas Jefferson, who brazenly sat down in the White House with a razor in one hand and a Bible in the other and cut out the portions he rejected. We also cannot be like those who are more subtle than

^a Jer. 1:5, Gal. 1:15; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:20–21; Mark 12:36, 1 Cor. 14:37

^b Matt. 4:4, 1 John 1:1–3; Matt. 5:17, Rom. 15:4, 2 Tim. 3:16

^c Matt. 5:18

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

Jefferson and simply ignore parts of the Bible as primitive, dismiss them as outdated, or explain them away with human reasoning. Paul shows us the proper attitude toward Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

The very words of Scripture are miraculous revelation. Every part of Scripture is God's Word to us, the product of his creative breathing, just as the world, humans, and apostles were.^a It is helpful because it is the voice of our God who loves you, cares for you, converses with you, counsels you, comforts you, and confronts you. To get a word from God, all you have to do is open the Word of God.

2 Peter 1:19-21 echoes Paul's words:

We have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is not just made up like a fairy tale. Its authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit as a boat is carried by a breeze that fills its sails. Because the Scriptures come from God, they perfectly reveal things no human could know. For example, the writers of the Old Testament could not have made up prophesied details such as a virgin birth in the tiny town of Bethlehem hundreds of years in advance.^b If God had not moved them, they could not have seen the future in such detail. The God who knows and rules the future, also reveals it in Scripture.

^a Ps. 33:6; Gen. 2:7, Job 33:4; John 20:22

^b Isa. 7:14, Mic. 5:2

DOCTRINE

The biblical authors consciously knew they were writing Holy Scripture. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:37, "The things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord." He had the courage to give them a commandment from Jesus and then put his own command right alongside it, as having equal authority.^a Paul quotes the Old Testament as Holy Scripture: "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,'" and then he quotes Luke right alongside it, saying, "The laborer deserves his wages."^b Peter also compares the letters of Paul to "other Scriptures."^c

Taken all together, the Scriptures make incredible truth claims. The Scriptures are given by God's inspiration; the very words of God; all we need to know God; a perfect guide for life; pure; true; trustworthy; perfect; effective; powerful; not to be taken from or added to; for everyone; the standard by which all teaching is to be tested; to be obeyed. Speaking poetically, the Scriptures also claim to be sweet like honey; a lamp to guide our life; food for our soul; a fire that purifies and a hammer that breaks us; a sword; a seed for salvation planted in us; milk that nourishes us.^d

WHAT IS THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE?

The canon of Scripture is the collection of books that God has chosen, and the Church has recognized, as having divine authority in matters of faith and doctrine. The term comes from the Greek word *kanon* and the Hebrew word *qaneh*, both of which mean "a rule," or "measuring rod." The canon is an authority to which other truth claims are compared and by which they are measured. To speak of canonical writings is to speak of those books that are regarded as having divine authority. They are the books of our

^a 1 Cor. 7:10, 12

^b 1 Tim. 5:18

^c 2 Pet. 3:15–16

^d 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:19–21; 1 Thess. 2:13; Luke 16:29, 31; Prov. 6:23; Ps. 12:6, 119:140; Ps. 119:160, John 17:17; Prov. 30:5–6; Ps. 19:7; Isa. 55:11; Heb. 4:12; Deut. 4:2, 12:32; Rom. 16:25–27; Acts 17:11; James 1:22; Ps. 19:10; Ps. 119:105; Jer. 15:16; Jer. 23:29; Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12.; James 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:2

Bible.

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and twenty-seven books of the New Testament graciously preserved by God in the Bible are the inspired Word of God. The Protestant church recognized that these books constitute the complete canon inspired by God and received them as uniquely authoritative because they are God speaking to his people. F. F. Bruce says:

*One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa—at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397—but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities.*³

Time after time, Jesus and his apostles quoted from this distinctive body of authoritative writings. They designated them as “the Scripture,” “the Scriptures,” “the holy Scriptures,” “the sacred writings,” and so forth.^a They often introduced their quotations with “It is written”; that is, it stands firmly written.

We call these authoritative writings the Old Testament. Jewish people call them the Tanakh, an acronym formed from the first letters of Torah (Law), Naviim (Prophets), and Ketubim (Writings). We see this idea when Jesus explained to his disciples “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”^b It is important to note that the Tanakh includes the same material as the Protestant Old Testament, though they arrange the books differently.⁴

Beginning two hundred and fifty years before Christ, Greek-speaking Jews living in Alexandria translated the Old Testament into Greek, calling it the Septuagint. For some unknown reason,

^a John 7:38, Acts 8:32, Rom. 4:3; Matt. 21:42, John 5:39, Acts 17:11; Rom. 1:2; 2 Tim. 3:15

^b Luke 24:44

DOCTRINE

they changed the content of several books, added many books, and rearranged the order of the books.

Early Jewish Christians followed Jesus and used the same Old Testament books as found in the Hebrew Bible today, the canon that was formally ratified in a meeting of rabbis at Javneh in A.D. 90. But as the center of Christianity moved away from Jerusalem and Christians read and worshiped more in Greek than Hebrew, the books of the Septuagint were widely used. There was a long and complicated debate about the validity and status of these books. Eventually the Roman Catholic Church adopted many of the books of the Septuagint into its Latin version, called the Vulgate. They referred to them as deuterocanonical, which means secondary canon. As the Reformers attempted to rid the church of many tradition-based, Bible-less teachings and get back to the Bible, they also rejected the deuterocanonical books, calling them the Apocrypha. They kept the ordering of the Vulgate but returned to the authoritative books of Jesus, the Hebrew-speaking Jews, and the original Christians.

Today the Eastern Churches and the Catholic Churches accept the Apocrypha while Protestants remain with the books accepted by Hebrews then and now. It should be noted that accepting the Apocrypha would have no significant impact on the doctrinal teaching of the church. The errors of the Catholic Church came from using Apocryphal texts as seeds for speculation rather than from the teachings of the texts themselves.

The early church immediately recognized most of the books of the New Testament as canonical. The four Gospels, written to preserve and spread the story of Jesus to the whole church, were received gladly and universally, as were the writings of Paul, including 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus (also known as the Pastoral Letters). Acts, 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation were also universally recognized. However, Hebrews remained in dispute for several centuries, especially in the West, because of the anonymity of its author. The status of James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude fluctuated according to church, age, and individual judgment and are occasionally omitted from canonical lists. Some works of the apostolic fathers, such as the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the first and second epistles of Clement are

sporadically cited as potentially Scripture but are not included in formal canonical lists.

In the fourth century the church moved to settle the issues of the New Testament canon. In the East it was done in the Thirty-Ninth Paschal Letter of Athanasius in AD 367. In the West, the canon was fixed at the Council of Carthage in AD 397.

Was the New Testament canon disputed? Not really. Virtually all the books were immediately accepted. Did the church canonize the books? Not at all. Rather, they recognized and confirmed their canonical status. J.I. Packer writes:

The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly He gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up.⁵

How did the church know which books ought to be recognized as canonical? What were the criteria for canonicity? They used three primary criteria:

1. Conformity to “the rule of faith.” Did the book conform to orthodoxy, Christian truth recognized as normative in the churches?
2. Apostolicity. Was the writer of the book an apostle or did the writer of the book have immediate contact with the apostles? All but a few New Testament writers were eyewitnesses to the events they recorded.^a Though not eyewitnesses, Luke received his information from Paul and numerous eyewitnesses, while Mark received his information from Peter, who was an eyewitness. James and Jude were closely associated with the apostles in Jerusalem and were probably Jesus’ brothers, which would have also made them eyewitnesses.^b
3. Catholicity. Did the book have widespread and continuous acceptance and usage by churches everywhere?

^a John 19:35; 20:30–31; Acts 1:1–3, 9; 10:39–42; 1 Cor. 15:6–8; 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 John 1:1–3

^b 2 Tim. 4:11; Luke 1:1–4; 1 Pet. 5:13

DOCTRINE

In considering the great agreement surrounding the canon of Scripture, scholars have said:

The fact that substantially the whole church came to recognize the same twenty-seven books as canonical is remarkable when it is remembered that the result was not contrived. All that the several churches throughout the Empire could do was to witness to their own experience with the documents and share whatever knowledge they might have about their origin and character. When consideration is given to the diversity in cultural backgrounds and in orientation to the essentials of the Christian faith within the churches, their common agreement about which books belonged to the New Testament serves to suggest that this final decision did not originate solely at the human level.⁶

CAN I TRUST THAT MY BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?

If you have a good modern translation of the Bible, then you have almost exactly what the ancient authors wrote. It is amazing that people try to argue that we cannot trust the Bible because we do not have the original copies. The same is true of Plato, Sophocles, Homer, or Caesar Augustus.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, our oldest copies of the Old Testament dated from about AD 900. We knew the extreme care the rabbis used to copy the sacred text before they destroyed the worn one. But still, the copies we had were historically distant from the original (called the autographa). But then in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered at Qumran. Suddenly we had copies of much of the Old Testament that were more than a thousand years older than our previous oldest copies, including some 40,000 ancient inscriptions. From these fragments more than 500 books have been reconstructed, including some Old Testament books, such as a complete copy of Isaiah.

A comparison of the Qumran manuscript of Isaiah with the Masoretic text from AD 1000 showed the most minor variations, mostly spelling (like the American honor and the British honour) or stylistic changes such as adding a conjunction. Checking the pivotal

text of Isaiah 53, we find that out of the 166 words in that chapter, only one word is really in question, and it does not at all change the meaning of the passage. The Qumran text added the word “light” after “he shall see” in verse 11. It’s a word that was implied but not actually written. Our confidence in the text was confirmed.

In the case of the New Testament, we have more than 20,000 handwritten manuscripts in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic and other ancient languages including almost 6000 Greek manuscripts with fragments written no later than 50 years after the original books and letters. In addition, we have more than one million quotations of the New Testament by church fathers. This is truly amazing because the Bible was copied onto fragile materials like papyrus. The copies weren’t stored anywhere that protected them from the elements, but in God’s providence they still survived.

As we compare copies of both Old and New Testament, we do find variations, but most of the variations in the many handwritten copies involve spelling, word order, or style. We would expect such minor human error no matter how careful the scribes were. Less than 1 percent of all the variations have anything to do with doctrine, and no doctrine is affected by any variation.

Lastly, Jesus himself used copies and translations. He trusted them, so we should too, especially when the science of textual criticism has confirmed that our text is accurate. Because we have so many manuscripts to check, we are virtually certain that the text of the New Testament is 99.5% textually pure.^a In the entire text of 20,000 lines, only 40 lines are in doubt (about 400 words), and even Bible critics agree that none of these affects any significant doctrine.^b

CAN SCRIPTURE BE WRITTEN TODAY?

The only people who could write Scripture were prophets and apostles—people who were witnesses of God’s revelation in Jesus,

^a Geisler, Norman L., Nix, William E., *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 475.

^b *Ibid.*

DOCTRINE

or authors like Luke who based his Gospel on eyewitness testimony and on the report of the apostles who were eyewitnesses.^a

Books of the Bible cannot be written today for two primary reasons. First, the Old Testament ended with the prophet Malachi promising that the next major event in redemptive history would be the coming of John the Baptist, preparing the way for Jesus.^b Four hundred years followed during which time no book of the Bible was written until John came, as promised.^c Likewise, the New Testament ends with its final book, Revelation, telling us that no other books of the Bible are to be written following it, as the Bible is completed as we await Jesus' Second Coming.^d

Today, we are like God's people in the days between Malachi's promise and Jesus' coming. We know the future but are awaiting its coming. We do not need any more Scripture, but rather the fulfillment of the promises we have already received.

Second, the Bible says that Jesus is God's final word to us and that we should not add anything to the Bible.^e Furthermore, we have no need for any new book of the Bible because we already have all we need for faith and godliness. If there were some knowledge that all Christians desperately needed, God would certainly not have waited some two-thousand years to reveal it while His people sat in the darkness of partial knowledge.

Simply stated, the canon of Scripture is closed. No books, not even a word, will be added to the Bible. John's warning at the end of Revelation (22:18-19) applies to the Bible as a whole:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

^a Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3, 9

^b Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6

^c Luke 1:11-17

^d Rev. 22:18-19; Rev. 22:20-21

^e Heb. 1:1-2; Deut. 4:2, 12:32, Prov. 30:5-6

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

This does not mean that God's special revelation has ceased. God still speaks to people and groups, albeit not in apostolic, inspired, canonical revelation. Examples include such things as predictive prophecies, audible speech, dreams, visions, angelic visits, and the like that Scripture itself speaks of.

In dealing with any alleged extra-biblical revelation, we must follow the biblical cautions. We must be neither gullible nor skeptical. On one hand, 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 says we must "not despise prophecies," but instead, "test everything; hold fast what is good." 1 John 4:1 says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

The following six biblical guidelines are for testing those who allege to have extra-biblical revelation, including prophesy:

1. Are they loyal to the LORD?^a
2. Is their word consistent with the Bible?^b
3. Is what they describe or predict accurate?^c
4. Is their character Christlike?^d
5. Does their word build up and encourage the church in truth?^e
6. Do Spirit-filled church leaders affirm their word?^f

WHY IS SCRIPTURE AUTHORITATIVE?

Holy Scripture is God speaking. That simple but profound statement is why Christians believe that Scripture is our highest authority by which all other lesser authorities are tested. Practically, this means that lesser courts of reason, tradition, and culture are under the highest court of truth, which is divinely inspired Scripture. By contrast, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches teach that Scripture is a part of the larger pool of revelation that the church uses in its teaching. For them, authority is not in the Bible

^a Deut. 13:1–11; 18:20

^b Deut. 13:1–11, 1 Kings 13:15–18

^c Deut. 18:22

^d Jer. 23:9–40, Mic. 3:5–10

^e 1 Cor. 14:3

^f 1 Cor. 14:29

itself, but in the teaching office of the church.

Others appeal to the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral: *Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. Scripture [however] is primary, revealing the Word of God "so far as it is necessary for our salvation."*⁷

In practice, though, the Bible often becomes just one of four major sources of authority to be balanced. Thus, when contemporary critical theories of the Bible start to be taken seriously, the Bible often is judged by other authorities.

The central development of the Protestant Reformation was the return to Scripture as supreme authority. The Reformers coined the slogan "sola Scriptura" (sometimes *prima Scriptura*) to summarize this conviction. Nothing judges Scripture. It judges everything else. As followers of Jesus, we take the same stance He did and receive the Bible alone as infallible, inerrant truth from God with full authority over our lives.

The Bible is a living book of God authoritatively speaking as a perfect Father to children He dearly loves about how to live godly lives. For example, it commands us to "put away falsehood" and "speak the truth with [our] neighbor," not as arbitrary rules of conduct but as church family members who are "members one of another."^a It is a story of what is best in God's loving family of the Spirit. It is the story of the God of redemption rescuing us from rebellion, brokenness, sin, and death. Its authority is that in these inspired words we find how to connect with the forgiving and transforming power of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

IS THE BIBLE SUFFICIENT OR ALL I NEED FOR LIFE WITH GOD?

The Protestant Reformers' slogan "sola Scriptura" means that Scripture alone is our court of highest authority. This should not be confused with "solo Scriptura", which is the erroneous belief that truth is to be found only in Scripture and nowhere else.

^a Eph. 4:25

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

Scripture itself speaks of lesser courts of lower authority that Christians should obey: we should submit to the authority of pastors, government, and parents up to the limits of disobeying the highest authority of Scripture.^a

The Bible itself models the fact that there is at least some truth outside of the Bible when it occasionally quotes other books, such as the *Book of Jashar* and the *Book of the Wars of the Lord*.^b In quoting them, the Bible is not saying that they should be included as sacred Scripture but rather that they do contain some truth. Likewise, a mechanic, doctor, or computer programmer does not have to consult Leviticus to turn a brake drum, perform open-heart surgery, or make an addition to a software program.

Regarding the sufficiency of Scripture, the Bible and the Bible alone teaches a complete Christian worldview that includes what we need to know about God, how to come into relation with him, who Jesus is and what he did for our salvation, and what will happen at the end of history. One example is perhaps most clarifying in understanding the sufficiency of Scripture. Jesus tells the story of a man who died in unbelief and was suffering in torment. Jesus explains how the man in anguish had a conversation with Abraham across a chasm that separated those who had died in faith from those who had died in unbelief in the days prior to Jesus opening heaven. The man in anguish was concerned for his five brothers who remained alive and in unbelief. Luke 16:29–31 reports:

Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." And he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

Jesus was emphatically clear that the Scriptures alone are sufficient for all that is needed to know God and enjoy His salvation. As Abraham said in Jesus' story, the Scriptures are even clearer and

^a Heb. 13:17; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17–20; 1 Pet. 2:13–15; cf. Acts 4:19; 5:29; Rom. 13:1, 5; cf. Acts 16:35–40

^b Josh. 10:13, 2 Sam. 1:18; Num. 21:14

more compelling than the testimony of a man returned from death to give a personal report of the consequence for dying in unbelief.

WHY ARE THERE DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS OF SCRIPTURE?

For centuries the Eastern church had the Bible only in Greek. The Western church had the Bible only in Latin. Since most people were not fluent in these languages, they were unable to read the Bible themselves. One of the great developments of the Protestant Reformation was to return the Bible to the people in their own language. Martin Luther and John Wycliffe are just two of the men who risked their lives to translate the Bible into German and English. William Tyndale was charged with heresy and condemned to death for translating the Bible into English. According to Foxe's Book of Martyrs, he "was tied to the stake, strangled by the hangman, and afterwards consumed with fire," simply because he wanted people to be able to read the Bible.⁸

Today, part of the Bible has been translated into at least 2,454 languages, at least one of the two Testaments exists in at least 1,168 languages, and the full Bible is available in at least 438 languages.⁹ During the past four centuries there have been hundreds of English Bible translations, and dozens are actively used today. They fall into three major categories.

1. Word for Word Translations

Word-for-word translations (or formal equivalence translations) emphasize the patterns of the words and seek "as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer...Thus it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original."¹⁰ The goal is precision like one would expect in other important communications, such as legal documents, marriage vows, or contracts.

Word-for-word translations have advantages for studying because of their closeness to the original, though they sometimes become a bit stilted stylistically because the biblical languages use different patterns of grammar and expression from English.

Among the best contemporary word-for-word translations is the English Standard Version (ESV). The King James Version (KJV) is also a word-for-word translation and remains the best-selling English translation. It sounds very reverent to many people, but it is difficult for some people to read because it uses old English when the Greek New Testament was, in fact, written in the common language of ordinary people. Other good word-for-word English translations include the New King James Version (NKJV) and the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

2. Thought-for-Thought Translations

Thought-for-thought translations (also called dynamic equivalence or functional equivalence) attempt to convey the full nuance of each passage by interpreting the Scripture's entire meaning and not just the individual words. Such versions seek to find the best modern cultural equivalent that will have the same effect the original message had in its ancient cultures.

A favorite thought-for-thought modern English translation, the New International Version (NIV), is also the most popular. Others include the New Living Translation (NLT) and the Contemporary English Version (CEV).

3. Paraphrase Translations

Paraphrased translations put the emphasis on readability in English. Therefore, they pay even less attention to specific word patterns in an attempt to capture the poetic or narrative essence of a passage. Examples of paraphrased translations include The Message (MESSAGE), The Living Bible (TLB), The Passion Translation (TPT) and The Amplified Bible (AMP).

All faithful Bible translations try to achieve a balance of four elements:

1. Accuracy to the original text as much as possible.
2. Beauty of language.
3. Clarity of meaning.
4. Dignity of style.

While some translations are better than others, each has

various strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, rather than fighting over translations, Christians should praise God for every good translation, study multiple translations, and trust God the Holy Spirit to use them to transform our lives as we enjoy them.

For serious study we encourage comparing a formal equivalence translation, a dynamic equivalence translation, a good Catholic translation (New American or New Jerusalem Bible), a Jewish translation of the Old Testament, and a translation into a language other than English. That will enable you to get behind ambiguities of particular wordings or interpretations in translation.

We would encourage you to use the English Standard Version or another good word-for-word translation as your primary study tool, while also using other translations as secondary resources. Noted theologian and ESV general editor J.I. Packer reflected, "I find myself suspecting very strongly that my work on the translation of the ESV Bible was the most important thing that I have done for the Kingdom, and that the product of our labors is perhaps the biggest milestone in Bible translation in the past fifty years or more."¹¹

While Christians should enjoy multiple good translations, they must be careful of corruptions. Corruptions are counterfeit and deceptive "translations" of Scripture that undermine the very teaching of Scripture. These include the Jehovah's Witness' New World Translation, written to eliminate the deity of Jesus Christ. Just like demons masquerade as angels, some brazen lies masquerade as Biblical truth.

ARE THERE GOOD ANSWERS TO COMMON OBJECTIONS TO THE BIBLE?

In a research project that culminated in the book *Christians Might Be Crazy*, I commissioned researchers to discover the primary objections and questions regarding Christianity among the unchurched (people without church history), and the dechurched (people who used to go to church but no longer do). The research included more than nine hundred thousand phone calls, survey interviews with one thousand people, and eight focus groups (male and female) in four major American cities that resulted in over four hundred pages of transcribed conversations about the Bible and

Christianity. Regarding the Bible, the following objections appeared most frequently.

"The Bible has been edited by too many people."

People in every focus group said the Bible has undergone so many changes throughout its history that we no longer have access to its original message. One man echoed many saying, "The people that are obeying it to the letter of the words, they might not be following what Jesus really said because it's been passed down from so many different people, so many different scholars. It's been edited by too many people. So, do we really know what the word of God in the Bible is? We don't, there's no way to know."

In the days before the printing press and electronic files, trained scribes copied manuscripts letter by letter to preserve and disseminate them. While critics object that we do not possess the original autograph, the ancient age and quantity of copies we do have on hand means we are nevertheless certain of the Bible's original message.

As far as New Testament documents, Dr. Darrell Bock said in an interview with me, "We have access to literally thousands of manuscripts and fragments that are used in translating the Bible, not a long chain of degraded translations..." And, "We have over 5,800 Greek manuscripts of one sort or another."¹²

There are another 15,000 copies in other ancient languages. This compares with fewer than a dozen copies of most ancient works. Tragically, opponents of Scripture have attacked its trustworthiness by falsely stating that our current English translations are built upon poorly transmitted copies. However, the bibliographical test of Scripture fatly refutes this argument. This test determines the historicity of an ancient text by analyzing the quantity and quality of copied manuscripts, as well as how far removed they are from the time of the originals, the autographs mentioned earlier. In the next section we will examine this fact in greater detail.

The quantity of New Testament manuscripts is unparalleled in ancient literature. There are about 5,800 Greek manuscripts and about 15,000 manuscripts in other languages.

As the following chart illustrates, both the number of transmitted

D O C T R I N E

manuscripts we possess of Scripture and their proximity in date to the autographs are unparalleled when compared to other ancient documents.¹³

Author	Work	Date Written	Earliest MSS	Time Gap	Manu- scripts
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400	1,757
Herodotus	History	480-425 BC	10th C.	1,350	109
Sophocles	Plays	496-406 BC	3rd C. BC	100-200	193
Plato	Tetralogies	400 BC	895	1,300	210
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	9th C.	950	251
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 BC-AD 17	Early 5th C.	400	150
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	AD 100	1st half: 850, 2nd: 1050 (AD 1100)	750-950	2+31 15th C.
Pliny, the Elder	<i>Natural History</i>	AD 49-79	5th C fragment: 1; Rem. 14th-15th C.	400 (750)	200
Thucydides	History	460-400 BC	3rd C. BC (AD 900)	200 (1,350)	96
Demosthenes	Speeches	300 BC	Some fragments from 1 C. BC (AD 1100)	1,100+ (1400)	340
New Testament		AD 50-100	AD 130 (or less)	40	5,795

In our interview, Dr. Darrell Bock adds, "If we're going to discount the text of the New Testament, we should shut down our classics departments in universities around the country. We would

have to reject the content of most of the works we use to understand ancient history. The idea that we don't know the text of the New Testament documents is simply something close to crazy. We've got by far more manuscript evidence for the text of the New Testament than any other ancient work. And it's by miles, it's not just close."¹⁴

Additionally, we find that "the vast majority of these variations involve mere changes in spelling, grammar, and style, or accidental omissions or duplications of letters, words, or phrases," according to New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg.¹⁵ "Overall, 97 to 99 percent of the original Greek New Testament can be reconstructed beyond any reasonable doubt. Moreover, no Christian doctrine is founded solely, or even primarily, on any textually disputed passage."¹⁶

The Bible is not a collection of fables and legends assembled over long periods of time. The book we hold in our hands faithfully reflects what God spoke through the original authors.

In our interview, Bock highlighted a second faulty assumption about the transmission of Scripture. "Many people think the Bible was written in some ancient language long ago but has since been translated and re-translated over and over into so many different languages that we cannot trust it anymore. The reality is that teams of translators/scholars painstakingly go back to the original Greek and Hebrew to create Bibles in English and other tongues of people around the world. These linguistic experts have as much or more schooling than many rocket scientists, and their work is open to evaluation by anyone who wants to wade into the details."¹⁷

"The Bible says..."

People often judge the Bible based on what they think it says. Here is a sample of some of the claims we heard in our focus groups:

"You're supposed to sell your first daughter into slavery." The Bible says no such thing.

"Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day, and teach a man to fish and he'll be fed forever." Literary types think they can trace back to the story "Mrs. Dymond" by Anne Isabella Thackeray Ritchie (1837-1919).¹⁸

"The Old Testament character Job [had sex with] his daughters.

DOCTRINE

Incest is allowed according to the Bible.” Actually, the Bible repeatedly condemns incest and the exceptionally righteous man Job did no such thing. Our participant might have been thinking of Lot’s daughters, who got their dad drunk in an effort to get pregnant (Gen. 19:30–38). That episode is a horrific story that illustrates the principle that the Bible often describes behaviors it never prescribes. It often records awful events as a warning, not as a recommendation on how to live.

“The Bible teaches Jesus was born on Christmas.” In fact, the Bible makes no attempt to clarify the date Jesus was born. The traditional observance of Jesus’ birth on December 25 started during the reign of the Roman emperor Constantine (AD 306–337).

“The Bible is full of contradictions.”

This is no small complaint. Why should anyone agree with a book that can’t agree with itself? One woman spoke for many when she said the Bible had no shortage of passages that say completely opposite things. She felt it was “mindboggling” that anyone believes the Bible.

People who make these claims are often simply parroting what they have heard. So, when they say “contradictions,” it is more than fair for you to say, “Show me.” But we also have to be honest. While the Bible claims to be true, trustworthy, perfect, and God-breathed, it does not claim to always be easy to understand.

2 Peter 3:15-16 (NLT) says, “And remember, our Lord’s patience gives people time to be saved. This is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him—speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture. And this will result in their destruction.”

Peter packs a lot into those words. He declares that the letters Paul wrote as “Scripture” alongside other Bible books, showing that Paul’s writings—13 or 14 (there’s a debate on who wrote Hebrews) of the 27 books in the New Testament—were accepted as sacred as soon as they were written. Peter had to admit that even though Paul wrote with God-given wisdom, his letters contained comments that were tough to understand. Nevertheless, people are not free

to interpret this, or any passage of Scripture, however they want. Already some “ignorant and unstable” people were twisting Paul’s writings and other Scriptures, resulting in their destruction.

If it appears that there is a contradiction in Scripture, we should first dig deeply into our Bible to see if what appears to be an error is, in fact, not an error once we have examined it more closely.¹⁹ In the end, it is perfectly reasonable to say that we do not have an answer for every question, we are always learning so the answer might come later, or when we get to heaven the answer will be clear. With our three pound fallen brains, humility requires that we begin by assuming we may be wrong, or simply not understand, many things in and out of the Bible.

As Christians, we trust that God makes clear the true essentials of our faith, a principle called the perspicuity of Scripture. We also humbly admit that sometimes the Bible feels challenging because we don’t like what it says. Our problem often is less that we don’t understand what it says and more that we don’t agree or don’t want to obey. This is especially true of sexual sin, as the Bible is a lot clearer than many people had hoped. Thankfully, there are entire books that reason through the toughest points of Scripture.²⁰

“The New Testament was largely written by people who didn’t even know Jesus.”

A woman in Austin exposed a common attitude toward Bible accounts, claiming the New Testament was written by people who had never met Jesus, “To me Jesus is this guy who lived and then they wanted to create a religion around him and so they changed the end of what they call the Old Testament, the Torah, and built this new religion.”

Earlier in this chapter, we established the fact that the New Testament is testimony from eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life and ministry. The Bible also says that upward of 500 witnesses saw Jesus risen from death at one time, and most were still alive and willing to testify about it publicly at the time.^a

These details are intensely relevant. Devout Jews who believed

^a 1 Cor. 15:1–8

DOCTRINE

that the act of worshipping a false God would damn them to hell forever started worshipping their friend, brother, and son as God. Many were tortured and died as martyrs without one of them ever recanting that Jesus was God who rose from death. Additionally, many of the historically verifiable early church leaders such as Polycarp, who was martyred for his testimony of Jesus, were disciples of the Apostles.

Some people imagine that a chronological gap between Jesus' life and the writing of His story made room for corruption, legends, and myths to develop. In actuality, the time between the New Testament events and their recording is very short, especially compared with other ancient documents. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15:1–8 about Jesus' resurrection, within about 25 years. Eyewitnesses were alive to object if what Paul wrote and the church taught were historically inaccurate. The earliest surviving manuscript fragment of the New Testament—from the Gospel of John—dates to about AD 130, within decades of when John penned his Gospel in AD 70–100. New Testament scholar Daniel Wallace reports that a fragment of Mark may date to the first century, even earlier than the one from John.²¹

“There are some stories that are kept in and some stories that were kicked out.”

Participants across our focus groups believed that many early Christians played fast and loose with the facts about Jesus, including only select details when they compiled the Bible. A woman in Austin said, “They put together the whole New Testament so there’s [sic] some stories that are kept in and some stories that were kicked out. I think some of the real history is in there. I just don’t think we have all of the story.” A San Francisco woman shared, “I’ve heard the Vatican hides sections of the Bible that portray Jesus in a more negative light.” And another Austin woman noted, “In the Bible there’s [sic] 26 original gospels. Only four of them got put in the Bible. I think that maybe there’s [sic] more to that.”

Our focus groups repeatedly mentioned Dan Brown’s novel *The Da Vinci Code*, which popularized the idea that there were numerous competing “gospels” and church leaders chose their favorites and rejected others, including the Gospel of Thomas,

the Gospel of Barnabas, the Gospel of Philip, or even the Gospel of Judas. Whenever these "other gospels" get bursts of media attention, it seems to challenge the credibility of the Bible. There are a couple obvious reasons these "other gospels" are unreliable as genuine history about Jesus.

Dan Brown built much of the storyline of his best-selling book, *The Da Vinci Code*, on the premise that the church selected the four canonical Gospels from eighty similar books.²² The others, it is said, were stamped out by "a Church that had subjugated women, banished the Goddess, burned non-believers, and forbidden the pagan reverence for the sacred feminine."²³

In fact, however, even by the most generous count, there are fewer than thirty "gospels." Only the canonical Gospels date from the first century. The earliest of the others was written more than one hundred years after Jesus lived. Most of them are dated at least two hundred years after Jesus. Contrary to false accusation, not one of these "lost gospels" was hidden by the church. Furthermore, no "lost" gospels have been discovered. All of the discovered books were referred to in the church fathers' writings because they knew of their existence but simply did not consider them sacred Scripture. Some older or more complete copies of them have been discovered, most significantly in the Egyptian Nag Hammadi site. 2 Peter 1:16 rightly calls these kinds of claims about lost gospels and suppressed teachings about Jesus "cleverly devised myths" with no basis in fact or reality.

There is no reason to be concerned about any lost gospels containing truth that we need about God. Anyone curious about their truthfulness should simply read them. The Gospel of Philip purportedly says that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married. In fact, it says, "And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene, [...] her more than the disciples [...] kiss her on her [...]. The rest of [...]. They said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?'" (The ellipses in brackets indicate where the papyrus is broken and lost.) To say the least, this is extremely slender evidence for Jesus' marriage that some purport, even if this very late, clearly Gnostic gospel was accepted as authentic, which it is not.

The Gospel of Thomas is one of the earlier and most widely affirmed Gnostic gospels. It is not a gospel in the sense of a

DOCTRINE

narrative that tells the story of Jesus. Rather, it consists of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus, some of which clearly parallel sayings in the canonical Gospels.

But that is where the similarity ends. It was written at least a century after the four biblical Gospels, long after the eyewitnesses to Jesus Christ were dead. It clearly reflects Gnostic theology built on a belief system that despised earthly and material realities and exalted the “higher” spiritual plane. The “god” of Thomas is a second-rate angelic being who rebelliously created this physical world. Humans are presented as spiritual beings ensnared in a wretched physical body. The only attention given to the humanity of Jesus was when trying to excuse it. The canonical Gospels, however, provide a very different picture of Jesus: a man who is fully human, in body and spirit, and who had disciples and friends, both male and female.

To make the differences between the real Gospels in the Bible and the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas clear, just read its final adage where only men can enter heaven:

Simon Peter said to him, “Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.” Jesus said, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.” (114)

Regarding the wrongly termed “lost gospels,” New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg has said:

In no meaningful sense did these writers, church leaders, or councils “suppress” Gnostic or apocryphal material, since there is no evidence of any canon that ever included them, nor that anyone put them forward for canonization, nor that they were known widely enough to have been serious candidates for inclusion had someone put them forward. Indeed, they would have failed all three of the major criteria used by the early church in selecting which books they were, at times very literally, willing to die for—the criteria of apostolicity (that a book was written by an apostle or a close associate of an

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

apostle), coherence (not contradicting previously accepted Scripture), and catholicity (widespread acceptance as particularly relevant and normative within all major segments of the early Christian community).²⁴

To be fair, there are a handful of other ancient books that have some good content. The Shepherd of Hermas and the Didache were appreciated by the early church and are akin to some popular Christian books today. Helpful like C.S. Lewis? Yes. Bible? No. Only a few individual churches and teachers wanted them included in the canon. Simply, they were not accepted because they were not God's Word for his whole church.

From the very earliest days, the church knew which books were God's inspired Word for them in the same way that a child knows who their parent is in a crowd. They read them, studied them, obeyed them, lived them, and passed them on. We should do the same without adding anything to the Scriptures. Proverbs 30:5-6 says, "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar."

"Christianity borrowed from ancient religions."

"If you look at Egyptian cultures," said Kirk from the Phoenix focus group, "there's the story of a virgin birth in there somewhere, and if you look at it even further..." That was one assertion among many, that Christianity stole its best ideas from outside sources.

The easiest way to decide if early believers indeed borrowed key elements like the resurrection from other ancient religions is to read those supposed sources. The story about a corn god died, was buried, and came back to life as new crops is not exactly the Jesus story. Neither is the yarn about Osiris and Isis, Egypt's ultimate power couple. In the oldest version of the myth, the divine Osiris is killed and dismembered, with his body parts scattered across Egypt. His wife, Isis, retrieved every last piece—save for his phallus, which unfortunately had been gobbled up by fish. Isis made a gold phallus and sang a song to bring Osiris back to life. Osiris then impregnated Isis, and she gave birth to the new king, Horus. And did we mention that Isis was Osiris' sister?

DOCTRINE

It is hard to see how we should consider myths like these as inspiration for stories of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is an actual historical event attested to by eyewitnesses. After thoroughly researching ancient beliefs about resurrection, theologian N. T. Wright concludes: "Nobody in the pagan world of Jesus' day and thereafter actually claimed that somebody had been truly dead and had then come to be truly, and bodily, alive once more."²⁵

Edwin Yamauchi has immersed himself in no less than 22 languages and is an expert in ancient history, including Old Testament history and biblical archaeology, with an emphasis on the interrelationship between ancient near Eastern cultures and the Bible. He is widely regarded as an expert in ancient history, early church history, and Gnosticism. He has published over 80 articles in more than 3 dozen scholarly journals and has been awarded eight fellowships. His writing includes contributing chapters to multiple books, as well as books on Greece, Babylon, Persia, and ancient Africa. After a lifetime of careful academic study on this issue, Yamauchi has concluded that there is no possibility that the idea of a resurrection was borrowed because there is no definitive evidence for the teaching of a deity resurrection in any of the mystery religions prior to the second century.²⁶

In fact, it seems that other religions and spiritualities stole the idea of a resurrection from Christians! For example, the resurrection of Adonis is not spoken of until the second to fourth centuries.²⁷ Attis, the consort of Cybele, is not referred to as a resurrected god until after AD 150.²⁸

Some have postulated that the taurobolium ritual of Attis and Mithra, the Persian god, is the source of the biblical doctrine of the resurrection. In this ritual, the initiate was put in a pit, and a bull was slaughtered on a grating over him, drenching him with blood. However, the earliest this ritual is mentioned is AD 160, and the belief that it led to rebirth is not mentioned until the fourth century. Princeton scholar Bruce Metzger has argued that the taurobolium was said to have the power to confer eternal life only after it encountered Christianity.²⁹

In summary, whatever similarities might exist between points of

Jesus' story and ancient religions, it is far more likely that the other faith borrowed from Christianity than vice-versa.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR REASONS CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

We believe that what the Bible teaches is true, so we come to the Bible with what J. I. Packer calls "an advance commitment to receive as truth from God all that Scripture is found on inspection actually to teach."³⁰ In the same way, the wives we love who have only been good to us throughout our years together get the benefit of the doubt when they tell us something – because of their character we begin by assuming that what they say to us is loving and true.

We believe that all that the Bible teaches is truth from God, whether statements of fact about earth, heaven, humans, or God, or moral commands, or divine promises. This has been the universal affirmation of the church until the time of the Enlightenment, when acceptance in the secular academy led some biblical scholars to base their conclusions on culturally misguided reason rather than on revelation and reality.

The affirmation of the truthfulness of the Bible is tied to the character of God. God is a truthful God who does not lie.^a Therefore, because God is ultimately the author of Scripture, it is perfect, unlike every other uninspired writing and utterance.

Taken altogether, inerrancy is the shorthand way of summarizing all that the Scriptures say about Scripture. Inerrant means that the Scriptures are perfect, without any error. The doctrine of inerrancy posits that because God does not lie or speak falsely in any way, and because the Scriptures are God's Word, they are perfect.^b As a result, the entire Bible is without any error.^c

The Bible claims to be wholly true and therefore inerrant. We find such explicit statements in passages such as 2 Samuel 7:28, "O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true"; Psalm 19:7–10, which uses words such as perfect, sure, right, pure, true,

^a Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2

^b 1 Sam. 7:28; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18

^c Num. 23:19; Ps. 12:6; 119:89; Prov. 30:5–6

DOCTRINE

and righteous; Psalm 119:42–43, 142, 151, 160, 163, which uses the specific word truth or true; and John 17:17, “Your word is truth.” Second Timothy 3:16 rightly says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God.”

Unlike the Bible, however, those of us who read and study it, are not inerrant in our understanding of it. The Bible itself gives us much cause for humility as we approach the Scriptures because:

- God’s thoughts are much loftier than ours^a
- God has secrets that he has not revealed to anyone^b
- Sometimes we see the truth as if through a dirty and fogged window^c
- We are prone to resist God’s truth because it forces us to repent, and sometimes we are simply hard-hearted^d
- We know in part^e
- Some parts of the Bible are just hard to understand^f

A telling example of the Bible’s accuracy is in the transliteration of the names of foreign kings in the Old Testament as compared to contemporary extra-biblical records, such as monuments and tablets. The Bible is accurate in every detail in the thirty-six instances of comparison, a total of 183 syllables. To see how amazing this is, Manetho’s ancient work on the dynasties of the Egyptian kings can be compared to extra-biblical records in 140 instances. He is right forty-nine times, only partially right twenty-eight times, and in the other sixty-three cases not a single syllable is correct! The Bible’s accuracy is shown not only in the original work but in its copies as well.³¹

Luke correctly identifies by name, title, job, and time such historical individuals as Annas, Ananias, Herod Agrippa I, Herod Agrippa II, Sergius Paulus, the Egyptian prophet, Felix, and Festus.⁹

^a Isa. 55:9

^b Deut. 29:29

^c 1 Cor. 13:12

^d Rom. 1:18–19

^e 1 Cor. 13:9

^f 2 Pet. 3:15–16

⁹ Acts 4:6; Acts 23:2; Acts 12:1–3, 20, 23; Acts 25:13–26:32; Acts 13:7; Acts 21:38; Acts 23:23–24:27; Acts 24:27

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

Political titles were very diverse and difficult to keep straight since every province had its own terms and, worse yet, the terms constantly changed. Yet Luke gets them right: a proconsul in Cypress and Achaia, the undeserved title Praetor in Philippi, the otherwise unknown title of Politarchs in Thessalonica, Asiarchs in Ephesus, and “the chief man” in Malta.^a

The descriptions of local custom and culture are equally accurate. As John Elder states:

It is not too much to say that it was the rise of the science of archaeology that broke the deadlock between historians and the orthodox Christian. Little by little, one city after another, one civilization after another, one culture after another, whose memories were enshrined only in the Bible, were restored to their proper places in ancient history by the studies of archaeologists...Contemporary records of biblical events have been unearthed and the uniqueness of biblical revelation has been emphasized by contrast and comparison to newly discovered religions of ancient peoples. Nowhere has archaeological discovery refuted the Bible as history.³²

This affirmation of the truthfulness of the Bible is exactly the attitude of Jesus himself. Frederick C. Grant, who is not any sort of fundamentalist Christian, acknowledges that the New Testament consistently takes “for granted that what is written in Scripture is trustworthy, infallible and inerrant. No New Testament writer would ever dream of questioning a statement contained in the Old Testament.”³³

Those parts of the Old Testament that are most commonly rejected as error are also those sections of Scripture that Jesus clearly taught. This includes the literalness of Genesis 1 and 2, Cain and the murder of Abel, Noah and the flood, Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot, Isaac and Jacob, the manna, the wilderness serpent, Moses as lawgiver, the popularity of the false prophets, and Jonah

^a Acts 13:7, 18:12; Acts 16:12, 20ff., 35ff; Acts 17:6, 9; Acts 19:31, 35; Acts 28:7

DOCTRINE

in the belly of a great fish.^a

In matters of controversy, Jesus used the Old Testament as his court of appeals.^b On many occasions where an Old Testament teaching was questioned, Jesus simply believed the clear teaching of Old Testament Scripture and defended himself by saying, "it is written."^c

Some of the most common critiques launched at the Old Testament are in regard to authorship, but Jesus actually named the authors of some Old Testament books. For example, many Old Testament "scholars" boldly claim that Moses did not pen any of the first five books of the Bible, or that two or three authors penned Isaiah, none of whom was actually Isaiah. But Jesus taught that Scripture was authored by Moses, Isaiah, David, and Daniel.^d

Following Jesus' example, while New Testament authors often refer to the Old Testament in a rather general way, they also feel confident to appeal to the smallest detail. In Matthew 22:29-33, Jesus' argument rests on the present tense of "to be" in Exodus 3:6. Matthew 22:41-46 refers to the use of "Lord" in Psalm 110:1. In John 10:34, Jesus' argument comes from the Old Testament use of the word "gods."^e Galatians 3:16 rests on the singularity of the Old Testament word translated "seed" or "offspring."^f

The standard for true prophecy was complete truthfulness, which is why Elijah was affirmed as a prophet: "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth

^a Matt. 19:4-5, Mark 10:6-8; Matt. 23:35, Luke 11:50-51; Matt. 24:37-39, Luke 17:26-27; John 8:56; Matt. 10:15, 11:23-24, Luke 10:12, 17:29; Luke 17:28-32; Matt. 8:11, Luke 13:28; 2 John 6:31, 49, 58; John 3:14; Matt. 8:4, 19:8, Mark 1:44, 7:10, 10:5, 12:26, Luke 5:14, 20:37, John 5:46; 7:19; Luke 6:26; Matt. 12:40

^b Matt. 5:17-20; 22:29; 23:23; Mark 12:24

^c Matt. 4:4, 6, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31; Mark 1:2; 7:6; 9:12-13; 11:17; 14:21, 27; Luke 2:23; 4:4, 8, 10, 17; 7:27; 10:26; 19:46; 22:37; John 2:17; 6:31, 45; 8:17; 10:34

^d Mark 7:10; Matt. 13:14, Mark 7:6; Mark 12:36; Matt. 24:15

^e Ex. 4:16; 7:1; 22:28; Ps. 138:1

^f Gen. 12:7; 15:3; 17:19

is truth.”^a Can the standard for the Bible be any less, if it is truly prophetic?

Because Scripture is God speaking to us as our Father, we also believe Scripture usually speaks accurately in ordinary language. Bible writers use popular language rather than technical terminology. So they say, “the sun had risen,”^b or refer to “the four corners of the earth.”^c There are figures of speech like “the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”^d There are also summaries, such as the Sermon on the Mount and Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, of events for which we do not have full transcriptions.^e Sometimes, the Bible also gives us rounded numbers rather than exact head counts of, for example, the number of men killed each day during a war.^f To interpret the Bible accurately we must consider it carefully. Thus, we interpret historical accounts, figures of speech, approximations, summaries, and such according to the author’s intent, taking care lest our cultural and personal presuppositions distort our interpretation.

This does not mean there are no questions to explore. My (Gerry’s) biggest question revolves around the numbers in Numbers. Compared to archaeological estimates, they are too big by a factor of ten. There are several proposals for what is going on, but at this point, we don’t know. A few decades ago, I also had questions about Jericho. According to the best archaeological reports, it was uninhabited from about 1600 BC to about 1200 BC. The Bible says the walls came tumbling down about 1440 BC. That would be hard if the city was already destroyed. But as excavations were done in a different part of the ancient site, a thick layer of ash containing grain was discovered. Dating by three different methods showed a burn date of (try to guess before you look!)—1440 BC.³⁴

^a 1 Kings 17:24

^b Gen. 19:23; Mark 16:2

^c Isa. 11:12; Rev. 7:1; 20:8

^d Isa. 55:12

^e Matt. 6:34; Acts 4:4

^f Judg. 20:44–47

HOW DOES OUR VIEW OF SCRIPTURE AFFECT OUR LIFE?

God speaks to us through the Scriptures as a perfectly loving Father. Christians worship God, not the Bible. But the Bible informs us of who God is and how we are to live in His love as worshippers. As a result, we come to the Bible for transformation, not just for information.

We agree with Luther, “When the Scripture speaks, God speaks.” Because Scripture is God speaking to us, we memorize, meditate, study, teach, and share His truth. Everything in life and ministry is guided by the truth of Scripture. Everything good is a result of the truth of biblical revelation being used by God the Holy Spirit to change our character to be more like Christ.

Sooner or later we all have to settle what we think about the Bible. We shouldn’t make that decision based on hearsay or speculation, but on what the Bible actually is, what it says, and does. Other people can’t determine our opinion. We each must make a decision. Scholar and friend Wayne Grudem has spent his life studying and teaching the Bible, and watching people wake up to what the Bible is all about. He describes how that happens in an interview I conducted:

“Hundreds of millions of people throughout history have begun to read the Bible with an open mind and then said, ‘Wow, this book speaks to my heart like no other book I have ever read. This is unlike any other book. These are the very words of God.’” The Bible itself claims to be God’s words in written form. And that is our starting point. “Am I going to believe that claim?” Grudem asks. “I think the only way for people to evaluate that is to give some serious time to reading the Bible and studying it and seeing if it rings true as being the word of God. Do I hear the voice of my Creator speaking in it when I read it?”³⁵

When the Bible says that the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers^a, it means that they really can’t see what we

^a2 Cor. 4:4

see. We might nag them. We might talk down to them. We might holler at them. But that's like yelling at a colorblind guy about what's on a painting. Yelling will not make him see.

The ability to see the truth of the Bible is not an intelligence issue. It's a condition issue. We should bring the same compassion and respect we would show anyone who is physically blind. If you know someone who is spiritually blind, buy them a nice Bible. Put the person's name on it and give it to them like Grace did for me. Then pray that the Holy Spirit opens their understanding as they read it. Why? Because we need God to get involved in this. It takes a miracle as big as Jesus healing a blind guy. The good news? He still heals the blind.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL JOURNALING AND/OR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Take a few moments today to thank God for choosing to reveal Himself to you and recount some of the ways He has done so (e.g. the Bible, godly Bible teachers, general revelation, etc.).
2. Which Old Testament Bible story reminds you the most of Jesus Christ?
3. If you could pick one book of the Bible to study, which would it be? Why don't you commit to taking some months to study it?
4. Do you feel like you are getting enough time reading the Bible? What changes could be helpful for increasing your Bible reading time?
5. What is the last Bible verse that you memorized? Which one should you memorize next?
6. How does the unity of the Bible across so many cultures, centuries, and authors reveal that God is ultimately responsible for all of its' content?
7. Is there any part of Scripture that you have struggled to believe and need to devote some time to studying in depth?
8. Is there any book or author that you are capable of elevating too close to God's Word in authority?
9. Is there a big issue or decision in your life right now that

DOCTRINE

- requires you to study God's Word in order to face it?
10. Who do you know that needs a nice Bible? What Bible could you buy them?

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REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

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With Pastor Mark, it's all about Jesus! Mark and his wife Grace have been married and doing ministry together for over twenty-five years. They also planted The Trinity Church with their five kids in Scottsdale, Arizona as a family ministry (thetrinitychurch.com) and started Real Faith, a ministry alongside their daughter Ashley that contains a mountain of Bible teaching from Pastor Mark as well as content for women, men, pastors, leaders, Spanish-speakers, and more.

Mark has been named by Preaching Magazine one of the twenty-five most influential pastors of the past twenty-five years. He has a bachelor's degree in speech communication from the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University as well as a master's degree in exegetical theology from Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. For free sermons, answers to questions, Bible teaching, and more, visit **RealFaith.com** or download the **Real Faith app**.

Together, Mark and Grace have authored "Win Your War" and "Real Marriage". Pastor Mark has authored numerous other books including "Spirit-Filled Jesus", "Who Do You Think You Are?", "Vintage Jesus", and "Doctrine".

