

The Christian Life Series—Book 1

The Value of God's Word

*Your word is a lamp to
guide my feet and a Light
for my Path*

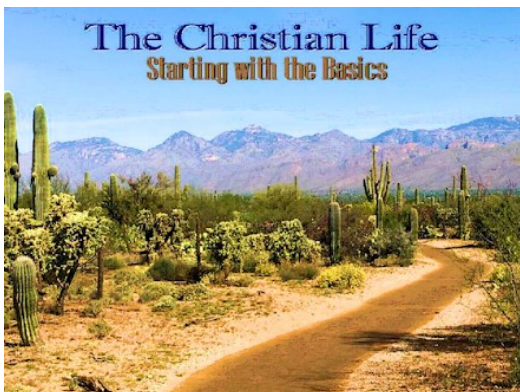
Psalm 119:105



Alaska Christian Ministry to Seafarers

Foreword

Welcome to a study of the Christian Way of Life! On occasion, an exasperated believer has said to me, “There is so



much to know! I didn't realize the Christian Life was so complicated." My response is always the same, "The Christian Life isn't the least bit complicated, but it is

comprehensive!" Since it covers everything, that means it is going to take some time to *grow into it!*

In fact as a student and teacher of the Word for more than four decades, I am most certainly still growing as the result of studying God's Word. It really is an inexhaustible source of riches for the child of God. So what we are going to do in this series is tackle the basics—those fundamentals we need to grasp as soon as possible after putting our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ to become a Christian. These fundamentals are a good reminder for all, and essential to those who are new to Bible study.

With that in mind, where do we start? With the Christian's most important reference—the Word of God. May God bless your efforts in drawing closer to Him, and growing in this most comprehensive faith.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redig".

Kevin Redig, pastor-teacher

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Introduction to the Series

Let me explain the title and the subtitle of this series of lessons: *The Christian Life, Starting with the Basics*. First, this is a collection of lessons on the Christian Way of Life. As you can tell from the graphic below, I am thinking about the path we are to take—the life God wants us to live—as Christians.

More specifically, I have in mind one of the three aspects of our salvation. Not the first phase, for that occurs at the point in time when we place our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and forever change our eternal destiny from one in the Lake of Fire to one in the presence of God in His heaven. What I have in mind is the second phase of our salvation, which consists of however many days God gives us on this earth as Christians—from the very day we place our faith in Christ until the day He calls us home to glory! It is during this period of time, whether long or short, that we are called to live the Christian Life. The Bible describes it in many ways: the call to *walk worthy* of who we are in Christ, the call to *redeem the time*, and to *be imitators of God*.



To complete our discussion of *The 3 "Phases" of Salvation* diagram on the previous page, there is a third phase to our salvation. It is when we exchange this mortal body for one that is immortal and incorruptible—just like that of our resurrected Savior!

Now this particular series of lessons constitute a collection of the basics. By that I simply mean those things that every Christian needs to learn and respond to in faith as soon as possible after coming to faith in Christ. At some point in the future, we will take a look at more advanced truth, but for now, we want to make sure that we are solid in terms of the fundamentals. And, let me remind you that just as an athlete who has a weakness in the fundamentals will struggle with more advanced activities, so too a Christian who has a weakness in the fundamentals will have trouble advancing spiritually. So this will be a good exercise for all of us.

In fact, here is the audience I have in mind for this series of lessons. First, the fellowship of those who sit under teaching at Vistoso Community Church that we might doctrinally all be on the same page. Then, a second audience is those to whom this fellowship might be led to minister. I trust the Lord might spread these truths among a variety of friends, acquaintances, and extended family.

The Place to Start—The Bible

Where should we start a series on the Christian Life? Specifically, what is the first fundamental we need to cover? For our purposes, we are going to start with the Word of God. For as we seek to identify the fundamentals of the Christian Life, and deeply understand each of them, our one and only source is going to be the Word of God. So we are going to spend a lot of time looking at one Scripture reference after another. Furthermore, you will come to learn that I think that, whatever the Word of God has to

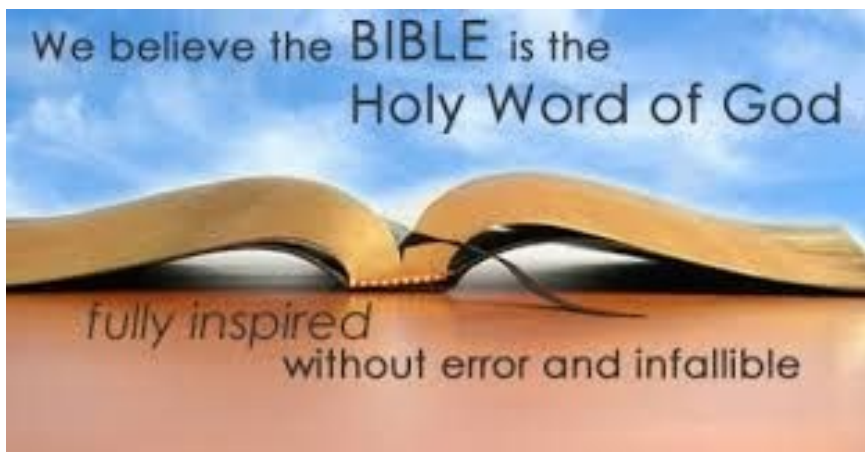
say on a spiritual matter, authoritatively settles the issue for us. We don't need to turn to any other source or give weight to any other voice. In fact, this summarizes our understanding of the authority of the Bible:

*The Word of God, as ministered by the Holy Spirit,
is sufficient for all matters of faith and practice.*

Now, if you are not used to this approach, you may have some questions:

- Why do you call it God's Word?
- Why do you give the Word of God so much authority when it comes to the Christian Life?
- Why do you place such a premium upon it?

In fact, as you get to know Bible-believing Christians, you are going to be surprised at how often they seem to quote the Bible, seek to memorize and turn to it in order to defend their point of view.



Answering the Questions

So let's draw all these questions together and ask:

*Why is so much weight given to the Word of God?
How is it that the Bible can be sufficient for all matters
of faith and practice?*

To answer these questions, you won't be surprised at all if I start with a verse of Scripture from Deuteronomy, which describes God Almighty as:

A God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.

Deuteronomy 32:4

Did you catch it? Our God is a God of truth! Since He is also upright and righteous, when He communicates to us, He naturally communicates truth. When we say that the Bible is *God's Word*, we are saying it came from Him. It contains things that are on His mind that He felt necessary to share with us. It is the one way we can know Him, and thereby share in His thoughts, affections and, purposes.

That being the case, His word is all we need for matters associated with the Christian Life. We don't need commentaries, devotionals, or the writings of theologians. That is not to say that these kinds of things are not useful or helpful, they certainly can be if used properly—but only if they are actually communicating the truth that God placed in His Word. And, when it comes to the Christian Life, we most certainly don't need to couple it with secular psychology, contemporary philosophy, or the latest self-help book.

The Word of God stands on its own without any additions being necessary. Notice that I am not saying the Bible is adequate to practice medicine, complete engineering projects, or other disciplines in their own right. I am simply saying it contains everything we need for living the Christian Life: thinking and doing what is right before our holy God, achieving spiritual victory, recovering from spiritual failure, and in general living a life on earth that is pleasing to our Lord and Savior before we step out of this life and into eternity.

Not surprisingly, it is also the Word of God that gives us glimpses of what our eternal home is going to be like as well. The Bible provides *everything we need for matters of faith and practice!*

The Role of the Holy Spirit

Did you notice the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is closely coupled with the Word of God? Although we will have much to say about the person of the Holy Spirit in later lessons, for now suffice it to say that He plays a vital role in both leading us into the truth of God's Word as well as correctly applying it to circumstances. Let me show you the impact of His ministry from two aspects:

- First, notice how Jesus makes clear Who it is that will guide us into the truth—none other than the Holy Spirit! And in doing so, He will continue to minister Jesus to those who have believed in Him unto eternal life.

"But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. . . He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you."

John 16:13-14



- Second, if you haven't yet had the experience of a lost person either distorting or misunderstanding the Word of God—you will. Here is the reason why:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

I Corinthians 2:14

You see, a lost person has not yet undergone a spiritual birth. They have a body and soul but no human spirit with which to receive spiritual truth. The lost person simply cannot receive spiritual truth, it just comes across as so much foolishness—even if the person is very academically sophisticated. Don't let it throw you! It is not that there is a

problem with the Word of God. Instead, the problem is on the receiving end. To unsaved persons, the Holy Spirit has just one ministry, and that is to convict them of their need to believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And, should they believe, from that moment forward the newly saved individual has the ability to be led into all truth by the Spirit of God as He ministers the Word of God.

So again, let me be very clear—for the Christian of today:

*The Bible, as ministered by the Holy Spirit,
is completely sufficient for all matters
of faith and practice.*

The Bible's Place Today

Now I know that some of you are thinking: "How could we possibly believe such a thing in this day and age? We have made so much by way of scientific advancement and developed such technological marvels! We know so much more in the areas of medicine, psychology, and sociology." Do not be deceived—the advances of man do not impact the realm of spiritual things. The entire history of man has added absolutely nothing to the omniscience of God, nor to that which has been revealed to us in His Word!

Now a much better question to ask is the following, "*How do we know the Bible is the mind of God revealed to us?*" Or asked another way:

*WHY DO WE GIVE SO MUCH WEIGHT
TO THE WORD OF GOD?*

First, we give so much weight to the word of God because:

All Scripture is God-breathed. . . II Timothy 3:16-17

The source of the Scriptures is the eternal, omniscient, truthful, and faithful Creator-God of the universe in which we live.

The above passage brings to mind a marvelous mental image captured by the picture of the child exhaling on a cold evening. God exhaled truth from His mind, and it condensed into the Scriptures we hold dear.



Now if this were true, then naturally the Scriptures should take precedence over every other source. For the divine source would separate the Bible in a decisive and unique way from every other document authored by man.

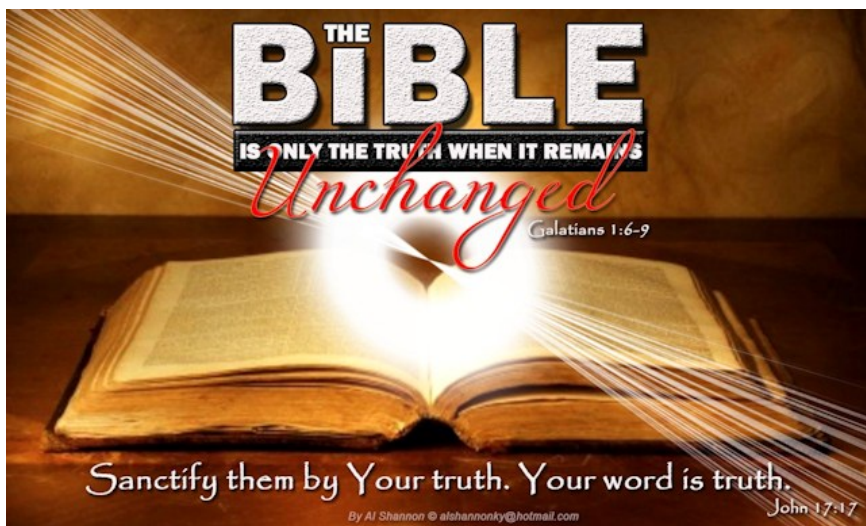
Now here is something important to note: When we speak of the inspiration of the Scriptures, we naturally understand them to be inerrant—that is, without error:

As for God His way is perfect; the Word of the Lord is flawless.

Psalm 18:30

Furthermore, we are speaking of something referred to as *verbal-plenary* inspiration. *Verbal* encapsulates the idea that every word of the original writings was inspired—not just the thoughts contained therein, but the words themselves. *Plenary* refers to the entire breadth of Scripture—all of it! Now this does not apply to the various translations

available to you today, but to what are called the *auto-graph* texts of Scripture. This would be the original documents authored by men inspired by the Holy Spirit, during the course of the Bible's compilation. We'll come back to this later in the study.



The second reason we assign so much weight to the Scriptures is because:

. . .the Word of God is living and powerful. . .

Hebrews 4:12

It is alive in a way that is true of no other written text. It is powerful in that it can *make wise the simple* (Psalm 19:7), and it *will never pass away* (Matthew 24:35).

Again, if the Bible really is God-breathed, with a spiritual life from God Himself, then it would naturally be the only place to turn for matters of faith and practice—guiding us in both what to think (right belief) and what to do (right practice).

Now to be sure, all manner of ideas can be *alive and powerful*. During the course of human history there have been all manner of political propositions, social theories, and religious beliefs that have captured the imaginations of

mankind and motivated him to act in all manner of ways. But I am making a distinction, and I want to make sure you understand it. Although these ideas from the mind of man may have a semblance of power and motivate action, the Word of God is *ALIVE and POWERFUL* in that it has a life of its own independent of man. It has an inherent power irrespective of the response of man.

You see the Bible's source is the omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign, Almighty Creator of the physical universe and all that is in it. Unlike the political, social, and religious thoughts of mankind—God's word has never been found to have fallen short, to have been in error, or to promise and not deliver. For God's word is truth—absolute and unchanging truth.

While being questioned, Jesus said the following to Pilate:

". . .for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me." John 18:37

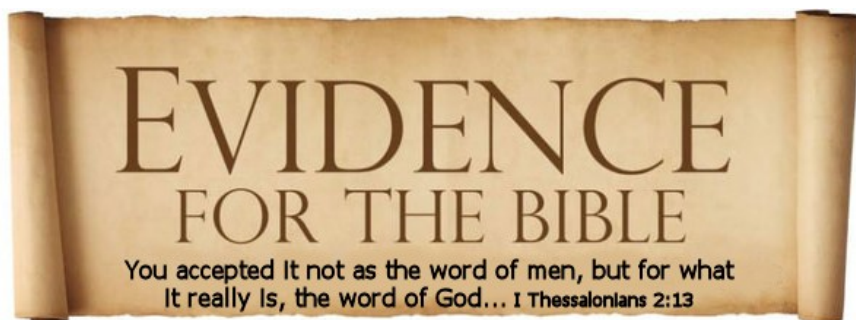
Note first of all that there is the side of truth, and then there is the side of all that is in error. Pilate muttered, "What is truth?" Then he walked away from the One who came from heaven "*full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). Jesus, the Son of God, as standing right in front of him and he turned and walked away. That's exactly what mankind does when it turns from the God-breathed, alive and powerful Word of God to anything that has its origin in the mind of man.

Why does that matter? Again, the words of Jesus are very instructive:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock." Matthew 7:24-25

Do you see it? The quality of the very life we live is at stake! So is our ability to handle the storms of life that are sure to come! And that's why we insist:

*The Word of God, as ministered by the Holy Spirit,
is sufficient for all matters of faith and practice.*



Evaluate the Evidence

Now you may very well be thinking: "This is a monumental claim, can you back any of that up? Aren't you just being narrow-minded, and ignoring other important sources? How is it that you can claim to have an exclusive *corner on the truth* by virtue of having the Word of God?" These are excellent questions with a very straightforward answer: Evaluate the evidence!

You see God has made this matter very clear. He has left His *fingerprints* everywhere! Now the skeptic will be sure to scoff, "What evidence?" He will go on from there to talk about supposed contradictions, lack of relevance, and advances of science. The scoffer shows his ignorance by supposing that the issue of the trustworthiness of the Scriptures is something that hasn't already been studied and validated for centuries—with far greater scholarship than he has almost certainly employed.

You see, it is the tremendous quantity of evidence that allows us to have confidence in the reliability of God's Word. This evidence ensures that we can trust God's word

as something upon which to build our lives. The Bible has so much more going for it in terms of evidence than any other available option. God has made it so, so it behooves us to consider this in detail. So let's consider just a sampling of the internal and external evidence that we have available to us, in order to evaluate the veracity and reliability of the Scriptures. Then we will add one more proof, the experiential case for the veracity of the Scriptures.

Internal Evidence for the Veracity of the Scriptures

The Scriptures tell us. By internal evidence, we mean what the Scriptures have to say about themselves. If the Bible itself doesn't present itself as a source of truth from God to man, then we certainly shouldn't superimpose that upon them. Let's turn to the full text of an earlier quote:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. II Timothy 3:16-17

This verse is about as all-encompassing as it can be. I have studied the Greek words used to expand upon the *God-breathed* nature of Scripture, and they reveal that the Scriptures are:

- Provides the curriculum to live a productive life
- Useful in pulling us back when we go astray
- Helpful in promoting an upright life and training in righteousness

All of these are so that we could accomplish every good work God has in mind for us to do. Isn't this exactly the claim I have made from the very beginning? For these are *matters of faith in practice*, and the Scriptures are sufficient solely because of the fact that they are God-breathed! Now perhaps you are thinking, "Wait a minute, it is making

this claim about itself! That doesn't count!" Of course it does. You can't take away God's voice or His ability to make truth claims. And again, if it didn't claim to be above and better than any other source, it would be improper to put it forward as such!

Let's continue with the Scriptures' internal claims:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

II Peter 1:20-21

The Bible makes clear an essential point, the Scriptures did not originate with man! Then how is it we talk about Paul's letter to the Romans? Paul was the human instrument used by God, as the above states quite clearly. Paul, and all the other human authors of Scripture wrote as they were "*carried along by the Holy Spirit.*"

Let me add to something mentioned previously, It is the original, or autograph copies of the Scriptures that were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Not later copies of translations. We will discuss this more thoroughly later, but for now take note:

Every Word of God is flawless. . .

Proverbs 30:5

Well of course it is! It is God-breathed and accomplished though the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Recall the verse on the cover of this book:

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Psalms 119:105

This really is a verse of application that gets back to our point of the sufficiency of Scripture for matters of faith and practice. The Word of God lights our *feet* and our *path*. The feet refer to our immediate need of guidance in present circumstances. Our path speaks of the future and the capacity of the Word to both mature and guide.

"All men are like grass. . .The grass withers and the flowers fall but the Word of our God stands forever."

Isaiah 40:6,8

Those who make the claim that the Bible is no longer relevant are really only commenting upon their understanding of the frailty of man—for he withers and falls in time. Not so the Word of God. You see the Bible doesn't present theories proclaiming the earth is flat, only to later amend its dogmatism. For the Word is a source of absolute truth from the unchanging Creator God of the Universe—and as such it stands firm. He both created this physical universe by speaking it into existence, and it will stand until He replaces it with a new and redeemed creation. Thus, these proclamations from God will never need to be amended!



The Bible's Consistency. The Bible's internal claims about itself are spectacular and would certainly require a supernatural act of God to *breathe* them into existence. Likewise the coherence and internal consistency of the Word of God requires a supernatural source!

Consider the following:

- The Bible contains 66 books written by 40 authors.
- The Bible was written over a period of approximately 1500 years.
- The Bible was written on three continents and in three different languages.
- It was written by men who were kings, fishermen, shepherds, military leaders, a doctor, prime minister, and tax collector—to name a few.

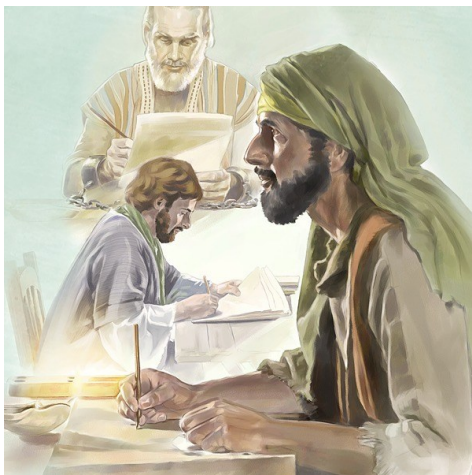
Despite all of the above disparate pieces, it speaks of one unfolding storyline from beginning to end and does this in perfect coherence. A redeemer is promised in the second chapter of the Bible, redemption is illustrated throughout the Old Testament, the Redeemer comes at the beginning of the New Testament and all of heaven is singing His praises at the end of the Bible in the Book of Revelation. Paradise is lost in the first book of the Bible, regained in the final book—and in between we have both history and doctrine which proclaims God's intent and actions to make it so. There is only one way to explain this—the coherence and internal consistency of the Word of God requires God as its source!

By way of contrast, since we are in the midst of a pandemic, let's take the world-wide spread of the coronavirus. How should we handle the outbreak? Let's take ten people: a restaurant owner, virologist, sociologist, CEO, religious leader, epidemiologist, professional athlete, small business owner, salesman, and college student. Now let's just select them all from America so that we make this the simplest possible case—all from one country, all at the same point in time, and all with the same language.

Now, back to our question: How should we handle the coronavirus epidemic? Would they all say the same thing? Would they all have the same opinion on shutting down

society, wearing masks, social distancing, returning kids to school, and so on? We already know they don't! In fact, our experience is that they emphatically disagree! And, that would be our experience on any complex subject.

Perhaps you are resisting my example, claiming first of all that the list of individuals were not all *experts*. As I have already pointed out, neither were those God used to write the Scriptures. They were from all walks of life—from the palace to the sheepfold and everywhere in between. They were from different continents, spread out over centuries, and speaking different languages. Yet, they all communicated a message that fit together perfectly from beginning to end.



Perhaps you are thinking, “Wait a minute, handling a world-wide pandemic is a complex issue!” On the contrary, it is much simpler and much easier to solve than the world-wide problem of sin. In the Bible, God provided a means for: a lost soul to be eternally saved; a corrupted body to be replaced with one that’s incorruptible; the justice of God to be satisfied in the face of sin; a way that the rebel could be clothed with a righteousness acceptable to our Holy God.

You see, the issues associated with our current pandemic are child’s play in contrast to the weighty spiritual issues associated with providing an all encompassing salvation for lost mankind. Yet the Bible clearly begins to expound on this very message just a few pages into the first book and holds forth its promise for the last of many times just a few pages from the end. The evidence points to only one

reasonable explanation: The Word of God is the mind of God revealed to us and that's why it all fits together in perfect harmony.

Fulfilled prophecy proves it. A strong evidence of the veracity of the Bible is the evidence of fulfilled prophecy.

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in the Scriptures.

Luke 24:27

"If you had believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me."

John 5:46

In both of these passages, Jesus is making it clear that the Scriptures spoke of Him! In fact, they have a great deal to say about Him. For Jesus fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies during His First Advent—which is precisely the reason that we have complete confidence He will fulfill all those that speak of His Second Coming. Here is just a brief sampling of things the Scriptures very specifically foretold that were fulfilled in a clearly recognizable manner:

- Jesus was born of a virgin.
- He was born in Bethlehem.
- He was in the lineage of Abraham, Judah, and David.
- He was presented with gifts at His birth.
- The gift-giving was followed by the killing of children as the secular ruler, Herod, sought to kill Him.
- He had a ministry of miracles.
- He was a teacher of parables.
- He came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, and was cut off at the 69th week of years since the decree to rebuild Jerusalem.
- He was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver.
- Lots were cast for His clothes.
- He was crushed for our transgressions and pierced for our iniquities.

All these were foretold in Scripture years, decades and even centuries in advance of Christ's coming—and all fulfilled.

Now this was just a sampling of the fulfilled prophecies regarding Jesus—there are many, many more very specific prophecies about people, places and nations—about places like Tyre,

Babylon, Moab, and Jerusalem. How can you explain this ability to foretell the future, and have all transpire as foretold? The explanation is simple if the Bible is what it claims to be—the revelation from an omniscient Almighty God!

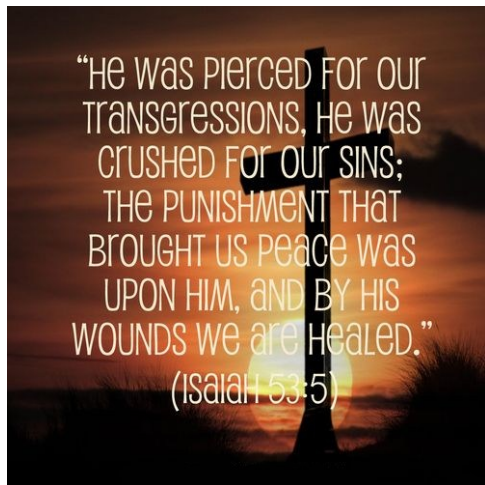
By way of contrast, take any of the sacred writings of the world's religions, and see if they can lay out a track record of fulfilled prophecy. They cannot! Not the Quran of Islam, nor the Book of Mormon, nor the Vedas of Hinduism. That is simply because man is behind them and God is not—they are neither full of truth nor divinely inspired.

Now let me show you what the unbelieving world does with the remarkable prophetic evidence of the Scriptures. In Isaiah Chapter 44, we have a remarkable bit of prophecy. God, in a section of the Scripture, declares:

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please."

Isaiah 46:10

God also identifies by name the Persian king who would authorize the return of the Jewish people from their place of exile, and allow them to begin reconstruction of their capital city and temple. He does this almost 200 years ahead

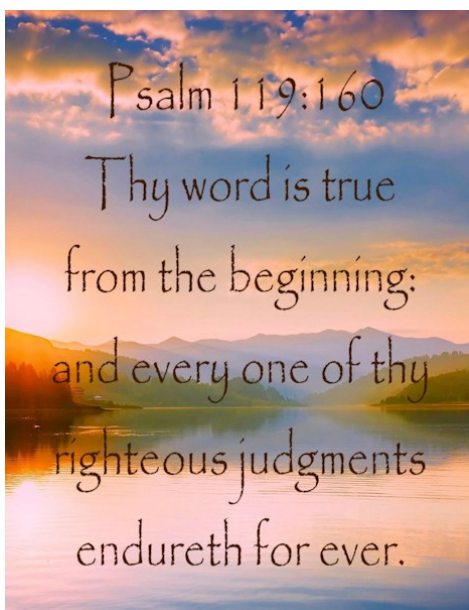


of time, and He names a king who was from a nation not at that time a dominant power.

"I am the Lord, . . . who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.'" Isaiah 44:24, 28

This is something only God can do, and what an encouragement it is to His people.

But, of course, the world must attack this prophecy! Why? It attacks because the world will not accept the supernatural, nor the authority of revelation from God. So they dismiss this prophecy and dismiss God as the ultimate author. Their answer is the hypothesis that it was not written by Isaiah but was added after the fact.



In other words, the scoffers say: "Who could know the name of the king 200 years ahead of time? It would require knowledge outside of the capability of man—and we will not allow for that possibility." So the world rejects the idea of divine inspiration.

But, since we are talking about evidence, let me show you the shallowness of their position and the strength of the Christian perspective. What evidence do they have for their hypothesis? Why none at all: no historical documents, no changes to manuscripts—no evidence at all. The only way their rejection works is if you consider the a priori rejection of omniscience and the intense desire to suppress the truth in order to continue in unbelief as evidence!

All I can say, is that no Christian has to be bound by the unbelief of skeptics when it comes to trusting in the veracity of God's Word!

External Evidence for the Veracity of the Scriptures

External evidence is verification that is outside of the Biblical record. We will look at two: Archeological record and preservation and number of copies.

Archeological Record. In the early years of Biblical criticism, the attacks on the historical veracity of the Bible were incessant. Critics disputed the location and size of Nineveh until archeology verified its immense size. They disputed the Bible's depiction of civilization at the time of Abraham, until thousands of extra-biblical references were found. In fact, in the last 100 years of archaeological work, the tables have been turned completely. Consider the words of Nelson Glueck, considered to be one of the three greatest archaeologists of all time.

. .in all of my archeological investigation I have never found one artifact of antiquity that contradicts any statement of the Word of God.

William Albright, another renowned archaeologist, has similar strongly worded convictions, consider these two:

The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools. . .certain phases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history.

There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition.

These men are not apologists for the Bible, they are experts in their own specific fields of endeavor. But what they make clear is that the Bible, when it speaks of peoples and places, speaks with perfect accuracy. That is just another piece of evidence that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be—truth from the mind of an all-knowing God that He has chosen to reveal to mankind.



Excavation of Nineveh—1876

Preservation and Number of Copies. Another external proof of the veracity of the Bible is the preservation and abundance of the Bible manuscripts. Because Old Testament Scriptures were written first, and over such a long time period, preservation of the integrity of the text is a reasonable concern. In other words, how can we have confidence that what was written thousands of years ago, has been accurately preserved down through the centuries? Dr. Bernard Ramm addresses this issue:

Jews preserved it (their Scriptures) as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. . . they kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word, and paragraph. They had special classes of men within their culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity. . .

In essence, preservation of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) was both a cultural and religious concern which was addressed with meticulous attention to detail. It is no stretch whatsoever to claim that no historical records in the world have been as carefully preserved as the Hebrew Scriptures.

As for the New Testament Scriptures, this is a very important piece of evidence, pointing once again to the hand of God. It is instructive to learn the lengths God has gone to preserve what He has communicated. It doesn't take long for a written text to begin to *decay* as it is recopied over time.

For example, the works of Shakespeare were completed just over 400 years ago, and in every one of his 37 plays there are hundreds of readings that are in dispute—and many of those disputes affect the meaning. In other words, the copies do not agree with one another. Thus, there is uncertainty as to what word the famous playwright actually used. This is true in hundreds of cases throughout his famous plays.

Now what about the New Testament, which was written much longer ago? There, too, are a number of uncertainties—mostly in terms of individual letters and their impact on grammar. There are very few words in dispute, and no basic doctrines in dispute. Clearly, although the New Testament Scriptures are much older than the works of Shakespeare, they are much better preserved! How do you explain that? The answer is that God has supernaturally preserved what He inspired!

But wait, there is something even more compelling. We do not have the *autograph* copies, and by that we just mean the originals, of any ancient manuscripts. We do not have autograph copies of the Bible, nor the works of Shakespeare, works of Homer, Aristotle, or the like. And so the

reliability of any ancient text is based upon two factors:

- The interval of time between a copy and the original (the shorter the interval the better)
- The number of copies (the more copies you have all saying the same thing, the more confident you become that you align with the original)

So in short, if you have many manuscripts, copied shortly after the time the original was written, and all saying the same thing, then you would be confident you have a reasonable facsimile of the original. On the other hand, if you had only a few manuscripts which greatly differed from each other, and were far removed from the writing of the original, it would be difficult to be confident about the exact content of the original. So now let's apply this to some famous and well-known writings of antiquity.

	<u>Age of closest copies</u>	<u># of copies</u>
The works of Caesar:	1000 years	10 copies
The works of Aristotle:	1400 years	49 (portions)
The Iliad:	500 years	600+ copies

As you can see, there is a very lengthy period of time between when these works were originally written, and the copies that have survived. That means there has been a lot of copying and recopying over the centuries. Furthermore, we do not have very many copies for the most part. The Iliad is the best preserved of ancient documents with just over 600 copies. And yet despite what you see and despite the many variations, no one attacks the integrity of these documents. For this is just the norm for hand-written documents of the past. Thus, those disciplines that deal with comparing the manuscript copies are confident enough of their work's proximity to the original, that you may very well have read and been tested on one or more of these texts during your high school or college years.

Now, let's compare these documents with the Bible.

	<u>Age of closest copies</u>	<u># of copies</u>
The works of Caesar:	1000 years	10 copies
The works of Aristotle:	1400 years	49 (portions)
The Iliad:	500 years	600+ copies
The New Testament:	25 years (earliest)	24,500+ copies

Wow! There is no comparison, is there? And to add to the above, the Bible has been so often quoted, that the entire text of the Bible could be accurately reproduced, apart from the manuscript evidence, by making use of the thousands upon thousands of readily available quotes found in non-manuscript literature. That's why:

. . .to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity. . . Dr. John Montgomery

Do you understand what He is saying? If you mistrust the accuracy of the Bible, there is no ancient literature. Yet we teach the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in literature classes semester after semester without even mentioning the issue of preservation and reliability. Yet the Bible, that is orders of magnitude more reliable, is under constant attack. That simply goes to show you the spiritual nature of the battle over the truth. So despite the skeptics:

It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain. . .

Sir Frederick Kenyon

It is not as if the world has been *neutral* toward the existence of the Scriptures as they accumulated over time. In fact, it is fair to say that no historical record has come even close to the attacks that have come against the Scriptures:

- King Manasseh of Judah became so idolatrous, that he tried to rid Israel of their Scriptures and they had to be hidden for years.

- The Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes, who cruelly ruled over the land of Israel, sought to eradicate the Jewish Scriptures upon the pain of death.
- In AD 303 the Roman emperor Diocletian ordered all Scriptures to be destroyed by fire.

And these attacks have been repeated over and over through the course of the centuries, including in the communist countries of this and the past century. And, just to show that God has a sense of humor, the French philosopher Voltaire declared in 1778 that within a 100 years Christianity would be swept from existence and, of course, its Scriptures with it. After his death, during the sale of his estate, his printing presses were sold. They happened to be purchased by the Geneva Bible Society! Guess what they did with those printing presses?

So, in terms of the evidence, not only has the Bible been preserved against all manner of attacks, it has been preserved with an accuracy that can only be accounted for by the watchcare of a supernatural Providence. And that is exactly what we should expect! For:

***All men are like grass,
and all their glory is
like the flowers of the
field. . . The grass
withers and the flow-
ers fall, but the Word
of our God stands for-
ever.*** Isaiah 40:6,8



The Experiential Case for the Veracity of the Scriptures

To conclude, I would like to provide one more thing for you to consider. This is not so much evidence, as it is a testimony. It is not the place to start in making a case for the veracity of the Scriptures, but it is a good place to finish!

As I came to the conclusion as a lost individual that the Scriptures were trustworthy, I began to believe what they had to say. And, as I became receptive to them, the Scriptures revealed to me the grace Gospel centered in Jesus Christ and I heard God's mercy calling my name. When I responded in faith to the message of the Gospel, the Scriptures taught me that I was a new creation in Christ. I can simply tell you that faith in the Biblical message of salvation centered in Jesus changed my heart and changed my eternal destiny! From that point forward, the pages of Scripture began to open to me as I learned one truth after another:

The unfolding of Your words give light; it gives understanding to the simple. Psalm 119:130

My life was undergoing transformation—not all at once, but steadily. My parents and family commented, my friends noticed, and I knew that every bit of it was connected to transferring the Word of God from the pages of the Bible into my soul. No surprise, for that is exactly what it says it will do:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

For our minds are renewed, and our lives thereby transformed, as we turn from the wisdom of this world, to the God-breathed and living Word of God. And after spending

more than 40 years of studying and teaching God's most precious Word, all I can say is:

**The Law of the lord is perfect, reviving the soul. . .
making wise the simple. . .giving joy to the heart. . .
giving light to the eyes. . .sweeter than honey. . .in
keeping them there is great reward.** Psalm 19:7-11

May God bless you as you study, believe and apply His Word!

Frequently Asked Questions

I thought it might be a helpful addendum to this booklet to address the questions that have come up over the years.

What About All the Contradictions in the Bible?

I typically respond to this question with this question: "What contradictions?" By far the most common response is: "Well, I don't know of any personally, but I heard there were lots of them!" Now if you go search the internet for a list of presumed contradictions in the Bible, you will certainly find a number of skeptics willing to help you. But I don't really care to address someone else's list that you might bring forward. First of all, I have satisfied myself. I know of no contradictions. In fact, I am convinced that the Bible rightly understood never contradicts itself, which is the most reasonable conclusion to come to given its inspiration by an omniscient source.

I am also interested in the contradictions you might suppose exist as the result of your study. I would always be happy to open the Bible with you and see what it has to say, and see if we can address your supposed contradiction. For I am confident I can show you that the Bible, rightly understood, never contradicts itself!

How can the Bible Be Inspired When There Are So Many Translations?

This is a very good question. Let me break my answer down into manageable pieces:

- This booklet makes no claim that any particular translation is inspired by God. Rather, it is only the autographs—the original documents—that were inspired by God. (Some will claim a particular translation is inspired, but there is no Biblical support for that position.)
- As explained in the body of this booklet, we have every reason to believe that we have a near perfect replica of the autographs—the original texts of Scripture. It is from these source documents, that the translations in every language have been developed.
- The Bible is written primarily in two languages: the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. (There is a bit of Aramaic as well.) So whenever a person reads the Bible in their native language, unless it is Hebrew, they are reading a translation. (The Koine Greek of the Bible is no longer a spoken language.)



- The quality of any Bible you might hold in your hand is dependent upon the quality of the interpretation and the quality of the translation. If you read a translation done by liberal theologians who do not believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures, and feel political correctness is the most important aspect of interpretation, you are going to end up with a translation that very poorly communicates the intent of the original. I would also caution you on study Bibles, as they provide a great deal of comment by the author that is based upon the author's own theology. If their theology is questionable, so too will be at least some of the comments, and it can be challenging to sort them out. Always work first with the text.

Here is what I think you should expect of pastor-teachers:

- They should start with a good quality translation that is readily available to those under their teaching.
- They should always take their own study of the text back to the original language text in order to confirm what they have found in their English Bibles, and add to it as possible. In this way, pastors are taking what is a translation, back to the inerrant and inspired Word of God.

Written So Long Ago, How Could the Bible Be Relevant Today?

This is one of those questions that make so much sense to the one asking it. But, the question is so difficult to understand by one who trusts in the Word of God as a source of guidance for every spiritual need.

Even a cursory examination of our society indicates elements of anxiety, depression, uncertainty, anger—and most recently, anarchy. That's simply because the answers

currently provided to life's most important questions are exceedingly confusing or unsatisfying: Where did I come from? Why I am here? What is the meaning of Life? Where am I going? On the other hand, the Bible clearly and in detail lays out the answer to each and every one of these questions in a way that is compelling, winsome, and true! Better yet, not a single answer has changed over the course of the centuries and is not going to!

If you hold the Biblical answers up against anything that man has to offer, you will see everything else pales into insignificance. The Bible doesn't have a relevance problem—the increasingly unsatisfactory machinations from the mind of man do!

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon. The ocean is dark with white-capped waves in the foreground.

**Your eternal word, O Lord, stands firm in heaven.
Your faithfulness extends to every generation,
as enduring as the earth you created.
Your regulations remain true to this day,
for everything serves your plans.**

Psalms 119:89-91

How Can You Know that You Are Correctly Interpreting The Bible?

This question often comes up when someone realized that there are often competing interpretations, which by their differences cannot all be right! This is a very astute observation and a very good question. It requires an understanding of the discipline of hermeneutics, which can only be answered with a brief summary in these FAQs.

I would suggest that the proper way to interpret what the Bible has to say is to approach it as we would any other important written communication. In other words, interpret the Bible *normally*. Because it was written in the past in a language that is not likely our mother tongue, in the course of *normal* interpretation we are going to have to pay attention to grammar, historical setting, context, and the use of rhetoric. This kind of focused approach is necessary because God communicated to us using language and He meant for us to understand what He communicated.

There have been far too many approaches where the text of Scripture has been reduced to allegory or hidden meanings supposedly found. This puts the interpretation in the hands of the interpreter rather than the author. In short:

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. . . David L. Cooper

Let me give you an example to show you how this works. To do so, we'll start with the text of John 3:14-16. The first thing that I am going to do is to give you the same text from four different translations of the Bible. Read through them carefully, and think about whether, as a translation of a document written in a foreign language, they are all communicating the same thing.

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:14-16; NIV-1984 ed.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:14-16; NKJV

Just as Moses lifted up the [bronze] serpent in the desert [on a pole], so must the Son of Man be lifted up [on the cross], so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life [after physical death, and will actually live forever] "For God so [greatly] loved and dearly prized the world, that He [even] gave His [One and] only begotten Son, so that whoever believes and trusts in Him [as Savior] shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:14-16; AMP



In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life. This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.

John 3:14-16; Msg

Now after reading the above, let me point out a few things regarding interpretation:

1. Notice how the Old Testament is used to illustrate the New Testament truth. The Bible is always the best interpreter of itself.
2. Notice how the Exodus generation in Numbers 21 was saved by faith physically, while Jesus teaches that spiritual salvation is also by faith.
 - This is a starting point for understanding that when God saves—He provides and we believe.

- Here is where a study of language comes in: The word translated *believe* means to trust—and nothing more. So, when modern day theologies add all kinds of baggage to the word *believe* they do so without Biblical authority.
 - There are no significant textual issues associated with these three verses, because we have very good Greek and Hebrew texts to use in the translation.
3. Notice how the means by which a person receives eternal life is clear—belief in the person and work of Christ. This is a truth claim that comes directly from the text. Although you may not believe what the text says, few people would interpret the text to say anything other than you are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. So when a religious system adds more criteria to the receipt of eternal life, Biblically they are in error. When pointing this out, Christians are often said to be arrogant. On the contrary, the Sovereign, Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Holy Creator of all things has proclaimed truth. It is hardly arrogant for Him to do so. In fact, it is a great blessing for all those who choose to align with it.
 4. And a final word on what I might call the quality of translations. To my reading, the first two translations say virtually the same thing—one in slightly more modern language than the other. Both the original NIV and the NKJV are respected translations. The NKJV tracks the text a little more closely while the NIV somewhat less. To these I would add the NASB and ESV as translation you can trust. But. .
 - The NIV is a good example of how the prevailing culture can impact translation. It was originally completed in 1984, and I find its use of language to be excellent. However in following editions, it has made many changes to accommodate the culture, and in its current form I refuse to use it.

- The Amplified is not so much a translation as a *help*. If you compare it to either the NIV or the NKJV you will notice that what it does for challenging or important terms is supply multiple words. In other words, if a Greek word has multiple meanings or shades of meaning, it gives you a sampling of them. For this reason, an Amplified Bible is much longer. This is meant to help you as you sort through a text. When two different translations use a word that is quite different, this often bothers people. It is simply because the translators were forced to choose between two different meanings for the same word. Usually, they agree but when they don't we notice.

The Amplified Bible can help you understand what the options are, and think through for yourself what the author intended. So although I would never start with the Amplified, it can help you sort out when translators selected from different meanings for the same word.

- Lastly, I included the Message translation so that you could see what a poor translation looks like. You will have a sense that good translations are saying the same thing, although the words will be slightly different. The Message translation seems as if it is communicating something completely different. For example, is having *a whole and lasting life* the same thing as receiving eternal life? Is *believing* the same thing as *trusting and expectant*?

There are many places where the text of the Message Bible bears no resemblance to more solid translations. I would recommend avoiding the Message Bible and other more paraphrased and contemporary versions. Simplified vocabulary, watering down content and culturally-approved gender usage does not promote good Bible translation—it compromises it!



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