

Bible Basics: Essential Doctrines of the Bible

Part 7

Bibliology

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The Bible leads us to Jesus Christ. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ.

Your Word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

Psalm 119:89

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

John 17:17-19 NIV

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Introduction:

I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

Psalm 138:2 NKJV (cf. Ps.33:4; Mk.9:7)

Can anything be more important than the Name of God, His very Person and reputation? It would seem impossible, but the scripture above, correctly translated from the Hebrew, makes it clear that the Lord has placed His Word before everything else, even His holy Name. For His Word, the living Word, Jesus Christ, and His Word, the written Word of the Holy scriptures, are indeed the central issue for the entire human race (cf. Mk.9:7). We are here to answer the question personally and individually "what think ye of Christ?" (Matt.22:42). And once we have answered to the Father's satisfaction that we regard His Son in our hearts as our Lord and Savior, we remain here in the world to learn, believe, embrace and apply His Word to every aspect of our lives. The Word of God is our true sustenance on this earth; everything else is secondary.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

Matthew 4:4

Without the Word of God, we would not know how to be saved. And without the Word of God, we would not have the means to grow and progress spiritually and to carry out the purpose our Lord has for us in this world of contributing to the edification of His Church. It would therefore be difficult to underestimate the importance of the Word of God for the carrying out of His plan in our lives – for it is absolutely essential like nothing else. For these reasons, understanding something about what truly constitutes the Word of God, biblically speaking, is of the utmost importance. God is the beginning of everything and for we who believe He is the glorious end as well – and in between, linking the beginning to the end, is the Word of God, Jesus Christ, the living Word whose very thinking is encapsulated in the written Word.

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct Him? But we possess the very mind of Christ (i.e. the Holy Spirit illuminating the scriptures which are Christ's very thinking).

1st Corinthians 2:16

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

Revelation 22:13

We Christians walk by faith, not by sight (2Cor.5:7; cf. Prov.3:5; 2Cor.4:18). Therefore as faithful followers of the Living Word, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.1:1-14), we must be careful always to put our total faith in the Word of God above anything and everything our eyes may see, ears hear, or feelings feel, and trust in what our Lord has told us through His Bible even in the face of such overwhelmingly persuasive "miracles" which may seem to contradict what we know from scripture to be true:

I will bow myself in worship toward your holy temple, and I will give thanks to your holy Name on account of your mercy, and on account of your truth, for You have *magnified Your Word above Your entire Name.*

Psalm 138:2 (cf. Ps.33:4).

So is the Word which goes forth from my mouth. It will not return to Me in vain without accomplishing what I please, and it will be successful in whatever [purpose] I have sent it forth.

Isaiah 55:11

"Is my Word not like fire?", says the Lord, "And [is it not] like a hammer which can smash to bits a rocky mountainside?"

Jeremiah 23:39

"Why do you call [to Me, saying] 'Lord, Lord', but you do not do *what I say*?"

Luke 6:46

(1) The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity between the Word and God [the Father]. (2) This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning. (3) Everything came into being through Him, and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being.
John 1:1-3

"Search the scriptures – since you assume by how you read them that you have eternal life! These are the very scriptures that bear testimony about Me."

John 5:39

Jesus said to [His disciple, Thomas], "Because you have seen Me you have believed? Blessed are those who have not seen and have [yet] believed!"

John 20:29

All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for admonishing, for correcting, and for training in righteousness.

2nd Timothy 3:16

[Jesus] is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word . . .

Hebrews 1:3a

For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; it acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.

Hebrews 4:12

It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we hope for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen.

Hebrews 11:1

(16) For I did not follow concocted tales in making known to you the power and the coming return of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but was an eyewitness to His majesty. (17) For when He had received honor and glory from God the Father, these words sounded forth to Him from God's majestic glory: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased." (18) And these words I myself heard as they were delivered from heaven, for I was with Him on the holy mountain (cf. Matt.17:1-8). (19) Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e., than what I saw with my own eyes). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105), until the day dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. the Living Word, Jesus Christ, returns), (20) pondering in your hearts this principle of prime importance: no single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection. (21) For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit.

2nd Peter 1:16-21

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life, [Jesus Christ].

1st John 1:1

Such powerful encouragement for us to put our faith in the Word even in the face of seemingly overwhelming evidence to the contrary is buttressed even further by the clear directions given by Paul to Timothy and applicable to all pastors to focus upon teaching the truth of the Word:

I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

1st Thessalonians 5:27 NKJV

Until I come, devote yourself to [public] reading [of the scriptures], to encouragement, to teaching [the Word].

1st Timothy 4:13

Let those elders who lead well be held worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and in teaching.

1st Timothy 5:17

Be zealous to present yourself to God [as one] approved [in what you do], a workman who does not need to be ashamed, [like a skillful carpenter] "cutting straight" the Word of truth.

2nd Timothy 2:15

Proclaim the Word! Keep at it, whether circumstances are favorable or not! Reprove, rebuke, [and] encourage with all patience [in your] teaching!

2nd Timothy 4:2

Yes, scripture is clear. It is the Word of God, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, to which we are to give our attention, not the things which our eyes may see or our ears may hear. No matter how amazing, how unprecedented, how thoroughly persuasive any "miracles" or "signs" we may behold, we are to count them as nothing if they are contradicted by the Word of God (compare Jer.10:2 with Lk.21:25-26; cf. Matt.24:4-5; 24:11; 24:24; Rev.13:13-14; 16:14; 19:20). This principle which has such critical implications for our conduct in the Tribulation also has an important application for us today on the threshold of that terrible time here in the Church era of Laodicea. For we live in a time when the Church, rather than giving precedence and pride of place to the teaching of the Word, is increasingly fascinated with the material world, with human works over the words of God, with experiences and emotional highs, with erstwhile miracles, healing and tongues, with hoopla, fanfare and carnival rather than the serious study of the Bible. The building up of a good conscience, of a good, godly value system, and of proper, biblical priorities now will not only be helpful but crucial in our successful navigation of the trials to come. On the other hand, undue attention now to the very sort of spectacles which will be used to such good effect by the beast and his false prophet during the Tribulation, not only places the believer in a very weak spiritual position now, but may well contribute to his or her apostatizing from Jesus Christ under the pressures of that terrible time ahead. Only by staying laser-focused on the truth from the Word illuminated by the Holy Spirit can any of us have any confidence of being able to walk through the fire and water to come in a way that pleases our dear Savior.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119:105 KJV

1. The Word of God

In the beginning, there was the Word.
John 1:1a

He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word.
Hebrews 1:3a

Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is the truth. Before the beginning of time, this was so. And after time is over, this will be so. And it would have been so if God had never created the world, for though He loves us now, He had no need of us then. It is we who have been so graciously blessed to have been created and, stumbling as we all do, forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Between eternity past and eternity to come is the time when God's creatures made with the free will image of God, angels and men alike, have our eternal futures decided through that very free will with which He has graciously endowed us, exercised in faith. How this happens has everything to do with the truth and our response to it – or more particularly, our response to Him who is the truth, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

While [Peter] was still speaking, behold, a cloud suffused with light enveloped them, and, behold, a voice [issued forth] from the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. *Listen to Him!*"

Matthew 17:5 (cf. 2Pet.1:16-21)

Listening to Jesus Christ, listening to the Truth, is what life is all about (Lk.6:46). It is why we exist and why the angels exist and why therefore the world exists. Time and the universe is God's great threshing floor wherein the wheat is separated from the chaff and the quality of each kernel of wheat meticulously determined. And what distinguishes the wheat from the chaff? The Truth. And what determines the quality of each kernel of wheat? The Truth. Or, more particularly, our response to the Truth, our response to God, to the Father through the Son who is His representative of truth to this creation.

(15) [Jesus Christ] is the exact image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. (17) And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him. (18) And He Himself is the Head of the Body, [that is,] the Church. [Even] He who is [its] Ruler, the Firstborn from the dead, [thus resurrected] to the purpose that He Himself might become the One who occupies the first place in all things. (19) For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], (20) and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven.

Colossians 1:15-20

As this passage makes clear – and as every Christian knows full well – the exalted position of our Lord Jesus Christ has been meritoriously won . . . through His death for us all on the cross. He is the fundamental truth to which all must respond or refuse to respond, with that response or lack thereof defining and determining our eternal futures. In Jesus Christ God the Father has manifested His love for His creatures in an ineffable way by sacrificing His life for ours. Responding to God, therefore requires accepting the truth of who Jesus Christ is, God and man in one unique Person forever since the incarnation, and what the Savior of the world has done for us all in paying the entire price for all of our sins.

(1) God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe. (3) He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:1-3

Jesus IS the message, the good news, the gospel, the Truth of God, the One to whom we are called to respond in faith, using the free will of the image of God we have been given to accept the truth of who He is and what He has done for us, pledging by our faith our lives to Him even as we reject this world and its evil ruler (Gal.6:14). Never has all this truth been clearer than during the Church Age following the sacrifice, resurrection, ascension and glorification of Him who is the Truth, Jesus Christ our Lord. For it is through Him, the Son of God, that "in these last days" God the Father has been pleased to "communicate to us" His Word, His Plan, His Gospel, His Truth – even Jesus Christ who is the Truth. He IS the Word of God (Jn.1:1; 1:14; Rev.19:13). Therefore the entire plan of God may be summarized as the presentation of the truth to creatures with God-given free will in order to let them demonstrate whether or not they wish to spend eternity worshipping the One who made them and saved them at a price beyond understanding – or not. That is the essential *logos* carried out by Him who is the *Logos*, the Word of God, Jesus Christ.¹

It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's Plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*).
Colossians 1:25

[God who] has [now] at just the right time revealed His Plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*) through the proclamation [of the gospel] with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.
Titus 1:3

As John 1:1 says, "in the beginning, there was the Word". So everything starts with God and God's truth. Truth exists in the persons of the Trinity, and it has pleased the Father to make known His truth to the world through His Son Jesus Christ – who is the very Truth. This message of truth was given "at many times and in many ways" in the past (Heb.1:1), but since the incarnation of our Savior, God's truth has been communicated to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. He has always been the encapsulation of the truth, but since His coming into this world to die for it the fact of Him being the very Truth and the very Plan of God for salvation has become perspicuous to all – to all willing to receive the truth. God is the Truth. Jesus Christ is the Truth. And truth is the great divider of creatures possessing free will.

(37) Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (38) Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"
John 18:37-38a NKJV

¹ See BB 4B: Soteriology, section I.2. "The Plan of God for the Salvation of Individual Believers".

The entire plan of God stands on the foundation of the truth and that truth is that Jesus Christ is God and man, and that He came into this world to die for the sins of all that all might be saved. But as Pilate's insolent question so vividly reveals, many, nay most, are not interested in hearing the truth or responding to it (Job 21:14; 22:17). How great the grace, the mercy and the love of God that even with so many rejecting His Son He still sent Him to die for all! And so it had to be. The plan of God is perfect and there is only one perfect plan of God. There is no other and could be no other. Everything has been decreed and nothing will ever violate the perfect plan in even the most minuscule respect. For those desiring eternal life and an eternity with the Father and our dear Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, our Savior had to die for all. Fundamental to the plan of God, therefore, is the issue of the cross presented in one way or another to everyone with the image of God: to accept Him is life eternal; to reject Him is separation from Him and the Father forever. This is the truth. How God has been pleased to make that truth manifest to the world so that all might have the means to be saved through accepting that truth – and to grow closer to Him by means of that truth for all wishing to do so – is the subject of this study.

(14) "I have given them Your **word**, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (15) I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. (16) For they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (17) So make them holy (i.e., "sanctified") by means of Your **truth** – Your **word** is **truth**. (18) And just as you sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (19) I am consecrating Myself for their sake, so that they too may be made holy (i.e., "be sanctified") through **truth**."

John 17:14-19

2. The Revelation of the Word:

The plan of God is salvation for all willing to be saved, and Jesus Christ is the embodiment of that plan, that "Word" of God, that *logos*.

And the Word (*logos*) became flesh and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – **this** is about the **Word** of life, [Jesus Christ].

1st John 1:1

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated on it is called "Faithful and True", and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war. (12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself. (13) And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and **His Name** has [always] been called, "The **Word** of God".

Therefore "this" (1Jn.1:1), namely, human life, is all about Jesus Christ – and our response to Him (cf. Rom.10:14-17). God is the truth. Jesus Christ is the truth. Salvation through faith in Him is the plan of God. So in order for the plan to be carried out, God would have to make the essential truths of the good news – that there is salvation to be had for those who respond to Him and His Son – available to all who desired them. That meant in turn providing the essential truth about our place in this dark world and how to be saved out of it to every human being desirous of being saved (Col.1:13). How God chose to mediate His truth is the subject of this section.

a. Natural Revelation²

For everyone sees that [even] the wise die. They [too] perish along with fools and those who lack common sense, and they leave their wealth behind to others.

Psalm 49:10

What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?

Psalm 89:48 NIV

(10) I have seen all the work that God has given Man to occupy himself with. (11) [God] has made everything beautiful in its [limited] time; but He has also placed the [notion of] eternity in the hearts of mankind – and [He has done this], moreover, without Man being able to discover the work which God has done from the beginning unto the end.

Ecclesiastes 3:10-11

(18) I also said to myself, "As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. (19) Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. (20) All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return."

Ecclesiastes 3:18-20 NIV

Without the reality of physical death, few human beings would be motivated to seek God. Death is the ultimate problem to which every human being is naturally compelled to want to find an answer. That is the most insistent part of the "eternity in the heart" of the image of God within in us. No one wants to die, but that is the common destiny of us all as all can plainly see. Being born is a death sentence, and human beings discover this very early on in life. Therefore God has graciously given us a compelling reason to seek Him: since obviously there are no human solutions to mortality, only a supernatural one will do. Linking eating from the tree of knowing good and evil to the death sentence, "dying though shalt die", was thus an act of extreme grace on

² For a full discussion of this principle, see BB 4B: Soteriology, section II, "Natural Revelation and Accountability", and Peter #11: "Natural and Special Revelation". For the Holy Spirit's role, see BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.b, "Natural Revelation".

God's part. Being sinful without an end to life would be a horrible state – endless sin and suffering alienated from God – and one within which there would be no pressing incentive to seek the one and only solution from the One who created us.

(22) "Behold, Man has become like One of Us in respect to his knowledge of good and evil. So now, lest he also keep stretching forth his hand and taking [fruit] from the tree of life and [so] *live forever* . . .". (23) So the Lord God expelled Man from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

Genesis 3:22-23

Everyone desires to live forever. No one wants to die. And our gracious heavenly Father has indeed provided the means for all to have eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord who is the very Plan of God, the *logos*, the Word which/who, when accepted, causes all who receive it/Him to be born again, born from above, unto life eternal.

(1) The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament tells of the work of His hands. (2) One day after another pours forth [His] words, and one night after another declares [His] knowledge. (3) There is no tongue or culture that cannot understand their voice (i.e., of the heavens/firmament). (4) Their design has gone out into (i.e., "is visible throughout") the entire earth, and their words to the end of the world. He has set a tent for the sun within them (i.e., hidden it in the heavens'/firmament's night sky), (5) and from this it goes forth like a [resplendent] bridegroom from his [wedding] canopy. [The sun] exults to run its course like an athlete [does]. (6) Its starting line is at one end of the heavens, and its circuit [takes it] to the ends [of the sky]. And nothing is hidden from its view.

Psalms 19:1-6 (cf. Job 36:24-25; 37:1-7; Ps.147:15; Is.40:26)

Once human beings were motivated to seek for God by the reality of death, the next essential thing was for there to be the provision of basic information about God, His existence and His perfect character (cf. Ps.97:6), so as to leave no doubt about the source of creation and therefore of salvation. For that reason, the Creator imparted His signature on everything He made. The entire creation sings of Him, telling us not only that He exists, but that He is perfect in every way. Human beings, made in the image of God and aware of our own mortality, are made by Him to be motivated to seek for the only One who can deliver us from death. And we are all given to find in the world He has made sufficient knowledge of His character to infer from His creation that He is the perfect, gracious and loving God who will help all who are willing to be helped, wherever they live and whenever they have lived in the history of the world. Thus it is that the way He made us and the way He made the world always combine to produce the critical "God-consciousness" which leads to salvation – or to the rejection of Him who is the only hope of thereof.

(18) God's wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth [in their hearts about God] in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday

experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both His eternal power and His divinity – so that they are without any excuse: (21) they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness.

Romans 1:18-20

In the long history of the world thus far, most have not desired any relationship with Him. In the case of those who reject Him, natural revelation only illuminates and confirms what is really in the heart. In the case of those who desire Him, it spurs us on to keep seeking until we find Him. Natural revelation is like a parable which is truly meaningful to those who desire the truth behind it, while it acts to condemn those who do not, even as they reject the patent truth of it and thus lose any hope of discovering the blessed truths that follow from pursuing it. For those who do respond to the truth seen in creation, God provides the Word fully revealed. For those who do not, He allows them to harden their hearts against it and to substitute all manner of satanic lies and practices in favor of the truth. The former is provided by the Holy Spirit and always has been – though the means of presentation has varied over time as Christ was first promised, then came into the world in an unglorified state, and was at last fully revealed in glory at the dawn of our present age (Rom.1:2). Rejection of the truth taught by natural revelation always involves blinding oneself against the basic divine realities of life – that death is certain, that God exists, and that He is perfect so that any true solution would have to come from Him in truth and grace. Unbelievers therefore come to deny the reality of death, the reality of sin, and the reality of God Himself, substituting other gods or things which are gods to them. Those who would respond to the truth are given to know the good news of life eternal and are saved through trusting in the One who would (before the cross) and who has (after the cross) redeemed us from sin and given us the right to become sons of the living God by grace through faith in Him alone (Eph.2:8-9). For all who are willing to respond, the gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is provided.

(13) For "everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32). (14) [***But***] how can they call upon someone they have not believed in? And how can they believe in what they have not heard about? And how can they hear without someone proclaiming [the truth]? (15) And how can they proclaim the truth unless they are sent? As it has been written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who give the good news!" (16) But not all obeyed that good news. As Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our tidings?" (17) So then, faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes through ***the Word of Christ***.

Romans 10:14-17

Creation at large and the way we are made brings about our consciousness of God – that is natural revelation. For all who desire life, the necessary further information, the gospel, is provided – that is the first contact we have with special revelation, i.e., truth about God which

cannot be fully intuited without an intermediary. "Those who give the good news" are the most common intermediaries of the message of salvation – believers like you and me who share the gospel, the truth about Jesus Christ and life eternal in Him with any and all who are willing to respond to it – so that truth is thus "not difficult to find" for any and all who are willing to seek it out.

(24) "The God who made the world and everything in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in man-made temples, (25) nor is he waited on by human hands, as if He needed anything from us. He is the One who gives us all life and breath and everything else. (26) From one man he created all the nations of mankind – that they should come to inhabit the whole face of the earth. He fixed and determined the specific times and extent of their habitations, (27) to the end that they should seek out this God, that they might go in search of Him and so might find Him – for He is not far off from any one of us."

Acts 17:24-27

But even though the truth about God is clear from His creation, and even though He has made salvation readily available through providing the gospel for any and all who are willing to accept it – as close as the Word in our hearts and on our lips (Deut.30:14; Rom.10:8) – nevertheless there are those who are not willing to be saved, even though the alternative is too horrifying to contemplate.

"But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

Luke 12:5 NKJV

Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment . . .

Hebrews 9:27 NIV

Everyone knows they will die. Everyone knows that God exists. Everyone knows that God is perfect. And everyone knows that they are sinful and cannot stand before Him in judgment. Everyone knows these things . . . initially. Those who take them to heart are given the gospel and saved. But for those who do not, for those who harden their hearts against these truths and substitute lies of their own making (so as to be able to ignore God in this life: Job 21:14; 22:17), the truth, even the understanding of natural revelation common to all, becomes veiled, like a parable which is heard but not understood. Sharing the gospel with these sorts is pointless because like the hardened road the seed cannot even gain an initial purchase (Matt.13:19), so that believers with discretion need to be circumspect in the presence of unbelievers who clearly want no part of God.

"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

Matthew 7:6 NKJV

By way of starkest contrast, those who are responsive to the truth will make that clear by their humble attitude and eagerness to accept it, doing so in childlike earnestness and without the cynicism and skepticism of the world.

(2) He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. (3) And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 18:2-3 NIV

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, '*From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise*' (Ps.8:2)?"

Matthew 21:16 NIV

Once a person has responded to the gospel, has been led to the truth and been saved, all biblical truth is now accessible, with the Holy Spirit who now indwells us all illuminating our studies of the Word and the orthodox Bible study to which we apply ourselves. That – truth beyond the gospel now available only from the Bible either directly or indirectly – is special revelation.

(1) Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lift up her voice? (2) She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, beside the way, where the paths meet. (3) She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city, at the entrance of the doors

Proverbs 8:1-3 NKJV

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

1st Corinthians 12:31b ESV

Now grow up through the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

2nd Peter 3:18

b. Special Revelation

Revelation, as we have been discussing it, is the unveiling of God's truth by Him to us for our benefit. Natural revelation is His revealing of Himself, "His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature" (Rom.1:20 ESV), through our consideration of the world He has created, with the purpose of supplying all human beings with the "answer" our internal makeup demands from birth: "who will save us from sin and death?" (Rom.7:24-25; cf. Eccl.3:10-11; Acts 17:24-27).

Special revelation, on the other hand, is the further truth revealed to all who respond positively to the message of God's existence and perfect character writ large throughout His creation, namely, believers. God provides this further truth to all believers who desire it, knowing perfectly the hearts of all from eternity past. But God is *not* obligated to provide any more truth other than that which sings forth from the whole universe to those who refuse to take that basic revelation

of His existence, goodness and holiness to heart. For all who do, the means of salvation has always been made clear. And for all who respond to the gospel and are saved, every bit of truth desired and useful in this world thereafter has also been provided by Him. It is merely the means of God's mediation of this special revelation which have been different at different times.

(1) Etymology of "Revelation"

(a) "Revelation" is a Latin-derived word meaning "to pull back the veil (*velum*)". As such, it is a good rendering of the Greek word it is meant to translate, *apokalypsis*, where the preposition *apo* is equivalent to our English negating prefix "un-" affixed to the noun *kalypsis* which means "veil". This word – from which we derive the now misleading "apocalypse" – is actually the first word of the title of the book of Revelation which is the "Unveiling (*apokalypsis* or "apocalypse") of Jesus Christ" – meaning, His glorious return and revelation to the world and all that precedes it. Since seeing Him who is the Truth, Jesus Christ, face to face will bring about a dramatic realization of the truth on the part of the inhabitants of the world (Zech.12:10; Matt.24:30; Rev.1:7; 6:15-17), the use of this word and its Latin and English counterparts to describe the unveiling of God's truth generally is highly appropriate.

(b) God and eternity are largely "veiled" from us in this world (Is.45:15; Jn.1:18; 1Jn.4:12; 1Cor.13:12; 1Tim.6:16).

(c) But God wants all men to come to know Him and be saved (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9, cf. Is.65:1).

(d) And God knows whether or not we want to know Him as well (1Chron.28:9; Jer.11:20, 17:10; 20:12).

(e) So God does "reveal" Himself sufficiently to all so as to demonstrate who is willing to be saved and who is not (Ps.19:1ff.; Acts 14:17; Rom.1:18-20).

(f) For those who do respond, God "reveals" all truth necessary to be saved (Jn.1:12; Acts 17:26-27).

(g) Thereafter, in the course of history, God has chosen to further "reveal" Himself and His will through prophets, in dreams, visions, miracles, theophanies and other means (e.g., Ex.3).

(h) But for the most part since the cross, it is through Jesus Christ, the living Word (Jn.1.1-2), that the Father has chosen to "reveal" Himself and His truth (Jn.1:18).

(i) Today that revealed truth is contained exclusively in the written Word, the Bible (2Pet.1:19-21).

(j) Now we who have believed eagerly await the ultimate revelation, the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ at the second advent (1Pet.1:7; 1:13; 4:13; cf. 2Pet.3:3ff.).

(1) God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe.

Hebrews 1:1-2

(2) The Gospel

(16) For I am not ashamed of *the gospel*, because it is the power whereby God may save everyone who believes, whether the Jew first, or the Greek. (17) Because in it (i.e., *the gospel*) the righteousness of God is *revealed* from faith to faith, as it is written, "the righteous – on account of his faith – shall live" (Hab.2:4).

Romans 1:16-17

The gospel, the essential truth about Jesus Christ necessary for salvation – who He is as God and man and what He has done in dying for all sin – is the link between the natural revelation available to all mankind at all times and the detailed special revelation of the Bible which is the province of believers only. In verse seventeen above, we find a clear expression of just that link. "The righteousness of God" – and indeed all of the truth about Him available to believers after salvation – is "revealed *from faith to faith*", meaning that gospel truth must be *believed* to be saved and all further truth must be *believed* to grow spiritually. It is on account of this revelation of the truth of the gospel that those who believe it are found to be righteous in God's eyes (e.g., Rom.3:24; 3:28; 4:1-25; 5:1; Gal.2:16-17; 3:24); and it is on account of holding onto that truth and all of God's truth and growing in it thereafter that the righteous "shall live". For this reason, namely, the double applicability of faith in the truth both to be saved and then to grow and be secure thereby in Christ, that the phrase "on account of his faith" in Greek hangs in the middle between these two elements so that we would be within our rights to translate the quotation as "the righteous on account of his faith on account of his faith shall live". That is the reason for Paul's statement that God's righteousness is "revealed *from faith to faith*", namely, from *belief* in the gospel which leads to salvation unto *belief* in all of God's special revelation made available after being saved, resulting in spiritual growth and the security in Jesus Christ which all who are walking with Him possess.

So then, faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes through the Word of Christ.

Romans 10:17

The gospel is a form of special revelation – it cannot be gleaned from nature; it has to be provided specially (nowadays through individual believers witnessing to the truth or through reading the Bible, etc.). But it does link the natural revelation everyone receives to the special revelation of all of God's truth only believers receive: some who hear the gospel accept it and grow; others reject it and as a result are not saved. For the latter, while natural revelation is understandable to them (or was until they began to harden their hearts against the truth), rejection of the gospel makes it imperceptible to those who refuse to accept it.

(14) "And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:
'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
(15) For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.' "

Matthew 13:14-15 NKJV

Rejecting the gospel is rejecting Jesus Christ – rejecting who He is, God become man to save us, and what He has done for us – paying the entire penalty for all of our sins. Rejecting the gospel is, moreover, rejecting the witness of the Holy Spirit, the "Evangelist in Chief", the One who makes the truth of the gospel – the initial special revelation beyond what may be seen and inferred from God's creation – completely understandable in the hearts of unbelievers who are given to hear it. For while natural revelation is available to all, no one can understand any special revelation without the Spirit's ministry, including the gospel. He is the One who makes the truth absolutely clear in the heart of anyone who hears the truth whenever it is proclaimed. Understanding God's truth thus does not depend upon intellect or perceptive abilities (there is in fact no "epistemological problem"); rather, it is entirely with the province of God the Holy Spirit to turn "knowledge" into "knowledge fully understood" (Greek *epignosis*), and He does so in each and every case where there is faith.³

(14) Now the unspiritual man (i.e., an unbeliever without the Holy Spirit) does not receive the [deeper] things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him and he is not able to understand them because they are appreciated [only] through spiritual means. (15) But the spiritual man does appreciate them all, though he himself is not appreciated [in this regard] by anyone. (16) For [as it says] "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who will instruct Him?" But we do have the very thinking (lit., "mind") of Christ (i.e., His truth from the Spirit).

1st Corinthians 2:14-16

The Holy Spirit performs this transformation for unbelievers only in regard to the gospel – the essential truth necessary to be saved; He does this for believers whenever the truth – any and all special revelation beyond the gospel – is taught . . . **and believed**. Only when the gospel is believed do unbelievers understand it fully and then accept it so as to be saved; only when the further truth of the Bible is truly taught and believed does it become *epignosis* in the heart of the believer – "truth believed" and thereafter useful for the believer to grow from and live by in the

³ See BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.1.d.2, "Gospel Epistemology".

power of the Holy Spirit.⁴ Just as we believed the Spirit's witnessing to the special revelation of the gospel and so were saved, so we believers need to continue to devote ourselves to the special revelation of all of the rest of the truth God has graciously provided us, reading our Bibles, accessing good teaching . . . and **believing it**. Thus we were saved; only thus can we grow spiritually.

But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!
Philippians 3:16

So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way].
Colossians 2:6

(3) Types of Special Revelation

Today, in these waning years of the Church Age, believers in Jesus Christ – who is **the** message of God's plan, **the** Word incarnate – are blessed to have God's complete written Word as the sole and ultimate source of all truth, of all special revelation: any pastor-teacher teaching or evangelist evangelizing or Christian witnessing the truth has ultimately gotten that truth from the Bible or from someone else who has gotten it from the Bible – provided that what is being spoken or written is actually true. This is not to say dogmatically that since the passing of the apostles God has never ever verbally communicated to any individual believer in a dream or vision, e.g., or that such will not be the case in the soon to come Tribulation.⁵ But it is important to point out firstly that even if unique communications of this sort have genuinely taken place, they will have contained no information not also present in and completely consistent with scripture; and secondly close investigation will readily reveal that, while easily **claimed**, actual cases are at the very least exceptionally few and far between.

God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the **prophets** at many times and in many ways . . .
Hebrews 1:1

While the Bible is clearly the only source of specially revealed divine truth today, in earlier ages and eras it was not so as Hebrews 1:1 quoted above affirms. What the prior means used by God to communicate His special revelation to believers have in common with His current scripture-based means is the fact that the Holy Spirit has always been the One providing that truth (as well as mediating the reception of that truth).

For true **prophecy** has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God

⁴ See BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.3.a.3, "Spiritual Growth Epistemology".

⁵ See below section 3, "The Nature, Inspiration and Perfection of the Bible".

have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit.
2nd Peter 1:21

Taken together, Hebrews 1:1 and 2nd Peter 1:21 demonstrate that anyone receiving genuine special revelation from God meant for His people is a *prophet* (a gift we are explicitly told has now ceased: 1Cor.13:8-11). Time would fail us in attempting to collect all of the biblical examples, but as any reader of scripture knows, from Adam to the apostles, God has given certain extraordinary believers of the past special revelation through dreams (e.g., Matt.2:13), through visions (e.g., Acts 22:17-21), through angels (e.g., Zech.1:14; 1:19), and through direct epiphanies (e.g., Gen.2:16-17; Acts 9:3-6). These special communications are termed "prophecies", and the believers who received them "prophets". Prophecy has two aspects (both present in the Greek preposition *pro-* prefixed to the word for "tell, say, speak"): "foretelling", which is that aspect of prophecy which predicts future events, and "forth-telling", which is the giving out of the truth – special revelation of doctrinal truths directly from God but without necessarily predicting future events (these two functions are often mixed together as, e.g., any reading of the book of Isaiah shows well enough).

While our omnipotent, omniscient God is certainly capable of giving any and every interested human being independent revelation of all His truth, to establish His own authority and that of those He has ordained to shepherd His people, He has for the most part in the course of human history chosen to work through various agents, stewards or "dispensers", who have been responsible for providing spiritual food to the family of God. Until the coming of the canon of scriptures, this was a direct process wherein the Word of God came exclusively to certain individuals of God's choosing called "prophets" (Hebrew: *nabi'* – נָבִי; Greek: *prophetes* – προφήτης) who were responsible for dispensing divine truth. During the formation of the canon (a period of some fifteen hundred years), prophecy and the written Word were dual means of dispensing divine truth. With the close of the canon and the passing of the apostolic generation, God's Word is now the sole source of unique special revelation about Him, so that the dispensation of truth during the division of human history known as the Church Age is correspondingly different from preceding dispensational divisions (the ministry and gifts of the Spirit being crucial at this present time). With the commencement of the end times and the millennial reign of Christ that follows, scripture will be complemented once again by extraordinary prophetic empowerment as the knowledge of God will come to fill the entire world (cf. Joel 2:17-18). Until that glorious future time, while most find miracles and miraculous activities thrilling, the written Word of God available to all is in fact "more reliable", because unlike miracles which come and are then gone – even if we have seen them with our own eyes – we may hold the Bible in our own hands at all times.

(16) For I did not follow concocted tales in making known to you the power and the coming return of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but was an eyewitness to His majesty. (17) For when He had received honor and glory from God the Father, these words sounded forth to Him from God's majestic glory: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased." (18) And these words *I myself heard* as they were delivered from heaven, for I was with Him on the holy mountain (cf. Matt.17:1-8). (19) Yet I consider the prophetically inspired

Word (i.e. the Bible) *even more reliable* (i.e., than what I saw with my own eyes).
2nd Peter 1:16-19

Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
John 20:29 NKJV

(4) Special Revelation throughout the Dispensations

So then, faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes through the Word of Christ.
Romans 10:17

The gospel message, the "Word of Christ" – or "teaching about Christ" – has always been the same. Truth never changes. What was different prior to the cross was that Jesus had not yet been revealed with the clarity that only His coming in the flesh to save us could provide.

(10) The prophets diligently investigated and inquired about *this salvation*, when they prophesied about this grace [that was to come] to you. (11) For they were eager to discover the precise time the Spirit of Christ within them was signifying as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. (12) For it was revealed to them that in prophesying these things, they were not so much serving themselves as they were you – and these same things have now been proclaimed to you through those who gave you the gospel through the Holy Spirit, sent from heaven – even angels want to look into these things.
1st Peter 1:10-12

For that reason, i.e., of our Lord not yet having been revealed in the flesh, before the cross the gospel message was provided through shadows, clear indications of the coming of a Savior who would take away sin, manifest in the symbolism of animal sacrifice, commencing from God's clothing of Adam and Eve with animal skins (the *protoevangelium*) to the multifarious, deep and rich allusions to Christ and His death for us all which are found in the Mosaic Law (e.g., Col.2:16-17; Heb.8:5).

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."
John 5:39 NKJV

"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me."
John 5:46 NKJV

For those who respond to the "Word of Christ" (Rom.10:17), further special revelation is provided by God; for those who do not, God is not responsible to provide truth that cannot be understood (without the Spirit) and would not be accepted (since the gospel has been rejected) with the result that even when such words of truth are heard by unbelievers, the true meaning of

them is hidden from view, just as parables not understood (cf. Is.6:9-10).

God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets ***at many times and in many ways*** . . .

Hebrews 1:1

What was true of the gospel – the message of eternal life for all who trust in Him merely differently presented – was also true of all further special revelation for believers prior to the Church Age. As outlined in the overview in the previous section, God's provision of special revelation has occurred "in many ways" depending on the "times". The word (and related words) the New Testament uses to distinguish between these "times" which govern the "ways" of special revelation and to explain the differences in God's "dispensing" of His truth in the various ages and eras of human history is *oikonomia*, "dispensation" (Eph.1:10; 3:2; 3:9; Col.1:25; 1Tim.1:4).

Our English word "economics" is derived from the adjectival form of *oikonomia* and in Greek refers to the management of a household (cf. "home economics"). In biblical contexts, the household being referred to is God's and the members of the household being provided with spiritual food are we believers, members of the family of God "whose household we are" (Heb.3:6; cf. Eph.2:19). Paul tells us he is a *diakonos* or steward of God, responsible for providing or dispensing the Word in order to make known the now-revealed mystery of Jesus Christ (Col.1:25-26). *Diakonos* (cf. "deacon") is a New Testament synonym of *oikonomos*, "dispenser", a word closely akin to *oikonomia*, "dispensation", and *oikonomos* is also used for the one who dispenses the truth of God's Word (cf. 1Cor.4:1; Tit.1:7; 1Pet.4:10).

Thus the image behind the concept of the dispensations is of God's household – His people on earth – being provided for, not with physical but with spiritual food, with the means and methods used for this provision having differed over time. Thus true distinction which scripture makes in the doctrine of dispensations is not between those who are provided for, but in the different mechanics God has employed for supplying the provision of truth necessary for salvation and spiritual growth at different times.

A dispensation is thus a period of time characterized by the means God uses to "dispense" His grace and His truth. For this reason, the difference between, e.g., the dispensation of Israel and that of the Church Age, is not to be found in any sort of eternal differentiation between those saved then or now (we are all part of Christ's Church from Adam and Eve until our Lord's return), but rather in the way in which the truth of God was/is being disseminated. That is to say, the different dispensations are not to be defined by the people within them, but by the manner in which God has chosen to provide the gospel to unbelievers, and the special revelation necessary for spiritual growth to believers.

(a) Patriarchs and Priests: In Eden before the fall, the Lord communicated directly to Adam and possibly directly to Eve as well (cf. Gen.3:8). After the expulsion from Eden, animal sacrifice was employed to demonstrate that God would provide a sacrifice for sin (represented by the animal offered; cf. Gen.3:21; 4:3-5; 8:20-21), and that trusting in Him to do so was the way in

which people were saved (cf. Gen.4:26) – just as is the case today for we who are given to see Christ and His cross clearly and without the need for these shadows (cf. Gen.15:6). The duty of performing such sacrifices generally fell upon the heads of families so that we may speak of a "patriarchal priesthood" wherein those in authority – in a family or clan or country – were responsible for ministering before God as in the example of Melchizedek (Gen.14:18-20). In addition to the knowledge passed down by their forebearers, these special individuals also occasionally received direct communications from God or His angelic messengers (e.g., Gen.6:13), sometimes in the form of Christophany, an appearance of Christ, most often as *the* Angel of God.⁶ And as at other times, specific directives were also sometimes given to other individuals (e.g., Cain: Gen.4:6-7).

(b) Jewish Patriarchs: The situation after the call of Abraham and the beginning of the Jewish Age was much the same as during the Age of the Gentiles. The main difference is to be found in the fact that now Israel had become God's light to the world (Is.42:6; cf. Is.49:6), and so Jewish patriarchs were the ones specially invested by God to receive His special revelations. We should also note that the frequency and familiarity of these visitations increased as recorded in scripture for us (cf. Gen.18:16-19).

(c) Priests and Levites and Prophets: With the coming of the Mosaic Law, special revelation took a wonderful and previously unprecedented turn. God now ordained for His message to be written down for all to be able to see and read and remember and apply. This change did not abrogate direct divine messages to the prophets of Israel (many of which were not directed to be written down; e.g., Ex.33:11), and indeed all special revelation ordained to be written down was committed to just such prophets:

For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit.
2nd Peter 1:21

Thus, the written Word has all the authority of a direct spoken word of God given to a prophet – and is, as Peter tells us in the same context, all the more sure for being inspired by the Spirit and written down under His guidance (2Pet.1:19). Additionally, the availability of the written Word for all of God's people – a blessing like no other – also did not abrogate the authority of those He appointed in teaching and explaining these writings, for while there is much that can be understood without divinely gifted and appointed teachers, there is much that is only accessible through submitting to their teaching authority:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, *that you may teach them.*"
Exodus 24:12 NKJV (cf. Lev.10:11)

⁶ See BB 1: Theology, section II.C, "The Trinity in the Old Testament".

From the time of Moses onward, in addition to direct prophecies given by God to some special individuals (e.g., Joshua: Josh.1:1; 3:7; 4:1; 4:15; 5:2; 5:9; 6:2; 7:10; 8:1; 8:18; 10:8; 11:6; 13:1; 20:1), there were also prophets in Israel, that is, individuals holding the specific office of "prophet" (e.g., Jdg.4:4; 6:8; 1Sam.3:20; 9:9; 22:5; 2Sam.7:2). Sometimes these individuals are known to us by name (e.g., Ahijah: 1Ki.11:29), but sometimes not (e.g., 1Ki.20:13); sometimes these prophets were not given to have the special revelation they received written down, but sometimes they were, often being named (as in the major and minor prophets of the Old Testament canon), but sometimes not (e.g., the writers of most of the rest of the Old Testament outside of the Pentateuch).

Dispensation of God's truth during this period – from Moses to Christ – was thus accomplished through a combination of means: 1) the symbolism of the tabernacle and its sacrifices along with the other symbolic aspects of the Law; 2) direct special revelation to individuals which was often meant to be shared with the community as a whole orally, and 3) special revelation which God inspired through His Spirit and commanded to be written down for all time. The latter, the Old Testament, was not only to be read, but was also to be taught by the Levites, establishing the principle which still holds today that believers need not only personal reading of scripture but also orthodox teaching of it.

They [the Levites; cf. v.8] shall teach Jacob Your judgments,
And Israel Your law.
They shall put incense before You,
And a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar.
Deuteronomy 33:10 NKJV

So they [the Levites of v.8] taught in Judah, and had the Book of the Law of the LORD with them; they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught the people.
2nd Chronicles 17:9 NKJV (cf. 2Chron.30:22; 35:3)

(4) "And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue," says the LORD Almighty. (5) "My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. (6) True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin. (7) For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth."
Malachi 2:4-7 NKJV

(d) The Earthly Ministry of Jesus Christ: It is of course not at all surprising that as the unique person of the universe, the God-man, our Lord's earthly ministry was also absolutely unique in terms of the special revelation He received and shared with those who listened to Him. While He did not write down anything Himself, the four gospels, the centerpiece of the whole Bible to which the entire Old Testament looks forward and on which the entire rest of the New Testament depends, are dedicated to giving us a detailed view of His words of truth. Everything in the Old

Testament is in complete accord with all He taught, and everything in the New Testament is based upon what He taught. And naturally enough so, since what He taught is who He is. For He is the Word of God incarnate.

And the Word became flesh and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct Him? But we possess the very mind of Christ (i.e. the Holy Spirit illuminating the scriptures which are Christ's very thinking).

1st Corinthians 2:16

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life.

1st John 1:1

And He was clothed in a cloak splattered with blood, and His Name stands [forever]:
"The Word of God".

Revelation 19:13

How blessed it would have been to have heard the words of truth directly from the mouth of Him who is the very truth, the Word of God Himself!

(16) "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; (17) for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

Matthew 13:16-17 NKJV

(e) The Apostolic Era:

(14) Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. (15) These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! (16) No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: (17) 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. (18) Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (19) I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. (20) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. (21) And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' "

Acts 2:14-21 NIV

The Gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon believers in Jesus Christ on that first Pentecost of the Church Age – and the common gift we all still share today – occasioned, in addition to a great many miraculous spiritual gifts no longer functioning⁷, a number of developments in the dispensation of special revelation unique to that short period of time which lasted only as long as the twelve apostles of Christ lived (the original eleven, minus Judas plus Paul). The apostolic period was, as we have previously seen, a most distinctive one⁸, a time of transition unlike any other, and that fact occasioned an equally unique dispensation of special revelation for the edification of believers from a variety of different sources:

(i) Tongues and Interpretation: We can see from what happened on the first Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), that the gift of tongues had to do with allowing a Christian who had no prior knowledge of a particular language or "tongue" to be able to speak it perfectly nonetheless so as to be able to share the gospel message with those who spoke that "tongue". This gift only provided special revelation to other Christians directly from God the Holy Spirit when it was supplemented by the spiritual gift of "interpretation of tongues" (1Cor.14:28-29). The content of these messages seems to have been restricted to the gospel message of Jesus Christ's person and work, and the praises of God and His glory.

(ii) Prophecy: Just as there were prophets in the Old Testament who provided specific special revelation to Israel which was not to be written down, so in the case of the early years of the Church Age many were given the gift of prophecy (e.g., Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9-10), for the purpose of edifying the local churches (Rom.12:6; 1Cor.12:10; 13:2; 13:8; 14:6; 14:22). This was a particularly important spiritual gift for that short interval between Pentecost and the time when the New Testament could be written and distributed (i.e., the roughly thirty-five years between 33 and 68-69 A.D. when the last apostle, John, was called home). In the absence of the New Testament, prophecy largely filled in the gaps by providing necessary knowledge of the mystery doctrines later to be expounded in the New Testament epistles, gospels and the book of Revelation. Now that the Law had been fulfilled, Jesus Christ revealed, and His mission of salvation accomplished, individuals with the gift of prophecy were empowered to explain these truths and their implications until such time as the New Testament itself became available. Just as tongues and its interpretation was dedicated to revelation necessary for salvation and its appreciation, prophecy was concerned with the entire realm of truth needed by believers to advance spiritually after salvation.

(iii) Other Communication Gifts: In his listing of spiritual gifts in 1st Corinthians 12:8-10, Paul mentions the gifts of "word of wisdom", "word of knowledge" and "faith". From the fact that the first two are related to words, that is, verbal communication, and from a comparison of this list to Paul's re-listing of the gifts in synopsis form of the gifts later in the chapter (1Cor.12:28-30), it is

⁷ See BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.3.d.1.c, "Temporary Gifts".

⁸ See BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section I.B.5, "The Time of Transition versus the Present Status Quo".

clear that these three gifts have to do with teaching – the communication of the Word of God during the apostolic era. These temporary gifts also helped to fill the gap between the Ages of Israel and the Church, providing the men who would teach the Word during those days with the means of doing so without having to first undergo a long course of preparation to be able to do so effectively as is the case today. That is to say, during the early days of the apostles and before the completion and distribution of the Bible, the content of the "word of wisdom" or "word of knowledge" or "[word of] faith" seems to have been supplied directly by the Spirit apart from scripture (which was not complete or completely available) and apart from personal preparation on the part of these early teachers (who had no completed New Testament to learn from among other disadvantages compared to the situation today).

(iv) Apostleship and the Inspiration of the New Testament: Apostleship was a unique spiritual gift which included (at times at least) all of the others, along with a special authority for supervising the new wave of evangelism that followed the first Pentecost and also of organizing and overseeing the growing Church as it now expanded into gentile areas. Apostles taught the truth, and were able to do so in depth and detail because of their prophetic gift. Of critical importance to the entire future history of the Church was of course the commissioning of certain apostles (and in a few cases of those closely associated with them) to write the New Testament. This occurred (as we shall consider below) over approximately a twenty-five year period, so that the New Testament took shape – absolutely according to God's perfect plan and supervision under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – somewhat incrementally, with the books themselves gradually finding their way to every Christian community as they were eagerly sought and copied from the very beginning.

(v) The Old Testament and the Law: In addition to the New Testament which came on the scene book by book, and in addition to the special revelation supplied by the apostles and those with the gift of prophecy, the Old Testament continued to be as it is today a rich source of truth needful for all believers.

He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Matthew 13:52 NIV

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Romans 15:4 NIV

But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully,

1st Timothy 1:8 NKJV

As any cursory reading of the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles will readily show, the process of coming to *understand* the Old Testament correctly and precisely how the Law was fulfilled in

its true essence (so as to be abrogated in its literal practice) was not an immediate one. It is not too much to say that the entire time of transition (from the era of the apostles to the full functioning of the Church under the Holy Spirit) was devoted to that task. Sadly, even today this issue is a stumbling block to many and not completely understood by most. Blessedly, however, the entire New Testament was completed during this time of transition, and the truth resides therein for all who are genuinely interested to find if willing to do so.

(f) The Church Age: Following the apostolic era, all temporary spiritual gifts were gradually discontinued as unnecessary and counterproductive after the transition from Old to New Covenant had been successfully made (1Cor.13:8-11; see following section). As a result, following the completion of the New Testament, special revelation during the Church Age thereafter has come entirely through the Bible, the Old and New Testaments, taught through the agency of those gifted by the Holy Spirit to teach. God has provided no further direct prophecy or special revelation through other gifts or visitations during this time. The Bible is at present the sole source of special revelation on earth, with the Spirit making it perceptible to believers, all of whom have the Spirit (e.g., Rom.8:9), through Bible reading for reinforcement of the truth already known and believed (*epignosis*), and through Bible teaching from a gifted, qualified pastor-teacher (so as to add to one's store of *epignosis* in order to grow spiritually). These are the only ways in which the truth of special revelation are currently being dispensed. Other spiritual gifts (all believers have them) have as their purpose the support of this goal of spiritual growth by amplifying the ministry of truth through, e.g., encouragement and material support of fellow believers and Bible teaching ministries, as well as ministering the Word to unbelievers.

(g) The Tribulation: The last seven years of the Church Age are also the last seven years of the Jewish Age (the two overlap). During this time, there will again be all manner of miraculous empowerments, most notably the 144,000 Jewish evangelists with the worldwide ministry of turning the hearts of Israel back to the Lord under the guidance of Moses and Elijah, the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven, brought back to life for this purpose. We may expect then all manner of prophetic revelation during this time (cf. Joel 2:28-29).

(h) The Millennium: During the final 1,000 years of human history, Jesus Christ will rule the world in person from Jerusalem. At that time, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Is.11:9b NKJV; cf. Hab.2:14). There will be no dearth of teaching or special revelation during that time, and we may safely say that all manner of means will be employed to dispense special revelation so as to achieve the fulfilment of this prophecy.

3. The Nature, Perfection and Inspiration of the Bible

a. The Nature of the Bible

(1) The Bible is a book entirely about Jesus Christ

"The Bible is not such a book a man would write if he *could*, or could write if he *would*."⁹

"Such a book could not be written by man if he chose to write it, and even if he could, man would not choose to write it, apart from divine direction."¹⁰

These quotes from L.S. Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, are pithy reminders of what every Christian already knows: the Bible is a book unlike any other which has ever been written.

"Is my Word not like fire?", says the Lord, "And [is it not] like a hammer which can smash to bits a rocky mountainside?
Jeremiah 23:29

Though it was written by over sixty human authors, in three different languages, over the course of fifteen hundred years, in poetry and in prose, as law and as letters, imparting prophecy and history, wisdom and teaching, from its beginning to its ending, the Bible is absolutely consistent in its message . . . of creation and salvation through Jesus Christ, the true Light of the world. He is the Message. He is the Word of God.

(1) Before all else, God created the heavens and the earth. (2) But the earth came to be ruined and despoiled – darkness lay upon the face of the abyss while God's Spirit brooded over the surface of its waters. (3) Then God said, "Let light be!", and there was light (cf. Jn.8:12; 9:5).
Genesis 1:1-3

(4) In Him was life, and this life was the light of men. (5) The Light shone in the darkness, but the darkness [chose] not [to] comprehend it.
John 1:4-5

(16) "I, Jesus, sent My angel to testify these things to you concerning the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star. (17) And the Spirit and the bride say 'Come [and be saved]!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come [and be saved]!' And let the one who is thirsty come [to salvation]. Let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. (18) I bear solemn witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, [that] if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues written in this book. (19) And [that] if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and of the holy city which have been written [about] in this book." (20) The One who bears witness that these things are so says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen! Come quickly Lord Jesus! (21) The grace

⁹ L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (1947-48), vol.1, p. 22.

¹⁰ L.S. Chafer and J.F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes* (rev. 1974) p.14.

of the Lord Jesus be with [you His] holy ones.
Revelation 22:16-21

Thus the fundamental reason for the different nature of the Bible as compared to all other books is that, while no other books do so, the Bible comes from God bearing His proclamation of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible alone contains His good news for all human kind, and that Gospel Message is Jesus Christ.

"I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life."
John 8:12b

The reality of the Bible being the one and only source of God's truth about Him who is the truth, Jesus Christ our Lord, can be demonstrated in many ways and from many different perspectives, but suffice it to say by way of introduction that everyone who is genuinely seeking the truth eventually comes to the Bible, and that everyone who reads the Bible out of a genuine desire to find the truth always comes to this same essential conclusion: this truly is God's book – and that is true of no other – and that its message is one of deliverance from sin and death through the One who is the only way of salvation.

(24) "The God who made the world and everything in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in man-made temples, (25) nor is he waited on by human hands, as if He needed anything from us. He is the One who gives us all life and breath and everything else. (26) From one man he created all the nations of mankind – that they should come to inhabit the whole face of the earth. He fixed and determined the specific times and extent of their habitations, (27) to the end that they should seek out this God, that they might go in search of Him and so might find Him – for He is not far off from any one of us. (28) *'For in Him we live and move and exist'*, as also some of your own poets have said: *'For we are also His progeny'*. (29) Since then we are God's progeny, we ought not to think that deity is similar to [something made of] gold or silver or stone, fashioned by human skill and imagination. (30) So having overlooked the [former] times of ignorance, God now commands all men everywhere to repent. (31) For He has appointed a day on which He is going to judge the world in righteousness through the Man He has ordained, having given proof of this to all through having raised Him from the dead."
Acts 17:24-31

Searching for a solution to the universal human problem of sin and death always leads to the Bible, and the Bible always leads to Jesus Christ, because the Bible is all about Jesus Christ, the only Way to life eternal, Him who is the Message Himself, the good news incarnate, the very Word of God.

And *the Word* became flesh and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."

John 5:39 NKJV (cf. Lk.24:27; Acts 13:27)

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me."

John 14:6

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about *the Word* of life (i.e., Jesus Christ).

1st John 1:1

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated on it is called "Faithful and True", and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war. (12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself. (13) And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and His Name has [always] been called, "*The Word* of God".

Revelation 19:11-13

Therefore as the only sure witness to Jesus Christ, the Bible itself, not the writings or teachings of any man or organization, not the supposed eyewitness accounts of any third party, nor any vision, dream, prophecy or any other possible source of information, is the only proper standard of faith and practice for those who purport to be followers of Jesus Christ. For the Bible is the Word and the Word is Jesus Christ.

And I fell before his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "See that you don't [do that]! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers who hold [fast] the testimony about Jesus. Worship God! *For the testimony about Jesus is the essence* (lit., "spirit") *of* [all divine] *prophecy*".

Revelation 19:10

(2) The Bible divides like a Sword

So much of human life actually has to do with separation, separating what is true from what is false and choosing one or the other. Life is God's means of allowing human beings to determine their own eternal futures and thus separate themselves from each other on the basis of their attitude towards the truth.

"For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he

who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

Matthew 10:35-39 NKJV

As God's witness to Jesus Christ, the Bible is the most divisive book ever written. And because it is God's very truth, it will of necessity provoke strong reactions from everyone who considers it and its content of truth. In this life, all have to decide whether or not to respond to God's Gift of Jesus Christ, and the truth of the Bible is the tangible means of producing that separation on the part of those who do respond from those who do not. Ultimately, there can be no fellowship between light and darkness (2Cor.6:14-18), so that those who decide to follow Jesus Christ and His truth as contained in the Bible will soon find themselves enemies of the world (Jn.15:18-20; cf. Jas.4:4; 1Jn.2:15-17; 3:13). The truth is divisive, and therefore the Bible, the ultimate source of God's truth in this world today, divides like the sharpest sword those who are willing to embrace that truth from those who are not, and continuing its work of division in all things important until the believer has been effectively separated from this world and its evil, even while still physically resident in it.

a) Dividing believers from unbelievers:

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a *sword*."

Matthew 10:34 NKJV

b) Dividing right thinking from wrong thinking by means of spiritual growth:

(12) For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged *sword*, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions. (13) For there is no created thing [which can remain] invisible before Him. Everything is naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:12-13

c) Dividing good choices from bad choices in the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged:

And [in this spiritual warfare] put on the helmet of salvation and gird on the *sword* of the Spirit – which is the Word of truth.

Ephesians 6:17

d) Dividing the "quick and the dead" literally at Christ's return, those who accepted the truth from those who spurned it:

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated

on it is called "Faithful and True", and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war. (12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself. (13) And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and His Name has [always] been called, "The Word of God". (14) And His armies were following Him in the sky [mounted] on white horses, [and] clad in linen white and pure. (15) And a sharp **broadsword** proceeded from His mouth wherewith to smite the nations, and He Himself will shepherd them with an iron staff, and He Himself will trample the winepress of the furious wrath of God the Almighty. (16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords".
Revelation 19:11-16

(3) The Bible is a divine Light

Surely, You are a God who hides Himself.
Isaiah 45:15

If God revealed Himself in all of His glory to any sinful human being, there is no one who has ever lived – outside of our Lord Jesus Christ – who would not be instantly destroyed (Ex.33:20). Moreover, even if God prevented that from happening, shielding the person in question as He did Moses (Ex.33:21-23; 34:5-7), or giving said person the revelation in an ecstatic state as He did John (Rev.4:2-3), seeing God in His glory would virtually remove the issue of free will in salvation which is the entire point of the plan of God. Human history is the great proving ground where we all must decide for ourselves whether or not we desire to be with the Lord forever. The "price" of eternal life is merely to cease desiring to be gods ourselves (Gen.3:5) and instead accept from God in His grace through faith the Gift of Jesus Christ – but where there is no room for faith in the exercise of free will, there is no free will in fact.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and ***a light*** unto my path.
Psalm 119:105 KJV (cf. Ps119:130; Prov.6:23)

Standing between the darkness of this world and the unapproachable light of God Himself (1Tim.6:16) is the Word of God, the living Word Jesus Christ and the written Word which perfectly represents Him.

Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e., than witnessing the transfiguration of vv.16-18). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to it (i.e., scripture), just as to a ***lamp shining in a dark place***, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises (i.e., Jesus Christ revealed at the Second Advent).
2nd Peter 1:19

Jesus Christ is the Light of the world (Jn.8:12; 9:5; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 1Jn.2:8; Rev.21:23). He is the bright Morning Star (2Pet.1:19; Rev.22:16; cf. Num.24:17; Is.9:1-2; 42:6; 49:6; Matt.2:2; 2:9; 4:16; Lk.2:30-32), whose glorious presence will illuminate the entire earth on His return

(Is.60:1-3; Matt.24:29-30; Rev.1:7). But until that time, all "light" or truth about Him is found in one place and one place only: the holy scriptures. For all true witnessing and all true biblical teaching and encouragement ultimately derive from that one source alone.

For God who said, "Let light shine forth from the darkness!", is He who has shone forth [His light] into our hearts *to illuminate* our knowledge of God's glory in the person of Jesus Christ.

2nd Corinthians 4:6

Whenever a person responds to the light, there is illumination in the darkness of the heart through the Holy Spirit, for salvation when an unbeliever turns to the Lord, and for spiritual growth when a believer accepts the truth of the Word whether directly from scripture, or from its orthodox teaching, or from the encouragement of other believers based on the Bible. And the foundation, the essence, the "spirit" (Rev.19:10) of that truth has always been Him who is the Light, even Jesus Christ. He is the mystery veiled from the world and only unveiled, revealed and illuminated through the agency of the Holy Spirit for those willing to believe and accept the truth. And it is only in the Bible that the mystery of Him who is the Light, Jesus Christ our Lord, is revealed.

(25) It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*), (26) that is, [to make known] *the mystery* hidden from ages and from generations [past], but now *revealed* to His holy ones (i.e., believers). (27) To all such God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – is in you.

Colossians 1:25-27

(1) I want you to know what a great struggle I am engaging in on your behalf and on behalf of those in Laodicea and [on behalf of] as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, (2) [struggling] that your hearts may be encouraged, being instructed in love and [led] into the entire treasury of [spiritual] understanding, confidently believed, so as to [possess] the full-knowledge (*epignosis*) of *the mystery* of God the Father, [namely] Christ, (3) in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

Colossians 2:1-3

(4) The Bible is the very Word of God

And because of this we also give thanks to God continually, because, when you received the word of hearing from us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it really is, *the Word of God* – the very Word which is at work inside of you *as you believe it*.

1st Thessalonians 2:13

Just as salvation requires genuine faith, so all spiritual growth requires not only the reception of the Word of God, its teaching in particular, but, as in the passage above, its acceptance as such –

through faith in the veracity of what it says and teaches. Only in this way is the knowledge imparted by reading the Bible and by accessing orthodox teaching about the Bible converted by the Holy Spirit into "full knowledge" or *epignosis*, that is, "truth believed" and thus stored in the heart so as to be useful to the Spirit in guiding our steps and encouraging us in all our trials. The Bible and its truths must not, therefore, be considered "the words of mere men", but "the very Word of God" in order for the Christian to be benefitted by it. Only in this way do we store up the treasures of truth in our hearts necessary to see the world and ourselves through God's eyes, so as to then be able to think, speak and act accordingly in a godly way.

For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; *it acts as a judge* of our heart's intentions and emotions.

Hebrews 4:12

(21) Therefore cast aside all [moral] filthiness and effluence of evil, and in humility [continue to] receive the Word implanted in you, for it is able to save your [eternal] lives. (22) Be *doers of the Word* and not merely hearers, deceiving yourselves. (23) Because if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, such a one is like a man who recognizes his natural face in a mirror – (24) for in this case, though he recognized himself, he straightway went about his business, soon forgetting what he looked like. (25) But he who sets his gaze upon the perfect law of freedom (i.e., scripture – the perfect mirror of the heart) and sticks with it, and is not a [mere] forgetful hearer [of the Word], but a doer of deeds [inspired by the Word], that man will be blessed in his "doing".

James 1:21-25

Only the very Word of God itself is capable of sifting our hearts' intentions and emotions; only the very Word of God reflects for us like a mirror what we are really like deep down inside – and only when we accept it for the Word of God it truly is.

5) The Bible is the very Truth

From where then does wisdom come?
And where is the place of understanding?
It is hidden from the eyes of all living,
And concealed from the birds of the air.
Destruction and Death say,
'We have heard a report about it with our ears.'
God understands its way,
And He knows its place.

Job 28:20-23 NKJV

Wisdom is said to be the first of the works of God (Prov.8:22), and what is wisdom and where is wisdom contained if not in the Bible? And what is wisdom, if not to know the truth about God and respond accordingly?

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
Proverbs 9:10 NKJV

Scripture is a perfect reflection of God, a life-giving, powerful one, and as such is the embodiment of truth for us who are in the world. It is hard, indeed impossible, to imagine a more perfect device for sharing the knowledge and truth of God to His children than the scriptures we possess. They are absolutely essential to everything we know about Him and everything we do in response to Him.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."
John 14:6 NKJV

Jesus Christ *is* the Truth. And the Bible, the written Word which bears testimony to the Living Word, is likewise the truth – the perfect reflection of Him. Only the truth – found only in the Bible – is capable of setting us free from the lies and deceptions of the devil's world (Jn.8:31-32; 8:44); only the truth of scripture, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, is capable of transforming believers into the persons our Savior would have us to be.

(17) Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. (18) And everyone of us, if we reflect the Lord's glory with no "veil" obscuring our faces (i.e., with unsullied Christian witness), is being *transformed* into the same image [of God] (i.e., become more Christ-like as we use our free will to respond to Him) so as to reflect an ever greater degree of [God's] glory [as we do so] (lit., "from glory to glory") – exactly what is to be expected with the Lord's Spirit as the agent [of our transformation].
2nd Corinthians 3:17-18

(1) Therefore I entreat you by God's mercy, brothers, to dedicate your bodies as a living sacrifice, well-pleasing to God – [this is] your "priestly-service" spiritually performed. (2) Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by this renewal of your thinking, so that you may discern what God's will for you is, namely what it is good, well-pleasing, and correct [for you to do]. (3) Through the grace which has been given to me I tell everyone among you not to over-think [his role] beyond what he ought to think, but to direct his thinking towards sober thoughts [in this regard], inasmuch as God has allotted each [and every] one of us a measure of [our common] faith [in Jesus Christ] (cf. 2Pet.1:1).
Romans 12:1-3

Acceptance of the essential truthfulness of scripture is thus fundamental to our spiritual growth, because only by believing the Word of Christ can we become more like Christ.

6) The Bible is God's testimony of Life

In Him, [Jesus Christ], was life, and this life was the light of men.
John 1:4

Jesus Christ *is* life, and thus His Word is described as "living" as well (1Pet.1:23; Heb.4:12; cf. Jn.4:10-11; 6:51; 7:38; Acts 7:38) – because only the testimony about Him leads to life eternal.

But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."
John 6:68 NKJV

Without the Bible, it would be impossible for us to know the truth about Jesus Christ through whom alone we have eternal life. And so it is in this sense of being the undying truth concerning the living God coming directly from Him, and of being the only means by which we know the wonderful truths about the Author of Life, Jesus Christ, that scripture is "alive", for it is the very "water of life" which alone leads to rebirth from death (Jn.3:5; Rev.22:17; cf. Is.55:1; Jer.17:13; Jn.4:14; 7:37-38; 1Cor.10:4; Eph.5:26; Tit.3:5).

(7) The Bible is the very Mind of Christ

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct Him? But we possess the very mind of Christ (i.e. the Holy Spirit illuminating the scriptures which are Christ's very thinking).
1st Corinthians 2:16

This verse speaks for itself and sums up all we have been saying in this section. In truth, there is no distinction between the thoughts and words of our Lord and the Bible which testifies to them and to Him – a truly important perspective to hold fast and to embrace whenever we open our Bibles and give attention to the Word of truth,

b. The Perfection of the Bible

"But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth."
Daniel 10:21 NKJV

"But first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth."
Daniel 10:21 NIV

However translated, the Hebrew phrase (*bechtabh emeth* – בְּחִתְּבֵי אֱמֶת) used by the angel Gabriel speaking with Daniel here (cf. Dan.9:21), "in the writing of truth" is referring to the Bible, for in the remainder of the book of Daniel, Gabriel gives Daniel a detailed exposition of future prophecy. This tells us unmistakably that the Bible in its exact original form (i.e., as originally penned) was already perfectly conceived in the mind of God. For this "book of truth" from which Gabriel reads throughout the next two chapters of the book of Daniel *is in fact from the book of Daniel*. Based on the above, we are right to take the following scripture in an entirely

literal sense:

Your Word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.
Psalm 119:89 NIV

Therefore the Bible is not an afterthought or reaction to events. In its precise original form it existed in the mind of God before the initiation of creation as a critical and essential part of that creation – because the Bible is the written record of God's plan explicating Him who is the Word, the very plan of God incarnate, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore the Bible is not just *a* word of God, or an important collection of *some* words of God. The Bible is *the* Word of God – just as it proclaims itself to be (e.g., 1Sam.9:27; Mk.7:13; Eph.6:17; Heb.4:12; Rev.1:2).

(8) Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. (9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part. (10) But when that which is *perfect* has come, then that which is in part will be done away.¹¹

1st Corinthians 13:8-10 NKJV

The Bible is the complete, inspired, authoritative, *perfect* message from God about Jesus Christ. Just as our Lord became a human being who could be touched (Jn.20:27) – and yet is so much more than what our physical senses can perceive, so also the Bible is God's specific and tangible message, one we can hold in our own hands, written down for us who believe in Jesus Christ, meant to help us draw closer to Him through the truth it contains – which is also far greater than our physical senses can perceive. As such, the Bible is God's perfect written Word, the perfect complement to Him who is the perfect living Word, Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior.

This is no small point. In the passage quoted above, 1st Corinthians 13:8-10, Paul places scripture far above the "sign gifts" that have often captured the attention of readers of scripture (even to the point of wrongly trying to engage in them now that they have ceased). So important is the Bible that Paul describes it as "the perfect" or "the complete" thing, and uses the Greek phrase, *to teleion*, to deliberately recall and parallel the perfection of Christ's sacrifice (Heb.2:10; 5:9; 7:28; 10:14; 12:2; cf. Heb.7:11; 7:19; 9:9; 10:1; 11:40; 12:23), the perfect and complete work of redemption which is the counterpart of the Person of Christ that together form the basis of our faith – and about which we can only know from "that which is perfect and complete", namely, the Bible.¹²

(28) After [all] this (i.e., our Lord's physical suffering and His spiritual death for the sins

¹¹ For a discussion of this passage and its meaning vis-à-vis the cessation of the extraordinary spiritual gifts mentioned here, see BB 5: Pneumatology, in section II.B.3.d.1.c, "Temporary Gifts".

¹² See BB 4A: Christology, section II.5.a, "Christ died spiritually".

of the world), when Jesus knew that everything had now been accomplished (*tetelestai*) in order for the [prophecy of salvation found in] scripture to be fulfilled, He said, "I am thirsty". (29) Now a jar of wine-vinegar lay there, so they placed a sponge full of the wine-vinegar on a hyssop [stalk] and brought it to His mouth. (30) So when He had taken the wine-vinegar, Jesus said, "It (i.e., salvation) has [now] been accomplished!" (*tetelestai*), and having thrown back His head, He gave up His spirit.
John 19:28-30

The Bible is perfect in every way; therefore "the perfect" is the perfect title for it. One need not go anywhere else to look for the truth as all of God's truth that may be known about Jesus Christ this side of heaven is contained therein. In fact, there is no place else to go for the truth we need to fulfill God's will for our lives.

But he who sets his gaze upon *the perfect* law of freedom (i.e., scripture – the perfect mirror of the heart) and sticks with it, and is not a [mere] forgetful hearer [of the Word], but a doer of deeds [inspired by the Word], that man will be blessed in his "doing".
James 1:25

c. The Inspiration of the Bible

As explained previously, the Bible falls under the category of "special revelation", that is, specific truth from God which is only given and which can only be understood through the agency of the Holy Spirit. As the passage quoted immediately below teaches, all such direct revelation from God is meant to be preserved – as opposed to a) the indirect revelation of the truth (i.e., "natural revelation" which may be gleaned from contemplation of His creation), or b) specific communications not meant to be recorded as part of the Bible – at least not by the individuals who received them (e.g., Gen.1:28-29; 1Sam.9:15-17; Neh.9:30; Zech.7:12; Lk.1:46-55; 1:67-79). Inspired revelation comes in a direct line from God to special individuals, called prophets in the Bible who are empowered by the Spirit both to receive these truths and also to preserve them for other believers through the process of writing so as to produce holy scripture. This process is called in theology, "inspiration".

(19) Yet I consider the *prophetically inspired* Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e., than what I saw with my own eyes). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105), until the day dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. the Living Word, Jesus Christ, returns), (20) pondering in your hearts this principle of prime importance: no single verse of *prophetically inspired* scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection. (21) For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken *under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit*.
2nd Peter 1:16-21

Often overlooked but of critical importance is the fact that the very first part of the written Word was inscribed on stone by the Lord Himself, setting the prime principle that scripture is God's

very Word:

And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.
Exodus 31:18 NKJV

(15) And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. (16) Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.
Exodus 32:15-16 NKJV

And the Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke."
Exodus 34:1 NKJV

"So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone."
Deuteronomy 4:13 NKJV

"These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me."
Deuteronomy 5:22 NKJV

The Lord's own writing out of the ten commandments was a special inaugural consecration of the written Word to demonstrate that scripture is "from God" in every way. Following the gift of the ten commandments, the Lord commissioned Moses to write out the rest of the Torah or Law (Ex.34:27).¹³ Thus, beginning with Moses, while prophets would continue to receive direct special revelation from God not meant to be preserved (e.g., Ex.33:11), they were sometimes instructed to record such revelation (as in Moses' case with the rest of the Law or Torah beyond the ten commandments: e.g., Ex.17:14; 34:28a; and cf. Deut.18:15 with Num.12:6-8). In this way, the Lord has provided believers with just what we need to know the truth in this dark world, namely, the Bible, the written Word of God.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119:105 KJV

As explained above, not all special revelation – direct communications from God to certain exceptional believers – has been written down. Far from it. Paul tells us in Hebrews that, "in the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways"

¹³ The subject of the second sentence in Ex.34:28 is the Lord; cf. NKJV: "And **He** wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments" (emphasis added).

(Heb.1:1 NIV). A prophet or other holy individual receiving a dream or a vision or an angelic communication or even a direct word from the Lord was then allowed in most cases to pass this along to other believers verbally in his or her own words (e.g., Ex.20:20; Deut.9:12). The Bible is unique in that in its original written form it comes from God Himself, directly at first (i.e., His personal inscribing of the ten commandments), then indirectly, making use of the prophets who received it to produce that written form through divine inspiration. Inspiration guarantees that even though most of the Bible was not penned by God Himself but rather written through His prophets, nevertheless it is very much **His** Word, being exactly as He intended it to be, just as much as if He had personally etched the entire Bible on stone.

All scripture is **inspired** by God and useful for teaching, for admonishing, for correcting, and for training in righteousness.

2nd Timothy 3:16

The word translated above as "inspired" is the Greek adjective *theopneustos* (θεοπνευστος), and means, literally, "God-breathed". As readers of this ministry know quite well, breath represents life (cf. Gen.2:7).¹⁴ Just as human beings only have life because God imparts/creates our human spirit's at birth (after the pattern of "breathing" into Adam's nostrils "the breath of life"), so also scripture is different from all other writing because it is quickened by God Himself, endowed with the life-giving truth that only the Bible possesses (as any believer who has read the Bible realizes full well just from reading it). Thus it is hard to imagine any description of scripture which would any more directly impute God's authority to the content of the Bible than "God-breathed". The ten commandments are "God-etched", but the rest of scripture is "God-breathed" so that the result is the same, even though Moses' pen rather than God's finger produced the first physical form of the remainder of the Law – and the same is true of rest of prophetic scripture as well.

(20) Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

(21) For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

2nd Peter 1:20-21 KJV

(20) . . . pondering in your hearts this principle of prime importance: no single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection.

(21) For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit.

2nd Peter 1:20-21

Peter in the passage above tells us first what scripture is not: it is **not** like any other human writing. Nothing in the Bible is "the result of personal reflection" (KJV: "private interpretation"), meaning that human intelligence, talent and imagination is **not** the source of any part of the Bible. "Prophecy" – the "foretelling" and "forth-telling" of God's truth (e.g., 1Sam.9:9) – has

¹⁴ See BB 3A: Biblical Anthropology, section II.3, "The Human Spirit".

never been the result of "human will" (RSV: "the impulse of man"). That is not what the Bible is nor how it came about. Scripture *is*, as Peter tells us clearly, the result of special individuals, prophets, "holy men of/from God" (literally) being directed, "carried along" (literally; KJV: "moved") by the Holy Spirit. That is to say, scripture is the product of the Holy Spirit using special individuals to produce God's perfect, life-giving message of truth in written form, the precise message that God intended us to have, perfect in every detail – yet without waiving the personalities or styles or prior experience of the prophets chosen to write it.

(1) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: (2) Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

Revelation 1:1-2 KJV

(1) Jesus Christ's revelation which God gave to Him in order to show His servants what must take place in rapid succession; and He (i.e., Jesus) in turn placed His seal of authority upon it by sending it through His angel to His servant John, (2) who [here] gives witness to [this] Word of God and testimony from Jesus Christ, as many things as he (i.e., John) did see.

Revelation 1:1-2

As we read the book of Revelation, we see the prophecy through John's eyes, and John relates to us the vision in his own words, even occasionally informing us of his emotional response to what he is given to see (Rev.5:4; 10:10; 19:10; 22:8). Yet we are assured in this introduction that this prophecy, the entire book of Revelation, 1) comes directly from and is about Jesus Christ; 2) emanates originally from God the Father and is then given directly to Jesus Christ; 3) has our Lord's personal seal of authority upon it; 4) was sent – as a prophecy – via angelic messenger from Jesus Christ to the apostle John; 5) is officially affirmed by John as being the very "Word of God" and a solemn "testimony" coming directly "from Jesus Christ"; 6) and finally is said by John in the power of the Spirit to be a prophecy he personally was given to "see" himself first hand.

Not only would it be difficult to conceive of a more emphatic and detailed statement as to the authority of the book of Revelation or a more unambiguous declaration that the words of the book are indeed the very words of God, but we can also glean from this description much about the process of inspiration: John very clearly is the one who put pen to paper in order to record this prophecy, and that is how we have the book of Revelation in our Bibles today, the original document being recopied and preserved by believers from that day until our own (see section 4 below, "The Transmission of the Bible"). And yet this is in every respect "God's Word", coming from the Father to our Lord Jesus Christ, then via angelic messenger to John for the purpose of recording it precisely as given, finally to be sealed with the authority of the Son of God so as to vouch for its absolute and pristine accuracy as the precise message meant to be shared with His Church.

So although these words were written down by John in his own style, the message itself and the content his words contain came directly from God, His Holy Spirit so directing the inspired prophet that the result is the precise message our Lord desired to convey (i.e., our Lord's "testimony" or "solemnly witnessed message of truth"). This is the essence of true, biblical "inspiration", not of man's will, but of God's will; not a confused or somewhat imperfect human message with divine elements, but a perfect divine message set in a form understandable to human beings, as the apostle Peter made clear: "For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit." (2Pet.1:21).

These are the last words of David: "The *oracle* [*ne'um*, נְאֻם – divine revelation] of David son of Jesse, the *oracle* of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs: *The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; His Word* was on my tongue."

2nd Samuel 23:1-2 NIV

In the Bible in its original form we have the Spirit's precise message just as the Lord desired it to be in every respect. The Holy Spirit directed the writing of every legitimate writer of scripture, every prophet, that is, moved by Him to write scripture, so as to divinely inspire every single word without waiving the prophet's human personality or personal modes of expression in the process.

"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

John 15:26 NKJV

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

John 16:13 NKJV

The result is the perfect and unalterable Word of God, just as the Lord would have it, the primary provision of the Spirit for the task of the Church's edification. Thus the Bible and the Bible alone is the Word of God, the treasure He gives which we are meant to mine, and the sole source of all truth for the Church of Jesus Christ, even Him who is the Living Word of God.

"All this," David said, "I have in writing as a result of the Lord's hand on me, and he enabled me to understand all the details of the plan."

1st Chronicles 28:19 NIV

He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool' ""?

Matthew 22:43 (cf. Mk.12:36)

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?"

Acts 4:25 NIV

(11) But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. (12) For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:11-12 NKJV

For it was through [God's] revelation that this mystery [of His calling out of the gentiles] was made known to me as I wrote you briefly before.

Ephesians 3:3

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

1st Timothy 4:1 NKJV

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice (Ps. 95:7–11) . . ."

Hebrews 3:7 NKJV

The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning.

Hebrews 9:8 NIV

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this.

Hebrews 10:15 NIV

The Spirit is the One who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

1st John 5:6b

"He who has an ear, let him hear what *the Spirit says* to the churches."

Revelation 2:7 (Rev.2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:32)

d. The Authority of the Bible

And because of this we also give thanks to God continually, because, when you received the word of hearing from us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it really is, *the Word of God* – the very Word which is at work inside of you *as you believe it*.

1st Thessalonians 2:13

As the Word of God, the Bible is worthy not only to be regarded as such but to be treated as such. In this regard, only total respect will suffice. Those who accept the Bible as God's Word in principle but in practice doubt it do themselves no good in any interaction with it because of their lack of faith. Paul's praise of the Thessalonian believers above is *both* for their reception of the truth of the Bible – and of the truth taught from the Bible – and *also* importantly for *believing*

what they read and were taught as a result. Just as, absent saving faith in Christ, a mere understanding on some intellectual level that Jesus is God and man and that He died for the sins of the world is not sufficient to be saved – even the demons know that (Jas.2:19) – so also the Bible has to be believed for what it is, God's very Word, to benefit those who read it and who are taught from it. Trusting without doubt that what the Bible says is absolutely true, fully respecting its special God-given authority, is a prerequisite for spiritual growth.

Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God."

Matthew 22:29 NKJV

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but *my words* will never pass away."

Matthew 24:35 NIV

"Search the scriptures (since you assume by how you read them that you have eternal life)! These are the very scriptures that bear testimony about Me."

John 5:39

You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105).

2nd Peter 1:19b

Those who give lip-service to the Bible but accept other "works" as authoritative have by definition disrespected the Bible's divine authority. Only the Bible is inspired by God. Not the Book of Mormon, nor the Apocrypha, nor any of the various and sundry "holy books" of every religion and cult under the sun. To the extent that anyone gives any credence to any other writing in terms of considering it on a par with the Word of God, to that extent the person in question has diminished the authority of genuine scripture – in his or her eyes alone (since the true authority of scripture is absolute and untouchable). This includes not only the books of non-Christian religious and quasi-Christian cults but also any work of the Christian tradition (e.g., the church fathers). Legitimate Bible teaching is valuable and actually essential for spiritual growth, but only the Bible is the Word of God.

Scripture alone is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for admonishing, for correcting, and for training in righteousness.

2nd Timothy 3:16

Our Lord and his apostles did many miraculous acts in the power of the Holy Spirit, and these signs and miracles contributed in many cases to the evangelizing of the unbelieving by giving a hearing to the Word (2Cor.12:12). In near time to come, however, the devil, his son, and their false prophet will be allowed to produce signs and portents of such power so as to deceive, "if possible", even the elect (Matt.24:24; 2Thes.2:9-10; Rev.13:14; 19:20). For believers, therefore, the Word not only *is* more authoritative even than anything we see with our own eyes, but also *needs to be* to us in fact.

Jesus said to [His disciple, Thomas], "Because you have seen Me you have believed?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have [yet] believed!"
John 20:29

For this reason, God has exalted the authority of His Word, His message to the world and particularly to believers, above all things – even above His own Holy Name.

You have magnified *Your Word* above *Your entire Name*.
Psalm 138:2b (cf. Ps.33:4)

Moreover, the *entire* Bible is authoritative, and equally so. Versions which print the "words of Christ" in red ignore the fact that the entire Bible is "the mind of Christ" (1Cor.2:16), bearing the authority of the Son who is the Living Word of God commissioned by the Father who is the source of the Word and empowered by the Spirit who inspires the written Word which alone bears testimony to Him. The message of the entire Bible is seamless: rightly understood, from the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelation, the Word of God is about *the* Word of God Jesus Christ, and absolutely authoritative in every part, Old Testament as well as New Testament, with no preference to be given in terms of authority to any part over any other part.

(51) "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. He said to them, (52) "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."
Matthew 13:51-52 NIV

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.
Romans 15:4 NKJV

But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully.
1st Timothy 1:8 NKJV

The Bible alone is the Word of God, and it is the only *source* in this world of the Word of God. Without the Bible, therefore, there would be no possibility of spiritual growth. Without God's written counsel, even believers would be "swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit" (Eph.4:14); but since we blessedly do possess the Bible, "by embracing the truth" found in scripture we are able to "grow up in all respects with Christ" (Eph.4:15). God being the perfect and faithful God that He is would never have left us believers here in the devil's world without a way to hear from Him and learn about Him and fellowship with Him. God has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Deut.31:6; 31:8; Josh.1:5; 1:9; Heb.13:5-6). He is ever with us, and we who are carefully following Jesus Christ see Him clearly with the eyes of faith, faith that focuses on one thing and one thing alone, the truth found in the Bible exclusively.

"And behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the age."
Matthew 28:20b

This we know because the Bible tells us so. But there are many voices in the devil's world which tell us differently. "The Bible is inconsistent!", they say. "There are historical inaccuracies in the Bible!", they say. "Archaeology disproves it!", they say. "They" say many things, borne of unbelief, borne of lack of faith, borne of disbelief that the Bible is what it purports to be, the Word of God itself.

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth, so is the Word which goes forth from my mouth. It will not return to Me in vain without accomplishing what I please, and it will be successful in whatever [purpose] I have sent it forth."
Isaiah 55:10-11

We will have occasion to address these and other objections to the truth in sections four and five below. But for believers, no such quibbling will ever shake our faith that the Word of God is true, just as it says it is. For the moment, we may reply with this question to all such skeptics operating under the devil's sway, "what think ye of Christ?" We know He is the Savior of the world, the only Way to the Father and life eternal. And we know that from the Bible. But if the Bible were not the Word of God, if every single part of it were not the Word of God, then how would we know the least thing about our Savior – since everything true we know about Him derives ultimately from the Word of God alone? Do these skeptics believe in Christ? If they are believers, they are on a very dangerous road since their faith has no firm foundation when the scripture's authority is not being accepted. But *we* do accept the Bible's authority because *we* do know that the Bible is true. How? *By faith* – the same faith through which we were saved by putting our trust in the Living Word. And it is only by accepting the truth of His written Word that we may grow closer to Him, walking by faith in His Word even as we came to belong to Him through that same faith.

For we *walk* by faith, not by sight.
2nd Corinthians 5:7 NKJV

So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way].
Colossians 2:6

4. The Transmission of the Bible

a. The Completeness of the Bible

"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."
Deuteronomy 4:2 NKJV

"Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."

Deuteronomy 12:32 NKJV

Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

Proverbs 30:6 NKJV

Until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota or one serif will pass away from the Law – until everything has come to pass (i.e., the shadows of the Law fulfilled on the cross).

Matthew 5:18

(18) I bear solemn witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, [that] if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues written in this book. (19) And [that] if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and of the holy city which have been written [about] in this book."

Revelation 22:18-19

These scriptures are sufficient to demonstrate that the Bible has a complete form which may not be altered in any way, either by addition or subtraction. In its unaltered form, the Bible is flawless (Prov.30:5 NIV); it is the complete Word of God, and we are to live by "every word" of it (Deut.8:3; Matt.4:4; Lk.4:4).

So is the Word which goes forth from my mouth. It will not return to Me in vain without accomplishing what I please, and it will be successful in whatever [purpose] I have sent it forth.

Isaiah 55:11

As shown by this verse, the import of the completeness of the Bible as seen from the divine viewpoint has to do with God's opinion of its completeness and what that means. That is to say, the Bible is absolutely complete as God would have it to be in order to fulfill the purpose for which **He** has ordained it. It does not have to conform to human expectations of what it "ought to be" in man's eyes. The Bible is everything it was always meant to be in God's eyes, and blessedly so. Therefore quibbles and objections and criticisms levied against scripture which proceed from human expectations or judgments are of no account in terms of evaluating the perfect Word of God. Just because some human critical work or school or philosophy or scientific endeavor finds fault with scripture does not in any way mean that scripture is faulty. Scripture is perfectly complete, a work of absolute integrity, lacking nothing in terms of accomplishing what God has been pleased to accomplish with it, perfectly fulfilling the purpose for which He has sent it forth.

We have seen in the previous section in some detail what the Bible is; in this section it will be necessary to demonstrate its completeness in contradistinction to secular criticisms of it by explaining what it is not.

1. The Bible is not a Textbook:

In terms of its form, the Bible is a collection of individual books written by different men at different times in different languages and in different literary forms for different specific contemporary purposes – and yet its power and presentation of the truth is seamlessly perfect throughout its whole, and its message necessary and powerful throughout for God's people at all times.

These differences in composition do mean that the Bible does not present material in the same way that, say, a junior highschool social studies text would. Each book of the Bible has to be considered individually as well as being seen for what it also is, namely, an integral part of a perfect whole. So to expect the Bible to directly and in one place "tell us all we want to know about sin", for example, is to misunderstand its composition and also to some degree its purpose. The Bible does indeed have much to say about sin of course (and all other topics about which God wants His children to be informed), but it does not present the material in the same way a pedagogical text would do. Part of that has to do with the way in which the Bible was written (at different times and places with different immediate objectives), but it is also true that the Bible's distinctive manner of presenting the truth is absolutely deliberate on God's part: those who really want the truth have to demonstrate some level of commitment in order to receive it.

(10) And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"
(11) He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. (12) For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. (13) Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (14) And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:
'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
(15) For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.' "

Matthew 13:10-15 NKJV

This issue of the truth being veiled in scripture is both a synchronic and a diachronic one. Not only is the understanding of the truth which the Bible contains available only to believers *today* (synchronicity) as we progressively advance in spiritual maturity, adding "precept upon precept" by growing in that truth (Is.28:10), but, as Peter tells us, even writers of scripture of the past were desirous of knowing the mysteries relating to Christ about which they were given to write but which at the time of writing were not fully perceptible (until Christ came in the flesh: 1Pet.1:10-12). As growth in the truth today is progressive and limited to believers, so also the

Holy Spirit has revealed the full import and meaning of all the mysteries of truth meant for the Church only over time (diachronicity), called commonly in theology "progressive revelation".

"But you, Daniel, roll up and *seal the words* of the scroll until the *time of the end*. Many will go here and there *to increase knowledge*."

Daniel 12:4 NIV

(25) Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to *the revelation* of the *mystery kept secret* since the world began (26) but *now* made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures [now] made known to all nations . . .

Romans 16:25-26a NKJV [expanded]

(4) When you read these things you will be able to understand my spiritual insight into *this mystery* of Christ, (5) which was *not made known* to mankind in previous generations as it has *now been revealed* to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

Ephesians 3:4-5

(25) It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for *dispensing* [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*), (26) that is, [to make known] *the mystery hidden* from ages and from generations [past], but *now revealed* to His holy ones (i.e., believers). (27) To all such God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – is in you.

Colossians 1:25-27

(1) God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe.

Hebrews 1:1-2

(10) The prophets diligently investigated and inquired about this salvation, when they prophesied about this grace [that was to come] to you. (11) For they were eager to discover the precise time the Spirit of Christ within them was signifying as He predicted the [future] sufferings of Christ and the glories *that would follow*. (12) For it was *revealed* to them that in prophesying these things, they were *not* so much serving themselves *as they were you* – and these same things have *now* been proclaimed to you through those who gave you the gospel through the Holy Spirit, sent from heaven – even angels want to look into these things.

1st Peter 1:10-12

This is an important consideration in understanding the Bible as a whole and in particular the Old versus the New Testaments and the transition between the pre-cross and post-resurrection dispensations. We have covered that transition between the two in depth in the previous

installment of this series.¹⁵ What concerns us here is the crucial point that because of a failure to properly understand this issue alone – and especially also in concert with the various differences in presentation and circumstances of individual books – many have thought to have found "inconsistencies" in biblical teachings. But in fact in spite of the differences between the two testaments – and in spite of *all* differences of language, culture, time, dispensation, authorship, genre etc. – there are absolutely *no* inconsistencies of teaching present anywhere in the Bible (as diligent and godly study will always show in the end).

Finally, given the massive amount of truth contained in the Bible and the fact that it has been tailored perfectly by God Himself to meet the needs of every generation of believers since He first inscribed the ten commandments on stone with His own finger, the Bible had to be written in just the way it was written, and it had to be produced in just the way in which it was produced, in order to accomplish this divine purpose, giving us all we need to know when we need to know it, summarizing what must be summarized (cf. Dan.7:1 KJV: "the sum of the matter") and expanding what needs to be expanded (cf. the four different presentations of the gospel and the three different presentations of Paul's conversion experience: Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18), with the result being that we who have believed have in our possession the entire message meant just for us, the entire and complete Word of Truth.

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Amen.

John 21:25 NKJV

2. The Bible is not a History Book: Similarly, many have found supposed errors in the Bible's presentation of history; but, analogous to the above, that is an incorrect and superficial assessment in every single case where such claims are made. God is not required to present things in His book according to modern sensibilities or according to modern historical paradigms or according to contemporary appraisals of what happened in the ancient past. He is not required to include everything secular history thinks should have been included. Indeed, the Bible only ever treats historical matters where they intersect directly with the *true* history it is presenting, the history of the salvation of the human race (for those willing to be saved); that is to say, history from God's point of view, wherein one Joseph is more important than all the Pharaohs of Egypt – and the entire secular history of Egypt – from beginning to end.

This difference of essential viewpoint accounts for most alleged "errors". The fact that the Bible contains details and information not to be found in secular ancient history does not make them untrue. They are true. The fact that the Bible does not mention historical events or personages deemed to be crucially important by secular ancient history does not render biblical accounts which take place simultaneously or in the same geographic area untrue. They are true. The

¹⁵ Bible Basics 6B: Ecclesiology. See especially section I.B, "The Church Age and the New Dispensation of the Truth".

Bible's essential purpose is different; it includes what the Spirit found important and not things which the Spirit found unimportant – despite what human historians think. The fact is that everything the Bible says is true, and if instead of assuming deficiencies in scripture secular ancient history began with that premise, it would be much closer to the mark in its efforts to uncover the past – for it would then have in its possession the only source from antiquity which is without error, one which sheds so much light on what *really* happened in the past.

History in general and ancient history in particular is an interpretation of events seen through a human-viewpoint lens and necessarily slanted towards the biases of the particular historian doing the writing. Ancient history should especially be subject to exceptional skepticism wherever it diverges from the biblical record: the data available from the ancient world is infinitesimally minute compared to the vastness of the epochs it covers. Taking ancient Egypt as an example, if we posit 20th century American history as working with a 100% basis of data (for the sake of comparison; clearly, not nearly everything can be recorded, even today), the information available for the entire centuries' long history of ancient Egypt would fall far below 1% by comparison, even given the far longer period covered. In addition, while we have a fairly good idea of what happened in this country in the past century from primary sources (and of course even here the coverage by historians of many issues, topics and events is still far less complete than we should like and the particular interpretations of many of these things are still being debated), most of what we know about ancient Egypt comes from ancient historians writing centuries later than the events they describe, or from hieroglyphic records and ancient depictions whose dating is debatable and which give a highly fragmentary and prejudiced picture of events (as official histories always do). In other words, being dogmatic about what happened and when in terms of, e.g., ancient Egyptian history when even essential chronologies are not universally agreed to is very unwise – especially if that causes anyone to doubt biblical accounts. Regardless of his or her credentials, no Christian should accept the dogmatism of any Egyptologist who proclaims that certain things the Bible says are "untrue" based upon his/her ever fluctuating (as new "facts" are unearthed) and necessarily massively incomplete understanding of the past.

Scripture is not history, but every historical detail it records is correct. Scripture does not approach the past as a history book would do, because the Bible is concerned with spiritual and not with secular events; and when it does treat secular events, it always does so from that spiritual perspective.

(10) At the end of three years the Assyrians took it. So Samaria was captured in Hezekiah's sixth year, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel. (11) The king of Assyria deported Israel to Assyria and settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in towns of the Medes. (12) This happened because they had not obeyed the LORD their God, but had violated his covenant—all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. They neither listened to the commands nor carried them out.
2nd Kings 18:10-12 NIV

3. The Bible is not an Archaeology Report: Archaeology in particular is fond of finding fault with biblical accounts. In part that has to do with the sensationalist nature of that quasi-science: self-

promotion is essential because digs and expeditions are very expensive. Patrons current and potential have to be kept interested and impressed respectively, and there is no better way to do so, it seems, than by disproving conventional wisdom through validating some famous ancient source (e.g., Schliemann and Homer), or by "proving" some other ancient source "wrong" (the Bible being the favorite target here).

We have discussed this issue elsewhere.¹⁶ Suffice it to say here that archaeology is given to making the most extravagant claims based upon the flimsiest of evidence. If a literary text makes a particular claim, e.g., stating that so-and-so was king when such-and-such an event took place, it may be possible to cross-check that claim based upon other historical accounts or epigraphical evidence. But for the most part, archaeology finds objects, and what any specific object may "mean" is generally open to a wide range of possible interpretations.

That is to say, finding a pot of a particular type and style (whose dating has been more or less established) at a particular excavation layer in a particular dig whose discovery at that layer is "inconsistent" with what the Bible is thought to say about events that took place in this locale at that time and place does not automatically make the Bible "wrong" – although such is often more than implied in the headline of the press release heralding the discovery: 1) The dating might be incorrect (especially if "scientific" dating methods are used to establish it [see previous footnote reference]); 2) The correlation between the dig and the biblical place might be incorrect (geographic locales taken for granted as being the town of "___" mentioned in the Bible are notoriously unreliable); 3) The pot might actually not belong to the layer where it was found (intrusions are common because people of all times have a tendency to dig – foundations, cellars, treasure troves, and just plain holes); 4) The pot could be a forgery (this, sadly, seems to be "the answer" more often than not when some new and fantastic biblical artifact is found; cf. the so-called "James Ossuary" which was ancient enough but whose inscription was clearly forged); 5) The archaeologist's understanding of the Bible may be faulty (not surprisingly also far from rare). Any one of the numerous and often unstated assumptions made by the archaeologists in question and upon which the claim is predicated might be flawed in one way or another. Generally speaking, when archaeologists discover a pot, they have found a pot. Claiming that said pot overturns previous historical assumptions should always be met skeptically with a grain of salt; claiming that it overturns the *biblical* record should be met with a cellar of it.

4. The Bible is not a Scientific Journal: The Bible is a spiritual book. Modern science, however, is fundamentally materialistic, denying as an "article of faith" (as ironic as that obviously is) any trace of the spiritual in the material universe it studies. That is to say, science today is not "two-tracked" (as in the case of Newton who could effectively study the world as God created it without doubting that God created it), nor is it "compartmentalized" (so as to allow faith and empirical research to coexist). Science today is anti-spiritual as a dogmatic belief (more irony).

Much of this has to do with the rise of evolutionary and predictive science. For while discoveries

¹⁶ See in particular in SR 5, section II.8.e, "The Problem of Science and the Bible".

in traditional physics, e.g., can be tested empirically (so that erroneous claims of "cold fusion", for example, were easily enough debunked when they were in fact untrue), evolutionary and predictive sciences must be taken completely on faith – that their mathematical models and theories based upon probability are reasonably grounded – and that what is true of the physical universe today was always true and always will be (and that double fallacy is a fundamental, fatal flaw in all such models). It is possible to examine the creation today as it is, to measure, to probe and to test theories about how it has been given to operate where results can be reproduced by others. But it is most definitely *not* possible to look deep into the past or far into the future and do the same. One can theorize, one can model, but one *cannot* "prove" – either that what now exists happened "because of ABC" or that because of what now exists "XYZ will happen".

By faith we understand that the ages have been constructed by the Word of God, so that what we see (i.e., the present material world) has not come into being from the things presently visible (i.e., from theoretical processes *of the past*).

Hebrews 11:3

(3) Keep this foremost in your mind: in the end times cynics will ridicule [the truth], acting out of their own selfish lusts (4) and saying, "Where is that 'return' He promised? Everything is the same now as it was since the beginning of the world, since the time our forefathers passed on." (5) But it escapes their notice in asserting this, namely, that there were heavens long ago too, and an earth, which was [re-]established out from under water (i.e., the "waters below") and through [the midst of] water (i.e., the "waters above") by the Word of God – (6) [and that it was] through these two [sets of waters] that the world of that time (i.e., in Noah's day) was [again] deluged by water [from above and below] and destroyed. (7) Now the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men (i.e., from direct divine intervention *in the future*).

2nd Peter 3:3-7

This is the fundamental and, one would think, obvious flaw in theories of evolution and climatic change, namely, no researcher can travel back or forward in time so as to test the model or the theory. Such models and theories are based on assuming that what we see now has always been more or less the same (so as to validate evolution) and always will be (so as to validate climate science). In other words, evolution in particular assumes no God, no divine creation of the universe, no Genesis gap judgment, no great flood – and no anything else of a spiritual nature has ever occurred. Climate science similarly projects a narrow range of present data forward in time – as if God has nothing to say in the matter (in His blessing or disciplining of individual nations by sending or withholding rain, to cite just one example; cf. Jas.5:17), and assuming that nothing of a spiritual origin will ever occur in the future – the massive judgments of the Tribulation, for instance.

For those who have dedicated much time and effort to critiquing these two areas of "scientific" inquiry, it will be obvious that these are not the only problems with the methods they employ. For one thing, in both areas, as new "facts" are uncovered, new theories developed, and new models

constructed, "what is true" today is likely to be radically different from "what is true" tomorrow – if the past is any sort of prologue. For another, the fact that both areas have become highly political in terms of what may be said and also in terms of how funding for such research is approved, likewise vitiates claims that such "science" is in any way objective.

The main point to remember here, however, is that God is in no need to explain things to His people in terms that the modern scientific community would accept – especially as they would never accept the Bible no matter how it explained things inasmuch as they deny all things spiritual as a tenet of faith. What the Bible says about *ex nihilo* original creation of the universe is absolutely true – even if modern science prefers its own ever-changing "scriptures". What the Bible says about the creation of Adam and Eve is true – even if modern science scoffs (and continually presents new theories about "the origin of mankind"). What the Bible says about the great flood is true – even if modern science pronounces it impossible. And what the Bible says about God's direction of all events on earth, past, present and future, from the "according to its kind" creation of all life to the fall of every rain drop to the extraordinary "climatic" events of the soon to come Tribulation is true – and in terms of the latter, many of these "scientists" will be given to see these with their own eyes. It will be interesting to see if the overturning of so many of their dearly held theories in the days soon to come will spark any rethinking on the part of those who had previously denied the spiritual in reverence for the material.

5. The Bible is not a 'Church' Document: Only the Bible is the Word of God. God has provided it to His people as our only *direct* link to the truth during our short sojourning here in this world. Believers who want to grow spiritually do need good teachers. But all believers have the right – and the responsibility – to read the Bible for themselves. Since it is God's gift to us all – explaining and proclaiming and illuminating *the* Gift, Jesus Christ – it cannot be superseded or out-ranked or replaced by any other writings whatsoever. No denomination's creed is superior to scripture. No ancient writing of church fathers or church historians or church officials carries any weight when placed in the scales with the Bible – not in God's eyes (and His is the only opinion which counts). God designed the Bible the way He designed it to be the perfect gift to all believers at all times – and timelessly so. He was not required to make it consistent with the way commentators or theologians or preachers or teachers or church fathers or church historians or popes or bishops or any other professional clergy or religious group or denomination or individual church might choose to phrase things or think about or express biblical matters. All such things are at best derivative interpretations which may in some way intersect with the truth. Or they may be mostly or completely wrong. But the Bible *is* the truth. Therefore to give preference to any extra-biblical writing based on any sort of church authority however illustrious (in the eyes of the one giving said preference) – on the grounds that said authority has "a better understanding" – is always a tremendous mistake.

Regardless of all quibbles from all sources, the Bible is in fact complete. It is God's complete message for us who have believed in Jesus Christ. Casting doubt on that completeness necessarily undermines its authority (in the eyes of the one doubting though not in truth). For if a person grants credence to any of the contrary opinions described in brief above, to the extent that one

does so, to that extent faith is crippled. And where, dear reader, will you go then to find the truth?

(12) "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? (13) Man does not know its value, Nor is it found in the land of the living. (14) The deep says, 'It is not in me'; And the sea says, 'It is not with me.' (15) It cannot be purchased for gold, Nor can silver be weighed for its price. (16) It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, In precious onyx or sapphire. (17) Neither gold nor crystal can equal it, Nor can it be exchanged for jewelry of fine gold. (18) No mention shall be made of coral or quartz, For the price of wisdom is above rubies. (19) The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, Nor can it be valued in pure gold. (20) From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? (21) It is hidden from the eyes of all living, And concealed from the birds of the air. (22) Destruction and Death say, 'We have heard a report about it with our ears.' (23) God understands its way, And He knows its place. (24) For He looks to the ends of the earth, And sees under the whole heavens, (25) To establish a weight for the wind, And apportion the waters by measure. (26) When He made a law for the rain, And a path for the thunderbolt, (27) Then He saw wisdom and declared it; He prepared it, indeed, He searched it out. (28) And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, And to depart from evil is understanding.' "

Job 28:12-28 NKJV

Without the Bible, we would know nothing about Jesus Christ. Doubting its integrity, its completeness, in any part casts doubt upon the whole. The world proclaims *all* of the miraculous events described by the Bible – from the creation of the universe to the creation of mankind, from the miracles of our Lord to all of the amazing events of the Tribulation, second advent and beyond into eternity, from judgment after death to resurrection for the righteous – as nothing but myths. For believers to be "fighting it out" with unbelievers over any such points in any of the categories above is, except for those gifted in apologetics, counterproductive, not helpful for one's own faith, and not likely to change the minds or hearts of naysayers – only God can change the heart. But for a believer him or herself to doubt what the Bible says can create a catastrophic fault line capable of shattering faith entirely. Without the Bible, how else would you know, believer, anything whatsoever about the Lord who redeemed you from your sin and gave you life eternal through faith in Him? You believe the truth. Do not, therefore, undermine the sole and ultimate source of that precious truth.

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct Him? But we possess the very mind of Christ (i.e. the Holy Spirit illuminating the scriptures which are Christ's very thinking).

1st Corinthians 2:16

b. The Present Form of the Bible

Accepting that the Bible is the perfectly complete message God has provided for His people to guide them in all faith and practice, produced in just the way He intended *in its original form*, can we be sure that the book we hold in our hands is the exact book written for us by those inspired by

the Holy Spirit to do so? We can indeed!

We do understand that scripture was written in ancient Hebrew and in ancient Greek (with a small amount of Aramaic found in both testaments), so that the English Bible we make use of is a translation of the original documents. We will address the issue of translation in section 5.a below. Suffice it to say here that 1) most mainline English translations are quite good (no translation can be perfect); 2) we are blessed today to have a great number of them (so we can easily compare them when we have questions about a particular verse); and 3) good Bible teaching is essential for spiritual growth in any case (and would be even if everyone being taught understood the ancient languages perfectly), and all truly good teaching will address issues of translation in interpreting any critical passage (as is the practice in this ministry).

The question that concerns us here has to do with the issue of the original autographs of the Bible (e.g., the scroll on which Paul first penned the book of Hebrews and from which all subsequent copies were made) versus the present form of the text of any given book (e.g., the Greek words printed in copies of the Greek New Testament available today). We should note first that while the original autograph was inspired by the Holy Spirit, subsequent copies – dating all the way back to when the book was originally copied in the first century – are just that: copies. Copies are not inspired. They are produced by human beings, and all human beings make mistakes – even when they are aware of the gravity of their task and are diligent in their efforts to avoid them. It is fair to say, however, that this problem – of potential error in the transmission of the text of scripture – is far less of a serious issue than one might suppose. Why?

1. Assiduous Modern Scholarship: While the history of scholarship in Greek and Latin Classics goes back to at least the third century B.C., modern scholars have been working diligently since the early 18th century to recover all that can be recovered of the literature of the Greco-Roman civilization. In the last three hundred years, the Mediterranean world has been thoroughly scoured in the hunt for manuscripts, papyrus fragments, and inscriptions in the continual search for any and all evidence of Classical texts, the New Testament included. Scholars have also developed systematic ways of analyzing differences between manuscripts and other evidence for the text of any ancient author or work and of presenting that evidence in a methodical way. The upshot of all this hard work by many generations now of mostly brilliant men and women is that the works of an amazing number of ancient authors have been recovered – and their texts accurately reconstructed.

How can that be – especially since for most ancient authors our earliest manuscripts do not go back much earlier than 1,000 A.D. (though the biblical evidence is much earlier, sometimes almost contemporaneous)? First, ancient copyists, while far from perfect, were following in the case of Latin and even more so in the case of Greek texts of languages whose internal discipline and meaning made errors harder to commit and easier to discern when made. Second, we usually have multiple manuscripts of said texts, many of which follow a different lineage, so that each is truly a "witness" to the original through a separate tradition (allowing us to compare differences and thus catch errors). Even so the differences between the manuscripts is always much smaller

than the non-specialist might assume (on the order of no more than 1% of text covered – which speaks to the first point as well). Third, the system of textual criticism developed by Classical scholars over the last few centuries has become very adept – especially when a skilled expert is practicing this art – at ferreting out errors and restoring original readings. This is essentially the same system used by biblical scholars to establish the original text of the New Testament (but there are differences because in the case of the NT there are vastly more witnesses to consider, some quite early; see point 4 below).

An illustration will be helpful. If we were presented with the sports section of our local newspaper which had been used to wrap fish, thus smudging the newsprint with the result that some of it was illegible, if we wished, we would probably be able to figure out without too much trouble what had been smudged when it was only the case of missing a word or two, especially if part of that word remained. If we were to have a dozen such sports sections, all re-purposed in the same way, different parts would be damaged and other parts still legible in the further copies. Carefully comparing them all would no doubt result in a complete reconstruction – or near enough so that no important meaning was lost. Or take the case of samizdat materials, that is, one-at-a-time typewriter copies of banned books produced underground in the old Soviet Union. If we had three copies of, say, *Animal Farm*, produced by three different typists, we would be able to compare the manuscripts and, by using our knowledge of the language – and our experience with the typists (which one is the most careful; which understands English the best so as to be least likely to err through confusion, e.g.) – be able to correct any small errors through that process of comparison.

Importantly also, the better a scholar knows the original language in question and the more experience he/she has in doing textual criticism of this sort, the closer to 100% of complete reconstruction of the actual original text will be possible. And one other factor needs to be taken into consideration as well. Classical scholars who do textual criticism so as to produce readable texts of ancient authors generally know those authors and also their subject matter intimately, and that is also a key to success. In our example of the sports section, someone who is a sports enthusiast and who reads that section regularly would no doubt do a better job on the reconstruction than an English professor who has no such interest (and who might not, therefore, realize in that in the baseball section "RB_" should probably be filled in as "RBI"). Similarly, in terms of the Bible, while experts in textual scholarship have over the years done an excellent job in refining the text of the Greek New Testament to a near perfect form, understanding the true meaning and theology behind the text is sometimes necessary to get it right in those very few cases where there is some dispute about this or that word or phrase. So there is still work for the godly pastor-teacher to do on this score, even with all of the fine efforts put in by scholars over the centuries.

2. Universal Oral Tradition in Ancient Times: In the ancient world, unlike today, silent reading was virtually unheard of. Everyone read aloud. While the modern world is visually centered, the ancient world was very much an oral-focused time. One result of this difference is that people's memories were better at retaining texts word-for-word. This is loosely analogous to the

phenomenon of people today who have a hard time memorizing printed text by rote, but being able to recall verses from favorite songs without any trouble. Greek in particular was very musical (in fact it was originally tonal). In ancient Greece, there was an entire professional track of individuals, rhapsodes, who made their living by reciting from memory Homer and other favorite poems and literary works. In our visual world, the idea of memorizing the entire *Iliad* word-for-word seems impossible, but it was not uncommon in antiquity. Simply put, at that time people were used to receiving and retaining most of their information by hearing it and remembering it. In terms of the Bible, since books (papyrus roles) were expensive, both because the material (papyrus) was costly and because copying was a painstaking and time-consuming occupation, most early Christians did not have their own copy of the scriptures; they went to church to hear them read (especially after the cessation of the "sign gifts": 1Cor.14:26), and they no doubt took pains to remember what they heard because that was the only way to have a "copy" – implanted in their memory (whereas today we may not pay such particular attention because we have our own Bible at home).

Now when this epistle is **read** [aloud] among you, see that it is **read** [aloud] also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise **read** [aloud] the epistle from Laodicea.
Colossians 4:16 NKJV

I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be **read** [aloud] to all the holy brethren.
1st Thessalonians 5:27 NKJV

Until I come, devote yourself to [public] **reading** [of the scriptures aloud], to encouragement, to teaching [the Word].
1st Timothy 4:13

Reading of the scriptures aloud – great portions of them – and teaching and explaining these same scriptures constituted the major activity in the early church gatherings (unlike today where only a few token verses are read, and where sermons do little teaching and explanation at all). Thus believers in the early church generally had a much better "mental Bible" in their heads and hearts than is the case for most of us today – and in the original Greek at that – with the result that errors would be caught much more easily (and corrected) than we might imagine. In this, the early churches followed the practice which had been the case in Jewish synagogues (Lk.4:16-21; cf. Ex.24:7; Deut.31:11; Josh.8:34-35; 2Ki.23:2; Neh.8:3; 8:8; 8:18; 9:3; 13:1; Jer.36:6):

(14) But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. (15) And after the **reading** of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, **say on.**"
Acts 13:14-15 NKJV

It was standard practice in the ancient world to copy letters and books (scrolls) that were important to you whenever you had the chance (cf. 2Tim.4:13). As there is nothing more important than the Word, we can be sure that the early congregations all did so with all the New

Testament books at every opportunity, sharing no doubt with neighboring congregations until each had at least one complete copy – which is really the only way to explain the vast amount of evidence for scripture surviving from antiquity as compared to Classical works.

I *wrote* to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.

3rd John 1:9 NKJV

In this situation the man who has usurped John's apostolic authority prevents standard practice, namely, reading aloud a letter written to the whole church which, if it were inspired, would have been copied and distributed thereafter (as was the case with this epistle quoted). The fact that this person prevents standard practice shows what standard practice was. This universal reading and re-reading aloud of the scriptures lovingly copied and preserved, in a time when people were attuned to remembering the spoken word, served not only to widely distribute the New Testament and the knowledge of it, but also to ensure the accuracy of early copies of the original text.

3. Meticulous Ancient Practices:

(1) What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? (2) Much in every way! *Chiefly* because to them were committed the *oracles* of God.

Romans 3:1-2 NKJV

We see from this passage that being entrusted with the stewardship of the written Word of God was not only a great responsibility but also the greatest of all privileges, and for most of their recorded history the Jewish people have taken this trust very seriously and have treasured it. It stands to reason, therefore, that great pains will have been taken to preserve God's Word in all periods, whether or not we are presently aware of the means and methods. While we do not have detailed information for precisely how this preservation of the Bible was accomplished during much of Israel's history, we do know that the Masorettes, Jewish scholars responsible for preserving the text of the Old Testament (between ca. 6th - 10th cent. A.D.), went so far as to count the letters of every book, as well as making many other marginal notations which helped to safeguard the original text as far as possible. This reflects the care and reverence shown for the Word of God that has never died out from among the Jewish people since the Lord inscribed on stone with His own finger the very first part of the written word (demonstrating its permanence). And this reverence for the scriptures continues unto the present day (even if a veil at its reading still lies on the hearts of many in Israel: 2Cor.3:14-15; cf. Rom.11:25), as maintaining a complete set of scrolls containing the entire Old Testament has always been of prime importance for every Jewish synagogue. It is this very practice that the early churches followed in their collection, careful copying and sharing with other congregations all of the New Testament books.

4. Abundance of Early Evidence: No written work from antiquity is so well-documented as is the New Testament, and that is true to an extraordinary degree (only the works of Homer can even be mentioned in comparison, and even these fall far short of the tremendous volume of evidence for the NT). And no written work from antiquity is so well-supported by evidence which is nearly

contemporaneous (nothing in secular literature can compare to the many early witnesses to the New Testament texts in this regard). Taken together, these two characteristics of New Testament witnesses have contributed mightily to the amazing accuracy of the text we now possess.

a) The Original Autographs: Original documents have always been prized (even printed first edition copies of James Audubon's *Birds of America* sell for millions of dollars). Therefore we are right to surmise that the autographs of all of the books of the New Testament were highly esteemed at the time and preserved as long as possible (cf. 2Ki.18:4). The continuing existence and possible accessibility of such documents through the first centuries of the Church Age will also have contributed to the correctness of the text in all of the various "families" of copies and manuscripts which followed.

b) The Existence Today of Amazingly Early Witnesses: A large number of papyrus manuscripts (the paper of their day and the origin of our word "paper") and fragments dating from not long after the originals were produced has reduced the opportunities for error. As copying was time-consuming and expensive, copies were utilized literally until they wore out. As a result, we can expect any given papyrus copy to have had a lifespan of at least human dimensions, and hundreds of years at times, before it became useless (with the existence still today of so many papyri underscoring that truth). The upshot of this is that we possess still today a third century papyrus of the gospel of Matthew (p64, ca. 200 A.D.), which is most probably a copy of a copy of the original autograph – only two generations removed or possibly even a direct copy of the original.

My paternal great grandfather fought in the Civil War, signing up with the Ohio militia to do so right at the war's inception. These men were called "the squirrel hunters", and I have both his enlistment certificate and also his mustering out certificate (they signed up at that time only for a one year "hitch"). The distance in time between today and that documented event is about the same as between the writing of the papyrus p64 and the gospel of Matthew which the papyrus partially preserves (with no serious textual differences between it and later witnesses). We are not surprised to learn of original Civil War records of minor importance still being in existence today; so it certainly is possible that the autograph was the template or *Vorlage* for this particular papyrus (and many others which have not survived). In any case, the nearness of time – between the penning of the original and the making of the papyrus copy – is in documentary terms incredibly close (from the middle of the first century to very early in the third), and that fact alone gives us confidence both about its text and also the much later witnesses which essentially agree with it, especially given that the importance of what was being copied was surely appreciated by those doing the copying. Simply put, very little time or opportunity ever existed for the text to "drift" or to be "improved upon" in any substantial way (as some earlier and now completely refuted theories of the origins of the gospels once proclaimed).

c) Volume of Evidence: In addition to portions of the Bible preserved from as early as the late second century on papyrus, ostraca (potsherds), and other materials (wood and jewelry items), we also find an abundance of manuscripts penned upon more permanent material (vellum or parchment). All told, there some 266 uncial manuscripts (i.e., written in capital letters and being

the earliest of the mss.), compared to, for example, no such early manuscripts of the most well-preserved of the Greek tragedians, Euripides.¹⁷ Further, the oldest Greek manuscript of the New Testament, Sinaiticus¹⁸ (also known as *Aleph* from its designation in the *apparatus criticus* notations), was most likely produced during the early to mid third century A.D., less than two hundred years after the inspiration and writing of the book of Revelation (comparable in terms of temporal distance to recopying a World War I document today).

There are other wonderful early manuscripts as well which likewise preserve the whole (or nearly the whole) of the Greek New Testament (e.g., Alexandrinus, ca. 5th cent., Vaticanus ca. 4th cent., Ephraemi Rescriptus ca. 5th cent., etc., designated by capital letters such as A, B and C in the case of these three respectively). All told, there are some 140 major papyri of the Greek New Testament, 266 uncial manuscripts and 2,754 Byzantine era minuscule manuscripts¹⁹, all of which, in the vast majority of passages, read precisely the same text (or have differences so small as to be entirely negligible, as in small spelling variations or adding or omitting words such as "and").

Thanks to the careful work of scholars over generations, we are relatively confident of the texts of many famous Classical authors whose works have survived in only a few manuscripts much later than their exemplars – by as much as a thousand years more so than almost all of the major biblical evidence listed above. How much more should we not then be confident that our Bible is *the* Bible when we possess so much evidence that even the skeptics are forced to close their mouths on the issue of the documentation of the New Testament's text (and argue about something else instead, such as its inspiration or interpretation)?

The text of the Old Testament presents a somewhat different case, but the resulting picture is essentially the same: the Hebrew text we have, known as the Masoretic Text (or MT for short) is an accurate reflection of the words originally written from Moses to Malachi to a degree very closely approximate of what we have in the case of the New Testament. Problematic in studying the New Testament text is that, since we have so many witnesses, their relative quality and usefulness needs to be evaluated and carefully applied in those few cases where manuscripts diverge to any significant degree (but as noted above, any pastor-teacher with a firm grounding in true biblical doctrine will find very few instances where the correct solution is not easily enough discernible even in these rare cases).

Where the Old Testament is concerned, our earliest complete manuscript of the MT, known as Codex Leningradensis, dates to the early 11th century. Nevertheless, there are many ways in

¹⁷ *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford 1964), B. Metzger, p. 34.

¹⁸ Discovered by Tischendorf in the monastery on Mt. Sinai. Sinaiticus also contains a near complete copy of the Greek Old Testament, aka the Septuagint (or LXX).

¹⁹ *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford 1964), B. Metzger, p. 32.

which to demonstrate that our Old Testament is also highly reliable in spite of the longer gap between original composition and our present text:

i) The existence of many other manuscripts of the Masoretic Text, a great number of which follow slightly different textual traditions and are thus useful for comparison.

ii) New Testament quotations of the Old Testament which sometimes translate from the MT directly (as opposed to quoting the LXX), and numerous citations of the OT in early Christian literature, often including commentary and discussion.

iii) The existence of a number of ancient translations of the Masoretic text representing the same essential exemplar: the Greek Septuagint (or LXX, ca. 3rd cent. B.C.); the Latin Vulgate (ca. 4th cent. A.D.); the Coptic versions (some dating from ca. 2nd cent B.C.); the Armenian version (ca. 5th cent. A.D); the Syriac versions (dating from ca. 2nd cent A.D.); and the Samaritan Pentateuch, an Aramaic version of the first five books or Torah (ca. 2nd cent. B.C.). A comparison of all of this evidence shows that the text of the Old Testament was firmly established by the time of these translations.

iv) Archaeological finds: The Ketef Hinnom Scrolls, containing passages from the book of Numbers and dating to the 7th - 6th century B.C., push the time line even further back. Also to be mentioned here are the later discoveries at Qumran known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, many of which are biblical texts. Perhaps the most famous of these is the "Great" Isaiah scroll containing the entire book of Isaiah, now housed in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem, and possibly dating from the 4th century B.C. Its text is substantially the same as that of the MT.

v) Doctrinal unity: the fact that nothing in the New Testament gives the slightest indication that its inspired authors were anywhere reading or understanding a "different text" of the Old Testament is, finally, a strong indication that their text and our text and the original Hebrew text are, for all important purposes, one and the same.

5. Divine Superintendence: We would be remiss here not to mention that God has not been uninvolved in this process of preserving our Bible. He has indeed made sure that we believers have the entirety of scripture available. Many of the preservations of scripture mentioned above may seem "nothing short of miraculous", but that, after all, is precisely how our God operates. The fact that there is still work to do in determining the precise text in some small portions of the Word is merely part and parcel of the tests of faith given to those who really are interested in seeking out the truth. The Bible itself presents itself as the authoritative and complete Word of God. We know that our God is easily capable of preserving it. Why, then, would anyone think that He has somehow done otherwise?

6. Current State of the Text: The places where the manuscript tradition of the Old and New Testaments are discrepant consist of well less than one percent of the total corpus. Further, the number of places where, for example, New Testament witnesses vary in a significant way are less

than one tenth of one percent. There are many small discrepancies which do not appreciably affect the meaning, the majority of which fall into one of the following three categories: 1) Synonyms: Very common is whether or not there is, e.g., a *de* or a *kai* (an easy mistake for a copier to make as both words mean "and" in Greek); 2) Order: There are many passages which are identical except for the word order (word order is flexible in Greek much more so than in English); while this might possibly affect emphasis, it rarely affects meaning in Greek significantly; 3) Mild disagreements: For example, the way that the words "we" and "you [all / pl.]" and their different case forms were pronounced in the early centuries of our era came to be essentially identical, so manuscripts being copied in a scriptorium, where one reader narrated the text and the other scribes copied it, could easily come to confuse "our love" for "your love" and vice versa. Because Paul, e.g., could easily mean either one in an epistle (and usually did, interchanging them frequently), this is the most common recurring reason for disagreement between texts.

Where there are occasional textual variants of significance, it is almost always the case that we have more than enough evidence from the multitudinous number of textual witnesses (discussed above) for someone with a good knowledge of textual criticism (i.e., someone who understands how texts were copied, and thus how mistakes tended to be made) to figure out the likely original text, and that is especially true for someone who has a deep understanding of what the teachings of the Bible actually are.

A more significant problem in this regard is more one of tradition, emotion and politics than it is of any real question about the actual text of scripture, rightly analyzed. A number of non-biblical passages were incorrectly included in the King James and earlier translation versions of the Bible because of the fact that at the time of translation much of the good evidence we possess today had not yet come to light. These wrongly included passages strangely (or, actually, not so strangely, given the devil's desire to corrupt the Word of God), often tend to be "favorite passages" which marginal believers and unbelievers have a habit of quoting the most. A few examples:

Matthew 6:9-13 (and Luke 11:2-4): Neither version of the Lord's prayer has the doxology in the original ("for thine is . . . etc."); this is a late addition and not part of scripture.

Mark's so called "longer endings" in chapter 16, all of which are erroneous: Mark 16 actually ends with verse 8, "for they (i.e., the women) were afraid"; no doubt the abruptness of the ending and the availability of many details from the other gospels were an invitation to later individuals of mal-intent to "fill in the blank", and many did.

Luke 22:43-44: Jesus' supposedly "sweating blood" is also a late intrusion into the true text.

Luke 23:34: "Father forgive them" is a late interpolation drawn word for word from Eusebius and motivated by a desire for our Lord to have said something comparable to Stephen's statement before his execution at Acts 7:60, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (NIV). But of course our Lord cannot deny Himself (2Tim.2:13; cf. "the unpardonable sin" of unbelief: Matt.12:32;

Mk.3:39; Lk.12:10).

John 7:53 - 8:11: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" is a later addition (none of the earliest mss. or versions contain this passage).

1 John 5:7-8: The so-called "Johannine comma". The true text as written by John reads: "(7) because there are three who bear witness, (8) the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three have the same purpose."

Revelation 20:5a: "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed". This is another interpolation though not as widely recognized as such; the half-verse does not occur in Sinaiticus, the oldest and best witness to the original text and one of the very few such for the book of Revelation.

Many study Bibles will point out that the "passages" above have problems, but for economic reasons (not wanting to be boycotted, for example), few new translations have the courage to leave them out – as they should, since they are not legitimately part of the Word of God (as any solid and godly textual analysis will make abundantly clear).

7. Assurance of Accuracy: Anyone who is interested in the Bible need not worry that by reading, say, the NIV versus the ESV, one is getting entirely different information. When it comes to things that a believer who is not a prepared pastor-teacher can get out of the Bible on his/her own, all such things can be gotten from any major English version (checking various translations against each other wherever questions about meaning come up is certainly an excellent idea).

It is hoped that this section gives believers confidence that the text of the Bible in its original languages as it has come down to us today is sound and secure. It is certainly true that to be correct on every single passage requires special preparation and diligent study. For believers without the gift of pastor-teacher and even so without the necessary prior preparation, what is needed is good teaching from men who are properly gifted and prepared so as to be able to sift through the 1/10 of 1% and get it right. But this necessity to find a good teaching ministry in order to grow spiritually is certainly something all advancing believers already understand.

The real issue is – as any serious Bible reader knows – that there are many things in scripture which can only be sorted out by listening to good, doctrinal Bible teaching. For example, the Trinity is a true doctrine and an important one (obviously). But the word itself does not occur in the Bible. And if a person had never before heard of the Bible or Jesus Christ, and began reading the Bible for the first time, it is entirely conceivable that said person might have difficulty coming to a full understanding of the Trinity – absent a good teacher. If a Christian reads the Bible and does see and understand Trinitarian passages and issues, it is doubtless because he/she had been previously taught about it (e.g., in Sunday school).

So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you

understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, *unless someone guides me?*"
And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.
Acts 8:30-31 NKJV

Every Christian should read the Bible for him/herself, and the more the better. That is an investment that pays all sorts of spiritual dividends. But to grow up to spiritual maturity requires a depth of understanding and belief in more than can be superficially gleaned by reading English versions without direction, even though they are relatively solid renderings and we are confident of their underlying text. As in the passage above, we all need this "guidance" in order to keep growing spiritually (addressed in section 5.c below, "The Teacher").²⁰

c. The Canon of Scripture

By "the Canon" we mean those books which are legitimately a part of the Word of God through the will of God and inspired by the Holy Spirit to be so – as opposed to a whole host of writings which are entirely fictitious (apocryphal and pseudepigraphical) or non-inspired (the apostolic and church fathers). Books which are indeed legitimately part of the Bible are traditionally termed "canonical"; those which are not, are not (even if they are important and godly, such as the letters of Polycarp, e.g.).

"Canon" is a Greek word meaning, literally, "reed" (2Cor.10:13-16; Gal.6:16); but in scripture reeds notably refer to "measuring reeds" such as the one given to John to measure the temple and its court in the book of Revelation (Rev.11:1-2; cf.; Ezek.40:3-5).²¹ Thus the key idea behind the use of the word "canon" for delineating what is and what is not true scripture is the application of a stringent standard so as to exclude those books which do not "measure up" because they do not meet the test of being inspired by the Holy Spirit and ordained by God as part of His written Word.

Finally, by way of introduction, it is important to understand that this standard is God's standard, not man's standard, and that it is God who has determined the canon – and given us the means to discern what He has included in His written Word. All human beings can do is to acknowledge what God has done in giving us His perfect Word, then respect and appreciate that gift by not seeking to add to it or subtract from it. Moreover, it is the case that our canon is in fact, *the* Canon, namely, the sixty-six books of our (Protestant English) Bible, all inspired and purposed by God to be in His written Word, while no others are.²²

²⁰ See BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section II.B, "The Pastor-Teacher".

²¹ The word there and also in the LXX text of Ezekiel 40:3-5 is *kalamos* which is a synonym of *kanon*.

²² The division of the books in Hebrew MT as well as their order, and the order of the books in various manuscripts of the Greek NT are somewhat different than one might imagine

As we have seen, scripture describes itself as scripture (Ps.50:16; 119:105; Dan.9:2; Matt.21:42; 22:29; Jn.5:39; 1Tim.4:13; 5:17; 2Tim.2:15; 3:16; 4:2; Heb.4:12; 2Pet.1:19-21; Rev.22:18-20). That is to say, the Bible self-identifies as the Word of God (e.g., Ps.138:2; Is.55:11; Jer.23:39). That being the case, it would be illogical to suggest that there is no discernible, definable boundary to that written Word of God from which we are instructed to take nothing and to which we are commanded to add nothing (Deut.4:2; 12:32; Prov.30:6; Matt.5:18; Rev.22:18-19). Simply from the way the Bible expresses itself and from the way God tells us to treat His Word we can say that there is a "canon", that is, a complete and distinctly delimited Bible which contains all the writings He has ordained to be included in it, with everything He has *not* inspired and ordained as a part of it meant to be carefully excluded from that canon.

All *scripture* is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for admonishing, for correcting, and for training in righteousness.
2nd Timothy 3:16

For *the Word of God* is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; it acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.
Hebrews 4:12

Only true scripture is inspired and useful for these tasks; only the actual Word of God has these living and powerful characteristics. When Paul wrote these two passages, it is clear that he was in no doubt what was scripture and what was not – and did not moreover feel any need to explain that point to the recipients of his letters. In fact, there is no indication anywhere in the New Testament that anyone was in any doubt about what was the Word of God and what was not.

"Search the scriptures – since you assume by how you read them that you have eternal life! These are the very *scriptures* that bear testimony about Me."

John 5:39

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the *Scriptures* and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.
Romans 15:4 NIV

(18) "I bear solemn witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of *this book*, [that] if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues written in this book. (19) And [that] if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and of the holy city which have been written [about] in

from reading the English Bible only. The Apocrypha, present in Roman Catholic versions of the Bible (as well as some others) is not canonical.

this book."

Revelation 22:18-19

In the first passage above, our Lord is referring to the Old Testament; in the second, Paul is referring to the Old Testament but not excluding the New Testament books written since and in the process of or soon to be written; in the third passage, John affirms in the Spirit that the last book of the canon, Revelation, is sacrosanct as well, with these three passages thus bracketing the entirety of our present Bible and demonstrating therefore that within its covers we possess the complete "canon" of scripture, containing all the "prophetic scriptures" (i.e., inspired writings) God meant for us to have:

(25) Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, (26) but ***now revealed*** and made known through the ***prophetic writings*** [i.e., New as well as Old Testament scriptures] by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—(27) to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Romans 16:25-27 NIV

Scripture itself thus makes clear that there is a "canon", that is, a perfect and perfectly complete Bible, namely, ***the*** "prophetic writings" through which all of God's special "revelation" has been made known to us, and that we are meant to know what that "canon" is – because otherwise how would we know what is and is not God's Word, or what is to be accepted as prophetic scripture and what it not? Based upon the above, it is improbable that God would have left His children in any doubt about what is scripture and what is not. And indeed He has ***not***. What we actually now possess is in fact the perfect Word of God in its entirety, just as we were promised:

(8) Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. (9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part. (10) But when that which is ***perfect*** has come [i.e., the completed ***Canon*** of scripture], then that which is in part will be done away.²³

1st Corinthians 13:8-10 NKJV

²³ In this passage, "the perfect" (*to teleion*), is deliberately counterpoised to "knowledge" (*gnosis*) and "prophecy" (*propheteia*) – meaning that whatever "the perfect" is, it is superior to these other two. This passage also means that "the perfect" (*to teleion*) has to do with the truth of the Word of God (since *gnosis* and *propheteia* are forms of truth); therefore "childhood" in this context has to do with special spiritual gifts which would be operational only until the "adulthood" of the completed Bible or Canon came upon the scene – and that, of course, is exactly what happened: after the Canon was completed, all such special gifts "ceased" just as prophesied in this passage. For details, see BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.3.d.1.c, "Temporary Gifts".

What we are attempting to accomplish in this section is merely to affirm that the Bible you presently possess, the great gift of the written Word you are blessed to hold in your hands, is in fact that perfect and perfectly complete Bible, nothing less – and that nothing else is. This is sure and certain as may be seen from the following evidence:

1. External Evidence that our Canon is *the* Canon: Virtually all complete Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament contain our Old Testament and nothing else. And while there are non-canonical books appended to some ancient Greek manuscripts of the Bible (in the manner of the appendices one sometimes sees in English study Bibles), one finds in them that the canonical books – the same books as we possess today – are placed together and first (with, significantly, the "extras" added later to indicate that they are merely supplements).²⁴ Early translations of the Bible which include the New Testament (e.g., the Latin Vulgate²⁵; later Coptic versions²⁶; the Armenian version²⁷; the Syriac versions²⁸) all have for the most part the same books in both testaments as we possess today, and all exclude, either absolutely or by sequestration in the order or by the tradition of their respective Churches, the books we deem non-canonical today.²⁹ Where there are minor exceptions to this rule, we may say that indeed these exceptions *prove* the rule – because we see from this phenomenon that these are in fact exceptional and outliers: if we overlay all of the evidence, we find that the true Canon is the unifying factor all of the witnesses have in common.

²⁴ Sometimes these do contain useful information, as in the books of the Maccabees which give historical – though not divinely inspired – details of the period between the testaments.

²⁵ As to this version, we know from Jerome's remarks that the Apocrypha was always considered as a thing apart from the Canon proper; cf. in particular his "letters to Paula" where he compares reading the Apocrypha to "searching [vainly] for nuggets of gold in the mud".

²⁶ The order of the books in the Sahidic version is: Gospels (John, Matthew, Mark, Luke), the Pauline epistles (Hebrews placed between 2nd Corinthians and Galatians), the general epistles, Acts and finally Revelation. Variation of order is found in very early Greek mss. as well, so we may be sure that it is not the order of the books which is the matter of supreme importance but the inclusion of all the truly canonical books and the exclusion of those which are not.

²⁷ This version includes some apocryphal books, including sometimes a "3rd Corinthians"; but this was never considered canonical in that Church's tradition.

²⁸ The *Peshitta*, as it is called, lacks 2nd and 3rd John, 2nd Peter, and Jude, representing a translation made before the entire canon had been completed and distributed. This is clear also from the fact that its gospel of John lacks the erroneous interpolation at John 7:53-8:11, a later addition and not truly part of scripture.

²⁹ The picture is similar for the Georgian, Ethiopic, Gothic and Old Slavonic versions.

Early lists and descriptions of the New Testament books also help to establish that our Canon is the only Canon which has ever existed. Polycarp and Ignatius of Antioch clearly and unambiguously reference Matthew and Luke in their epistles, indicating that by the very early second century the synoptics were widely dispersed throughout the Roman Empire and considered scripture. Marcion of Sinope, rightly deemed a heretic for his desire to take scissors to the New Testament and include only parts of which he approved, shows by his selection that he was selecting *from* the actual Canon. Origen of Alexandria (2nd to 3rd centuries A.D.) used the same 27 books found in our modern New Testament. Irenaeus' writings (2nd century A.D.) demonstrate the existence of the four gospels we possess as the only accepted gospels. By the fourth century, Athanasius of Alexandria's authoritative listing of canonical books is identical in all respects to what we acknowledge today (in the Protestant tradition), and representative of all of the evidence from that time and onward.³⁰ All other information to be gleaned from exhaustive analysis of the apostolic and early church fathers leads to the same conclusion: scripture is quoted extensively and consistently by all; books which are not part of scripture are not quoted with frequency and not consistently by all – because everyone knew what the Canon of scripture was . . . and is. Suffice it to say that any objective independent investigation, even one conducted by an unbeliever, would conclude that right from the beginning the early church honored the very same Canon we do today, including the books we include, and rejecting those which we reject.³¹

2. Internal Evidence that our Canon is *the* Canon: The New Testament itself demonstrates that both the Old Testament and its own books are part of an inspired and complete whole.

a) New Testament Quotations from the Old Testament: In addition to thousands of parallels and verbal allusions, the New Testament directly quotes the Old Testament nearly three hundred times, calling it scripture in the process, and validating thereby the Old Testament Canon. Every Old Testament book (with the possible exception of the Song of Solomon³²) is at least alluded to

³⁰ The famous Muratorian fragment (early 2nd century A.D.?), a listing of unknown provenance of New Testament books, shows by what it includes (most of the present books with the exception of the general epistles) and by not excluding any of the present books that our Canon is the Canon.

³¹ This is an important point to keep in mind in regard both to pseudepigraphical books and the Apocrypha. In terms of the latter, even Rome never considered these books to be canonical until they were "accepted" by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) in reaction to the Reformation (as many false Roman Catholic practices having no biblical support – such as Purgatory – do find some "support" in the Apocrypha). In terms of the former, while it is sometimes claimed, for example, that Jude 1:14 supports the validity of the pseudepigraphical "Book of Enoch", in fact the latter is derivative of the former, composed later and merely utilizing the true biblical quote as an "anchor" to give credence to its fabricated whole.

³² But compare John 4:10 with Song 4:15.

at some point in the New Testament.³³

"Search the [Old Testament] scriptures – since you assume by how you read them that you have eternal life! These are the very [Old Testament] scriptures that bear testimony about Me."

John 5:39

As this quote from our Lord and every other instance in the New Testament where the Old Testament is quoted and described demonstrate, the inspired writers of the New considered the Old Testament the Word of God.

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in *the Scriptures*: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Ps.118:22-23)'?"

Matthew 21:42 NIV

But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding *the Scriptures* nor the power of God."

Matthew 22:29 NASB

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

Luke 24:27 NASB (cf. Lk.24:32; 24:45)

"You search *the Scriptures* because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me."

John 5:39 NASB

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from *the Scriptures*.

Acts 17:2 NASB

(1) Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, (2) which He promised beforehand through His prophets in *the holy Scriptures*.

Romans 1:1-2 NASB (cf. Rom.11:2; 15:4; 16:26).

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you" (Gen.12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).

Galatians 3:8 NASB (cf. Gal.3:22; 4:30)

³³ See "Index of Quotations and Allusions" in The Greek New Testament (3rd ed., 1983), edd. Aland and Black, pp. 897-911.

b) The New Testament Validates its own Canonicity:

Until I come, devote yourself to [public] reading [of the scriptures], to encouragement, to teaching [the Word].

1st Timothy 4:13

This command to read the scriptures and teach the Word of God – of which few in the congregation would have had a complete copy – refers, and did even at the time of writing, to more than the Old Testament scriptures alone (cf. Col.4:16; 1Thes.5:27; 1Tim.4:13). That is clear from multiple instances in the New Testament where its books are seen to have been considered "scripture".

(1) Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, (2) just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, (3) it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things *from the very first* [lit., "from above"], to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, (4) that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

Luke 1:1-4 NKJV

The emphasized phrase above translates the Greek word *anōthen* (ἀνωθεν); but while this adverb often does mean "from the beginning", it also originally and commonly means "from above" (e.g., Jn.3:3), and that is the meaning here.³⁴ Luke certainly did not have a "perfect understanding of all things from the very first", but his understanding was indeed "perfect" since he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write his gospel, informed "from above". We have this confirmed by the apostle Paul under whose apostolic authority Luke wrote his gospel:

For *the scripture* says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing" (Deut.25:4), *and*, "The worker is worthy of his pay" (Lk.10:7).

1st Timothy 5:18

The first quotation used by Paul above (to demonstrate the godliness of providing pastor-teachers with support) is from the Old Testament (Deut.25:4), but the second one is quoting our Lord – as recorded in Luke's gospel (Lk.10:7). That this is not a mere verbal allusion but a direct quotation is very clear from the Greek where the texts are identical.³⁵ Paul's attribution of divine inspiration

³⁴ Sometimes both meanings are in view. When our Lord tells Nicodemus that he must be born *anōthen* (ἀνωθεν) at John 3:3, He is referring to a re-birth which most definitely comes "from above" – from the Spirit of God and the water of the Word of God (Jn.3:5).

³⁵ Absent only is the connective *gar*, which was inappropriate to have in Paul's quote but used by our Lord to apply the quotation as an explanation for His command to the seventy-two to remain in the same house in any given town and eat whatever was set before them (their

and canonicity to Luke's gospel by means of this quotation is even more remarkable when one remembers that Luke was by far the junior in their relationship, writing under Paul's guidance and apostolic authority – but writing also under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It will be recalled that Peter's explanation of the process of inspiration of scripture and its resultant authority are fundamental to any discussion of the Canon. Peter assures us that no such "prophecy" has ever occurred "by human will", but only when "holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit" (2Pet.1:21). Given his very clear view of inspiration and respect for scripture, the following statement – in the same epistle – is all the more revealing in regard to the canonicity of the New Testament in the eyes of the men ordained by God to write it down for us in the power of the Spirit:

(15) And consider our Lord's patience to mean deliverance, just as also our brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom given to him [by God], as he also states in all his letters when he speaks of these matters. (16) There are in [his epistles] some things which are difficult to understand, which the ignorant and unstable are [wont to] distort to their own destruction as they also do *the other scriptures*.

2nd Peter 3:15-16

Not only does this affirm for us that Paul's epistles were, in Peter's likewise inspired view, "scripture", but we may also be sure, since Peter is clearly here addressing them from a standpoint of equality and identical apostolic authority (1Pet.1:1; 2Pet.1:1), that he considered his own epistles nonetheless canonical – as is in fact the case.

Paul's declaration, therefore, that "all scripture is God-breathed" (2Tim.3:16; cf. Heb.4:12; 2Pet.1:16-21), was made in company with all the other writers of scripture in full knowledge that they were indeed writing scripture, that the Spirit was indeed directing them to pen words that were not merely empowered but truly inspired. Moreover, Peter's declaration that the "prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible)" is even more "reliable" than what he had seen with his own eyes (2Pet.1:19) is in fact a direct validation of the gospel accounts of the events which occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration – for those accounts are indeed in the example he uses just that "prophetically inspired Word" which in His godly view is even "more reliable" than his own verbal witness (Matt.17:1-13; Mk.9:2-13; Lk.9:28-36).

Finally on this point, while little appreciated (because of mistranslation), James also quotes Paul's epistle to the Galatians and calls his words "scripture":

(4) You adulteresses (i.e., immoral people of both sexes)! Do you not know that friendship with the world is inimical to God? Therefore whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God. (5) Or do you assume that *the Scripture* (i.e., Gal.5:17) says to no purpose "*The Spirit*" which dwells in you "*sets its desire against*"

"wages").

[such] "*envy*" (Gal.5:21)?
James 4:4-5

c) Authorial Awareness: Old and New Testament authors alike are aware of their God-given authority and mandate to write down His inspired Word.

"The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me,
And His word was on my tongue."
2nd Samuel 23:2 NKJV

This principle can be clearly seen from . . .

(i) An author's God-given credentials and commission:

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
Isaiah 1:1 NKJV

(8) Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:
"Whom shall I send,
And who will go for Us?"
Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

(9) And He said, "**Go**, and **tell this people**:
'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' "
Isaiah 6:8-9 NKJV

(1) The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, (2) to whom **the word of the LORD came** in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.
Jeremiah 1:1-2 NKJV

Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me:
"Behold, **I have put My words in your mouth.**"
Jeremiah 1:9 NKJV

(1) Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw **visions of God**. (2) On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, (3) **the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel** the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there.
Ezekiel 1:1-3 NKJV

The burden (i.e., oracle) which **the prophet** Habakkuk saw.

Habakkuk 1:1 NKJV

Then **the word of the LORD** came by Haggai **the prophet**, saying . . .
Haggai 1:3 NKJV

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, **the word of the LORD** came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo **the prophet**, saying . . .
Zechariah 1:1 NKJV

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, **called to be an apostle**, separated to the gospel of God (2) which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.
Romans 1:1-2 NKJV (cf. Rom.11:13; 1Cor.1:1; 2Cor.1:1; 12:12)

Paul, **an apostle** (**not** from men **nor** through man, **but** through **Jesus Christ and God the Father** who raised Him from the dead).
Galatians 1:1 NKJV (Eph.1:1; Col.1:1; 1Tim.1:1; 2:7; 2Tim.1:1; Tit.1:1)

Peter, **an apostle** of Jesus Christ, to those who, though outcasts dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet selected in the foreknowledge of God the Father, by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration, for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you!
1st Peter 1:1-2 (cf. 2Pet.1:1)

(ii) Commands to write coming directly from God Himself or from His angelic messengers:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "**Write** this for a memorial **in the book** and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."
Exodus 17:4 NKJV

"Now therefore, **write down this song** for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel."
Deuteronomy 31:19 NKJV

Moreover **the LORD said** to me, "Take a large scroll, and **write on it** with a man's pen concerning Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz."
Isaiah 8:1 NKJV (cf. Is.30:8)

"**Thus speaks the LORD God of Israel**, saying: '**Write in a book** for yourself **all the words** that I have spoken to you.' "
Jeremiah 30:2 NKJV (cf. Jer.36:2; 36:28)

"And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple and its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, its entire design and all its

ordinances, all its forms and all its laws. **Write it down in their sight**, so that they may keep its whole design and all its ordinances, and perform them."

Ezekiel 43:11 NKJV

Then **the LORD** answered me and said:

"Write the vision

And make it plain on tablets,
That he may run who reads it."

Habakkuk 2:2 NKJV

(9) I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (10) I came to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a loud voice like that of a trumpet, (11) saying, "What you see, **write in a book and send it** to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea".

Revelation 1:9-11

(17) And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. Then He put His right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. (18) It is I, the First and the Last, even the Living One. And although I died, behold, I am alive forever and ever! Indeed, I possess the keys to death and Hades. (19) **So write** what you have seen, both the things that are [happening] and the things that are going to happen after them".

Revelation 1:17-19

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus, **write**: 'This is what the One who has the mastery over the seven stars in His right hand says, the One who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands' ".

Revelation 2:1 (cf. Rev.2:8; 2:12; 2:18; 3:1; 3:7; 3:14)

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "**Write**: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:13

And [the angel] said to me, "**Write this down**: Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb! These [words] of mine are the true words of God".

Revelation 19:9

Then the One sitting upon the Throne said to me, "Behold! I am making everything new." And He says to me, "**Write** that these words are faithful and true."

Revelation 21:5

(iii) As reflected by their own commands, given with confidence and authority, to promulgate their writings:

". . . and I think I also have the Spirit of God" (i.e., in writing this).
1st Corinthians 7:40 NKJV

(10) "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." (11) Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present.
2nd Corinthians 10:10-11 NKJV

After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.
Colossians 4:16 NIV

I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.
1st Thessalonians 5:27 NKJV

If anyone does not obey our instructions in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.
2nd Thessalonians 3:14 NIV1984

(9) I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. (10) Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.
3rd John 1:9-10 NKJV

d) Consistency of Doctrine: From God's creation of mankind at the beginning of Genesis and His offer of salvation in the *protoevangelium* (Gen.3:21), to the offer of salvation and the blessings of eternity at the end of Revelation (Rev.22:17), the power of God and the mercy of God and the deliverance from sin and death through Jesus Christ for all who are willing pulses powerfully in the Spirit through every chapter and verse of the Bible. Rightly understood and interpreted, every book of the Bible presents the exact same message of truth and promise of salvation with no contradictions in doctrine. Instead, one finds an amazing unity of that truth in every single place. In spite of different languages, differing cultures, and different genres, the same perfect God and the same perfect plan of salvation reposing in the same Savior is undeniably evident throughout. This is no small point. In fact, in many ways it is precisely *the* point one has to understand in seeking to understand scripture. The integrity of scripture, the unity and the oneness of its absolutely consistent message, is what makes the Bible so unique when compared to any other human writings. And it is this very teaching of the truth in complete purity that also marks it out as different from any other earthly composition. Other writings may sometimes be found to have some truth in them, but the Bible is the very truth itself, and nothing within its chapters and verses is untrue or superfluous. No other book ancient or modern can come close to passing this particular canonical test. For Christians with the Spirit who have even a basic understanding of the truth, when reading scripture, it can always be clearly seen that "this has to be scripture"; but when reading anything else, it would never be mistaken for scripture.

e) The Inherent Power of the Bible: The Bible has a supernatural power like no other writings. This is made obvious by the Spirit to every believer every time we read it. Thus, while we have all manner of proofs, we really need none other than the scriptures themselves, illuminated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And [in this spiritual warfare] put on the helmet of salvation and gird on the *sword* of the Spirit – which is the Word of truth.
Ephesians 6:17

For *the Word of God* is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; it acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.
Hebrews 4:12

To quote from something shared with us from a dear friend of this ministry:

"Think about the above realities: 66 books, written by 40 different authors, over 1500 years, in 3 different languages, on 3 different continents. What is more, this collection of books shares a common storyline: the creation, fall, and redemption of God's people; a common theme: God's universal love for all of humanity; and a common message: salvation is available to all who repent of their sins and commit to following God with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength. In addition to sharing these commonalities, these 66 books contain no historical errors or contradictions. God's word truly is an amazing collection of writings!"³⁶

And all this is God's doing for our benefit, we who believe in Him and His words, we who belong to Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

[You] having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the Word of God which lives and abides forever, because
"All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers,
And its flower falls away,
But the Word of the LORD endures forever."
Now this is the Word which by the gospel was preached to you.
1st Peter 1:23-25 NKJV

d. Chronological Order and Composition of the Books of the Bible

1. The Issue of Chronology: For whatever reason, it has become a bit of a fad in the Christian

³⁶ I am indebted to Christian Vassallo for this quotation.

world of late to seek to read the Bible "chronologically". Not only is this an unnecessary task, adding nothing to spirituality or spiritual growth, but in truth it is a virtually impossible one. In the first place, one has to define what is meant by that: Are we talking about ordering and reading the books of the Bible by their date of composition; or are we wishing to have all of the passages of the Bible organized by the date of their actual occurrence?

In terms of the first proposition, while we do have confidence about the time of composition of some of the Bible's books (at least in relative terms: the Pentateuch or first five books were written first and Revelation was written last), for the most part anyone attempting to arrange scripture on this principle will face the double problem that 1) for most books we only have an approximate notion of the time of their composition, while many – such as the New Testament gospels and epistles – were composed at roughly the same time; and 2) since it took time to write some of the longer biblical books, with a number of them (such as the Psalms) clearly having been written over a lengthy period (and by multiple authors in the case of the Psalms), in a large number of cases we would only be guessing if we decided to place, e.g., the book of Hebrews before or after one or the other of the epistles of Peter. Thus, any such "chronological Bible" seeking to reorganize the books of scripture with dates of composition in view would of necessity be open to the dual criticism on the one hand of placing some books arbitrarily (e.g., Psalms before Proverbs or vice versa, since their dates of composition unquestionably overlap), and on the other hand of merely guessing about the "correct order" (as would have to be the case for many of the books of the New Testament whose authorship is clear but whose precise date of composition within the thirty-five year period in which the New Testament was written is not).

In terms of the second proposition, anyone who has undertaken to study (let alone produce) a "harmony" of the four gospels will understand immediately the difficulties involved in attempting to organize *all* biblical passages according to their order of chronological occurrence. Merely comparing e.g., Aland's harmony (the best available in Greek)³⁷ with Thomas and Gundry's harmony (the best of many available in English)³⁸ will see immediately that even among careful and qualified scholars who have spent many years on the issue, there is disagreement on many points (and in some places this author disagrees with both works cited). And the gospels, since they focus mainly on the period of Christ's earthly ministry, are "easy" in this respect compared to other parts of scripture. How, for example, are prophetic passages to be placed when by definition they refer to future events – and often to more than one occurring at different times (through double and sometimes triple application)? Should, for example, the taunt against the king of Babylon in Isaiah chapter fourteen be placed contemporaneously (as best as that can be narrowed down), or should it be placed before Genesis 1:2 since it is also referring to the fall of Satan – or even in the middle of the book of Revelation as it also applies to antichrist? The deeper one delves into this problem, the more it becomes apparent that even coming up with consistent and workable sub-principles of organization for such a method would be a fool's errand.

³⁷ *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, K. Aland (Stuttgart 1976).

³⁸ *A Harmony of the Gospels*, R.L. Thomas and S.N. Gundry (Chicago 1978).

As noted previously, there are organizational schemes for arranging the books of the Bible other than the traditional one found in Protestant Bibles today (for instance, the Hebrew Bible places the books of Samuel and Kings after Joshua, with all the prophets following immediately thereafter apart from the book of Daniel, whereas Acts and Hebrews are often placed within the Pauline epistles in early Greek mss.). But the standard organization of our English Bible is understandable, is as defensible as any other, and is easy enough to use. Additionally, it is familiar to us, and that yields various benefits such as ease of navigation. Given that neither of the above two proposed reorganizations would, for all their obvious disadvantages, proffer any true benefit whatsoever (in this author's view), it seems best to approach issues of chronology on a passage by passage basis (rather than to seek to change the set-up of the Bible we currently all possess).

2. Dates of Composition and Issues of Authorship: The simple fact is that we have no rock-solid information about either the time any book of the Bible was composed or the person or persons inspired and commission to write it *apart from* what the Bible itself has to say. The introductions to individual books in "study Bibles", articles in biblical encyclopedias or Bible dictionaries, or commentaries on individual books of the Bible, all have obligatory treatments of these two issues: we all want to know who wrote each book and when they did so. However, unless we discover in scripture direct references which are applicable to these questions or other statements in the Bible from which relevant information can be deduced, we may find ourselves at an impasse. For this reason, tradition, both Jewish and ecclesiastical, is often proffered by scholarly treatments to fill in the gaps. Such information, however, should be used with care (especially if the conclusions drawn affect our interpretation of scripture). Simply put, if God had wanted us to know more about these matters, He would have placed more about them in the Bible. The one caveat to this truth, however, is that it is in fact legitimate to make use of all of the information found anywhere in the Bible to help answer these questions, even if an individual book does not provide those specifics itself or does so only indirectly regarding dates of composition or authorship:

"For [it was] **Moses** [who] said, 'Honor your father and mother' (Ex.20:12; Deut.5:16), and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death' (Ex.21:17; Lev.20:9)".
Mark 7:10 NIV [expanded]

As we shall discuss briefly in the next section, during the 19th century a veritable cottage industry of "scholarship" sprang up dedicated to deconstructing the first five books of the Bible (and much else of the Old Testament). But beyond all argument, for believers who have faith in God and confidence in His Word, the above cited verse makes it very clear that the Pentateuch was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit *by Moses* – since our Lord Himself attributes these quotations (which occur in three of those five books) directly to him (cf. also Matt.8:4; 19:8; Mk.1:44; 7:10; 10:3-5; 12:26; Lk.5:14; 16:29-31; 20:37; 24:37; 24:44; Jn.5:45-46; 7:19-23). While our Lord's testimony certainly needs no confirmation, there are other internal proofs of Mosaic authorship which put the lie to all such false theories of "layers of composition" concocted by later scribes and priest.

Now **Moses** wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the

LORD.

Numbers 33:2a NKJV

(24) So it was, when *Moses* had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, (25) that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying: (26) "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you".

Deuteronomy 31:24-26 NKJV

Our Lord's validation of the internal claims of the Pentateuch above, namely, that it was written by Moses, should be taken as a general principle to be applied to all scripture: what the Bible itself says about its human authorship and date of composition (directly or indirectly) should be accepted to be just as true as everything else contained in this book of truth.

It does not lie within the scope of this study to provide a detailed assessment of all of the various issues, internal evidence and scholarly arguments concerning the dating and authorship of all of the Bible's sixty-six books. That is the province of Bible "Introductions"³⁹, "surveys"⁴⁰, "study Bibles"⁴¹, articles in biblical encyclopedias⁴² or in Bible dictionaries⁴³, or commentaries on individual books.⁴⁴ A short survey must suffice here to give the reader an overview of these issues.

In terms of authorship, many books self-identify. We have already demonstrated that the Pentateuch was written by Moses – with the exception of the last chapter of Deuteronomy, written possibly by the anonymous author of Joshua (who was a contemporary: cf. Josh.6:25). The other historical books, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, are likewise anonymous, but equally

³⁹ Such as E.J. Young's *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids MI 1964); and D. Guthrie's *Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove IL 1990).

⁴⁰ Such as G. Archer's *Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago 2007); and M. F. Tenney's *Survey of the New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids MI 1985).

⁴¹ Such as C. Ryrie's *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago 2012); and *The NIV Study Bible*, ed. K. Barker (Grand Rapids MI 1985).

⁴² Such as *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids MI 1979); and *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville 1962).

⁴³ Such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago 2006); and *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (Peabody MA 1990).

⁴⁴ These are nearly innumerable, but two famous older sets offering complete coverage of their respective testaments are Keil and Delitzsch for the Old Testament (rpr. Grand Rapids MI 1982); and Meyer's commentary for the New Testament (rpr. Royersford, PA 1979).

replete with information suggesting close contemporaries involved in the process (e.g., Jdg.1:21; 1Sam.6:18; 1Ki.9:13; 1Chron.4:41), so that traditions invoking Samuel, Nathan and Gad are not to be dismissed out of hand.

The autobiographical information in Ezra makes it likely that he wrote the book that carries his name, and Nehemiah is said to have done so in the case of his eponymous book. Esther is a special case, being the book most often queried as to its canonicity (God is never mentioned therein, for example, except obliquely at Est.4:14); but that book gives a very useful picture of the dynamics of the Jewish people in a status quo of being divorced from any great interest in the truth, so that anonymous authorship is no mark against it. Ruth and Job, likewise anonymous, are almost certainly products of the early monarchy, with Solomon's reign being the most likely time of composition. Whether or not he was the author – as he was of Proverbs (cf. Prov.25:1), Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon – cannot be said for certain, but all of these books mentioned are reflective of the expansion of the canon given to David's son to oversee.

Psalms is unique in having multiple named authors (David, Asaph, Heman, Solomon, and Moses, for example). The Psalms are traditionally divided into five books, and at the end of the second book, at Psalm 72:20, a psalm by Solomon, it says "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended", indicating that Solomon received from his father the first two books, or at least the psalms therein, organized them and added a capstone psalm (#72) to complete that collection. Then, over his lifetime, he collected and organized the other three books – which contain a number of David's other psalms: 86, 101, 103, 108-110, 124, 131-133 (all of these being songs "of ascent" indicating that they are placed into the collection here for that reason with other such psalms), and also 138-145. While there are anonymous Psalms in the first two books which may or may not have been written by David as well, Psalm 44 is the first psalm attributed to someone else, the sons of Korah, who also give us Psalms 44-49; #50 is by Asaph, 51-65 by David; 66-67 anonymous; 68-70 by David, 71 anonymous, and 72 by Solomon. Psalm 90 is said to have been written by Moses, and the unique use of the unusual word *gubh* which occurs only there (in verse ten) and Numbers 11:31, attests to the truth of the claim.

From Isaiah to Malachi, all of the prophets in the Hebrew order of books identify themselves as the authors of their respective prophecies. In the Hebrew order, Daniel is included among the "writings"; he is said to be the author (Dan.9:2 and Dan.10:2). Lamentations is also placed within that last section of the Hebrew Bible; while it does not name its author, the events, the style and the vocabulary confirm the universal tradition that it was written by Jeremiah (cf. 2Chron.35:25).

For the New Testament, the apostles (and a few men closely associated with them and their ministries) were given the blessed task of completing the canon of the Word of God. The first Pentecost of the Church Age took place in 33 A.D., but it took some time before the first book of the New Testament, the book of Matthew, was written, and some three decades after that before the last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, was written. None of the four gospels identify their author, but the names we associate with them, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, occur in the oldest manuscripts as titles, and these four men are consistently represented as

their authors throughout church literature from its inception. Furthermore, in the case of Luke, the book of Acts is certainly his work (inspired by the Spirit) as we know from his autobiographical comments (e.g., Acts 16:10-16), and Luke was definitely written by the same person, obvious from its style (which is the closest to Classical Greek of any New Testament book), and also from the fact that both books are dedicated to the same patron, whereas Acts 1:1 refers to "my earlier account" which has to be the gospel of Luke. John's representation of himself in his gospel as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn.13:23; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20), also puts that identification beyond doubt.

Paul identifies himself as the author of all of his epistles (the next thirteen books in our traditional Protestant order) and Hebrews was undoubtedly produced by Paul as well (kept anonymous in the Spirit to grant a maximum hearing within the broader Jewish community in Jerusalem which harbored those with hostility towards him: e.g., 1Tim.1:19-20; 2Tim.2:17; 4:14). Of the remaining eight books, James, both epistles of Peter, Jude and Revelation all identify their author directly. The three epistles of John, wherein John does not identify himself, were certainly written by him (under the inspiration of the Spirit); that is obvious from their unique style (which is unmistakably similar to that of the gospel of John), from the claim of personal knowledge of Jesus Christ (1Jn.1:1-4), and from the unanimous testimony of the early church (with no other candidates even being suggested).

One last thing all of these inspired authors of both testaments have in common: they are all Jewish – giving us an important additional litmus test for weeding out any work that wants to falsely claim a place in the canon of the blessed Holy Bible.⁴⁵

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law (Hebrew: *torah*, literally, "teaching").
Deuteronomy 29:29 KJV

(19) He declares His word to Jacob,
His statutes and His judgments to Israel.
(20) He has not dealt thus with any nation;

⁴⁵ Colossians 4:11-14 does not in fact require Luke to have been a gentile. Philippians 2:20 demonstrates that in making general comments of this sort Paul cannot be taken to be meant to be excluding others; moreover, Colossians 4:11 is qualified by the phrase "fellow workers who have proved to be 'a comfort' " (traditional translation): this word, in Greek *paregoria*, is used only here in the New Testament and is not the normal word for "comfort"; it is actually a legal term meaning to be a character witness in support of someone in their trial – which is the context of the Colossians passage (cf. 2Tim.4:16 where "no one stood" with Paul in his trial, yet Luke and Mark [who was most certainly Jewish] were "with him"). Luke is probably also the Lucius mentioned at Romans 16:21; if so, he is said in that passage to be among Paul's Jewish compatriots.

And as for His judgments, they have not known them.
Praise the LORD!
Psalm 147:19-20 NKJV

(1) What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? (2) Much in every way! Chiefly because *to them* were committed the oracles of God.
Romans 3:1-2 NKJV

3. False Theories of Composition: As we have seen, the Bible – the true scriptures – are all the work of the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

(20b) No single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection. (21) For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit.
2nd Peter 1:20b-21

Rejecting apocryphal and pseudepigraphical books which are not part of the genuine canon and affirming those books which God did inspire to be part of His Holy scriptures is only part of the battle against satanic attack. One particularly deadly and subtle assault on the Bible has to do with questioning the manner in which some of the books were actually written – subtle, because at first glance these may seem interesting and even legitimate sorts of questions for scholars to ask, but deadly because they actually undermine the principle of direct inspiration. Some of the major instances of this include:

a) The "Documentary Hypothesis": With the publication of Friedrich Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) which launched the "Homeric Question" (i.e., delving into the origins of Homer's sources and the process of the poems' formation), the investigation of sources and methods of composition became a focal point in Classical studies. This trend soon found its way into biblical studies and, even though its extreme features have fallen out of favor in Classical scholarship, it has continued to be a dominant "scholarly lens" in the academic study of the Bible as literature. The first such major approach, still in favor among scholars with a very low or, actually, non-existent view of divine inspiration, was the so-called "documentary hypothesis". In a nutshell, this theory proclaimed that it was possible to discover layers of composition in the Pentateuch (and other Old Testament books) by examining the frequency of occurrence of divine names (preeminently "God", *'Elohiym*, vs. "LORD", *Yhvh*). As any casual observer will easily conclude, the entire idea behind this hypothesis is fundamentally antithetical to the truth of the inspiration of scripture: if some later editor(s) is responsible for piecing together, e.g., the book of Genesis, concocting a story through a cut-and-paste approach utilizing earlier snippets of narrative, then how would we see the Holy Spirit having anything to do with the process? Such a view contradicts the forthright statements found in the Bible about the origins of scripture and the attribution by, e.g., our Lord, of the Pentateuch to Moses.

There are always adequate and reasonable alternative explanations to the frequency of name

occurrence which do not require assuming that scripture is a late editorial concoction. For example, in the Psalms, according to E.J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids 1949) p.305, *Yhvh* occurs 273 times to '*Elohiym*'s 15 in book I, while in book II, the situation is dramatically reversed, with '*Elohiym*' outnumbering *Yhvh* 164 to 30. Far from giving credence to the theory being critiqued here, however, this distinction in the first two books of the Psalms, most of which belong to David and all of which share similar themes, demonstrates that for the godly believer the two names are largely synonymous so that in most cases the difference is negligible and no basis for any sort of minor conclusion, let alone such a major one: for believers, the Lord is our God, and God is our Lord.⁴⁶

b) The "Deutero-Isaiah" Theory: The prophecies of Isaiah do possess a unique organizational scheme, with chapters 40-66, occurring directly after the historical interlude of chapters 36-39, and focusing on eschatological matters. This schema has provided skeptics a pretext for positing two (and sometimes three) "Isaias". However, this false theory is based entirely on the subjective use of supposed internal evidence, namely, the very change of approach (to future prophecy almost exclusively) in chapter forty and following, with the "proof" adduced that the latter part of Isaiah contains prophecies which have come true. Since, to secular and anti-spiritual judgment, genuine prophecy before the fact is impossible, these prophecies must then represent a case of *vaticinium ex eventu*, that is, the pretense of prophecy by backdating after the occurrence of the events "prophesied". In other words, the very proof that Isaiah was inspired – because all of his prophecies came true – is taken by unbelievers as proof that the latter portions of the book must have been written later. But what does the Bible say?

Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, the prophet ***Isaiah*** the son of Amoz wrote.

2nd Chronicles 26:22 NKJV

For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet ***Isaiah***, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the LORD;

Make His paths straight (Is.40:3) "

Matthew 3:3 NKJV (cf. Lk.3:4; Jn.1:23)

. . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by ***Isaiah*** the prophet, saying:

"He Himself took our infirmities

And bore our sicknesses (Is.53:4)".

Matthew 8:17 NKJV

⁴⁶ It is true that '*Elohiym*' is technically a plural while *Yhvh* is singular, so that the latter is more personal with the former more general (in terms of the person of the Trinity being addressed thus referring most often to the Father by default unless the entire Trinity is in view as at Gen.1:26); for that reason no doubt the devil used the former term in preference to the latter in his tempting of Eve (Gen.3:1).

(17) . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by *Isaiah* the prophet, saying:

(18) "Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen,
My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!
I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.

(19) He will not quarrel nor cry out,
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.

(20) A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench,
Till He sends forth justice to victory;

(21) And in His name Gentiles will trust (Is.42:1-4)."

Matthew 12:17-21 NKJV

(17) And He was handed the book of the prophet *Isaiah*. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

(18) "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

(19) To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD (Is.61:1-2)"

Luke 4:17-19 NKJV

(27) So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, (28) was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading *Isaiah* the prophet. (29) Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." (30) So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (31) And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. (32) The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

(33) In His humiliation His justice was taken away,
And who will declare His generation?

For His life is taken from the earth (Is.53:7-8)."

Acts 8:27-33 NKJV

But *Isaiah* is very bold and says:

"I was found by those who did not seek Me;

I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me (Is.65:1)".

d) Source Criticism: Secular, scholarly skeptics, mostly writing in the 19th century, exercised themselves over "differences" between the three "synoptic" gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark and Luke, which present a more or less parallel picture whereas John's gospel is notably different in many ways). Beginning with the premises that these books could not have been inspired and that they were written by later authors rather than by the men who gave them their names, it was abundantly "clear" to such scholars that solving the "problem" of supposed differences between the three, the so-called "synoptic problem", required drilling down into the material to determine the original sources upon which each was based. The most common "solution" has been to assert that Mark was written first (based on merely supposition), that Matthew and Luke wrote later, making full use of Mark, and that the supposed differences between them and Mark – and between each other – are to be attributed to a now completely lost second source which goes by the name of "Q" (from the German word for 'source', *Quelle*).

Since this theory became popular (several hundred years ago now), not a single solitary scrap of the hypothetical "Q" has come to light. In addition, this "solution" creates far more problems than it solves, because it does not actually explain why Matthew and Luke supposedly differ from each other (i.e., there is no common "Q" thread to be seen in doing such a comparison). Furthermore, no convincing reason has ever been adduced to explain just why we should assume that Mark was written first rather than Matthew – as all church tradition proclaims. Since this theory was adduced, finds of early papyri have made it impossible to maintain that the gospels were written later than the first century, a critical point because 1) it makes it more than likely that the men traditionally attributed with their authorship actually did write them, and 2) it allows for interaction and sharing of information not only with many eyewitnesses to the events described, but also between the human authors themselves or their associates, leading any reasonable person to conclude that the layering of sources assumed in this theory was practically speaking impossible. Finally, of course, we who believe understand that these gospels are *inspired* by the Holy Spirit, and that this is really the only reasonable departure point for proper interpretation – reasonable, that is, for us who *believe*.

e) Form Criticism: Other objections to the theory of "Marcan priority" discussed above, include the fact that all of the major ancient manuscripts place Matthew before Mark as the first book of the New Testament, a good indication that "Marcan priority" was not a theory known to the early church. Second, the early witnesses, Papias, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus, all report Mark as representing the apostle Peter's point of view, and all have the book written from Rome, a supposition which the gentile rather than Jewish focus of the book and the many Latinisms it contains surely support. Since Peter's traveling to Rome certainly has to post-date Paul's arrival and imprisonment there, that would argue strongly for a later rather than an earlier dating for that gospel, late 50's A.D. at the earliest. In such a case, it is hard to see how it could have preceded Matthew, much less Luke, whose follow-on book, Acts, ends with Paul's imprisonment at Rome. Thirdly, the idea that Mark wrote first does not predate the 19th century (Lachmann 1835), and the only reason this earlier dating is "significant" is its potential for showing that the other gospels are merely derivative. That is to say, the "priority of Mark" really has as its true "evidence" the

functional goal of proving that the other three gospels are fictional. But even if Mark did write first (a virtual impossibility given the evidence above), he clearly did not write so much earlier than the apostles Matthew and John or Paul's faithful physician Luke so as to be able to influence them in any way – even if they had been of a mind to copy him. The "Marcan hypothesis" had as a critical part of its foundation the assumption that none of the gospels were really written by the first generation of Christians as they claim to be and were in fact very late, as late as the third or even fourth century (depending upon the theory). That is not a defensible position nowadays as portions of the last gospel, that of John, for example, have been found in papyri which date to as early as the late first century.

Nevertheless, this flawed theory eventually spawned an entirely new method of "Bible interpretation", namely "form criticism". The essential idea behind form criticism is that Mark (and Q and possibly the other gospel writers or even non-biblical writers) received a core of Jesus' teaching/preaching (the *kerygma*), and that this core was expanded and elaborated upon by him and the others. Stripping away these later "additions" would theoretically give us "what Jesus actually said and taught". So while source criticism assumes original written sources and seeks to recover these, form criticism pushes things beyond those theoretical sources and attempts to reconstruct the "original teachings of Jesus" as reflected in the gospels. This is accomplished by breaking down different elements of the gospels and related writings into "forms" which represent the "original oral tradition" of the early church. Of course these "forms" or essential teachings, stories, parables, etc., are seen by form critics as merely the early oral tradition developed by the incipient church which may or may not bear any relation to what Jesus actually said or did, representing and reflecting the situation of that early church and its needs rather than any sort of objective truth (i.e., *Sitz im Leben*). We need not get into the details here of the methodology of form criticism. Suffice it to say that it involves essentially the assumption of an ethos of exceptionally imaginative story-telling that developed very quickly and spun out its tales in a mostly mythological way – an assumption for which there is no evidence at all, one which contradicts the evidence in Acts and the epistles and rejects the actual physical evidence of the gospels, and one, finally, which requires more imagination to believe now than it would have to produce then by the supposed community which created these stories, modified them, added to them, and wrote them down, all in a very short span of time.

What all of these and similar or derivative theories (such as redaction criticism, rationalistic deconstruction of the gospel of John, and attempts to discredit the pastoral epistles) have in common is that none of them possess a single, solitary smidgen of actual evidence. Instead, they are all the products of scholarly imagining and have nothing to do with the actual scriptures. After considering the above, believers should in fact have *more* confidence in the Bible than ever before when it is realized that despite centuries of the most sophisticated and determined scholarly attacks on the integrity of scripture, no weak link has ever been discovered – except only in the imagination of those who reject the truth of inspiration *a priori*.

e. The Languages of the Bible

As explained previously, the Bible is inspired – in its original form. And while we do not have the actual first copy of, e.g., Paul's letter to the Philippians, it has been sufficiently demonstrated above that believers have every right to be confident that our text of both testaments is substantially identical to what was originally written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (with the far less than one percent of important textual cruxes being accessible to proper solution by those with the gift of pastor-teacher possessing adequate preparation). Since, however, the Bible was not written in English, it is important to emphasize here that biblical inspiration applies to the scriptural texts in their original languages and not to any translation, however much esteemed. What this means in practical terms is that any detailed and in-depth Bible teaching should be based upon the original texts through the personal study of the pastor-teacher who understands their languages (or reliance on individuals and resources that do) rather than on English translations alone. That being the case, a brief reprise of the languages of the Bible, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, is in order here.

1. The Written Languages of Scripture: The Old Testament is, with the exception of some small Aramaic portions (Gen.31:47; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Jer.10:11; Dan.2:4b-7:28), written in Biblical Hebrew. Biblical Hebrew or "BH" is different from Modern Hebrew or "MH" spoken in Israel today. While Hebrew never entirely died out, following the last diaspora subsequent to the crushing of the Bar Kokhba revolt in the mid-second century A.D., it survived largely as a language of scholarship. MH today is the result of the deliberate resuscitation of the language through the impetus of proponents such as Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in the late nineteenth century. As such, MH, while deriving much of its basic vocabulary from BH, possesses an essentially modern and western syntax which differs greatly in many respects from that of BH. Apart from a small corpus of inscriptions and the later, Amoraic Hebrew of the Mishnah, BH is known to us almost exclusively from the Bible itself. While studying Modern Hebrew is of some marginal utility, those who set themselves to the task of interpreting the Old Testament need to adopt a dedicated practice of reading and re-reading the *Tanakh* itself (as it is called in Hebrew⁴⁷), in order to gain proficiency in the Hebrew of the Bible.

The Aramaic of the Bible constitutes, as noted in the previous paragraph, a very small percentage of the Old Testament scriptures. Moreover, the passages which are written in Aramaic are for the most part not difficult to interpret or translate, nor are they otherwise particularly crucial to the interpretation of biblical doctrine overall (Daniel chapters two and seven excepted). Additionally, Aramaic and Hebrew, being kindred languages of the Northwest Semitic group, are very similar. For these reasons, while gaining some familiarity with biblical Aramaic is, for any prospective pastor-teacher, a definite plus, it should most definitely not come at the expense of his mastery of Biblical Hebrew.

There are some Aramaic words and phrases in the New Testament as well (e.g., Matt.27:46; Mk.5:41; 7:34; 11:9; 14:36; 5:22; Jn.20:16; Rom.8:14; 1Cor.16:22; Gal.4:6), but on the one hand

⁴⁷ *Tanakh* is an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of the MT's three divisions: the Torah, the *Nebhi'im* (the Prophets), and the *Kethubhim* (Writings): Ta-Na-Kh.

these constitute an infinitesimally small portion of the text, and on the other they pose no problems for translation or interpretation (often being explained in the context). Furthermore, Aramaic as a language had a very long history (and is still spoken today in parts of Syria), and has changed quite noticeably over the course of its life. Thus, while the Aramaic of Jesus' day may be closer to the Aramaic of Ezra and Daniel than Old English is to Modern English, they are different enough to be considered nearly separate languages. Theories of an original Aramaic gospel has no basis in fact, and the supposed influences of Aramaic on the Greek of the New Testament are very much overblown and overwrought: a Greek scholar can easily understand the New Testament without knowing any Aramaic whatsoever, while a deep knowledge of Aramaic will not produce significant dividends in studying the New Testament anywhere close to commensurate with the effort gaining such expertise would require. Anyone interested in studying and teaching the New Testament should concentrate on Greek.

Since the Bible has been superintended by God in every way since its inception, it should come as no surprise that Greek was the perfect language for the New Testament. During the first century A.D., as well as during the several centuries preceding and postdating it, Greek was the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world. Aramaic was still a language of commerce in the east, and Latin was the language of government, but the percentage of people in the Roman Empire who had any formal education or who were involved in business of any sort who did not know the Greek language was small.

By the time of the writing of the New Testament, ancient Greek had been somewhat simplified compared to the sophisticated cultural works of Classical times – but it was still the same language. Efforts to suggest any major differences between Classical Greek and so-called *koine* or "common" Greek are mostly vastly exaggerated. Plato could have understood Paul without any trouble whatsoever – since he wrote in the same language – and Paul most certainly did understand Plato (though he never deigned to quote him). For this reason, those called to teach the Bible would do well not to restrict their Greek studies to the New Testament alone. Such an approach is intensely myopic – and completely unnecessarily so since there is such a vast store of Classical and post-Classical Greek literature and other witnesses to the language extent (such as papyri documents and inscriptions). That narrow approach is unavoidable in the study of Biblical Hebrew, but the corpus of the Old Testament is nearly four times larger than that of the New (a fact which mitigates the problem tremendously), and it is also true that interpretation of the Old Testament does not usually hinge on close doctrinal points as is often the case in the New.

Greek, being the sort of language that it is, highly inflected and conceptual in nature, lends itself to complex and precise expressions of thought (in a way biblical Hebrew does not), and was thus ideal for the revelations of "mystery doctrine" provided in the New Testament wherein the person and work of Jesus Christ are taught and explained.⁴⁸ For that reason too, taking advantage of the great wealth of ancient Greek which has survived so as to perfect one's understanding of what

⁴⁸ See BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section I.B.3, "The Mystery Age and the Mystery Complement".

individual verses of the New Testament may and may not mean in critical passages is highly recommended for any man who wants to teach the scriptures without error.

2. The Spoken Languages of the Bible: From the creation of Adam and Eve until God's deliberate confusion of it at the Tower of Babel, mankind spoke a single common language (unknown to us now).⁴⁹ Apart from genealogies, the first proceedings recorded in scripture following that event in Genesis chapter eleven have to do with the call of Abram. We do not know Abraham's original language, but we do know that he was born approximately three hundred years after the great flood, while the Tower of Babel incident occurred at least one hundred years after the deluge (as we know from the naming of Peleg: compare Gen.10:25 with Gen.5:32 and 11:10-16).⁵⁰ Given that no more than two hundred and possibly as little as one hundred years separated the confusion of human languages and the commencement of the dispersion of humanity around the world from our previous consolidated home in the Tigris-Euphrates valley area, it is probable that Abraham and his family spoke Hebrew originally, and that he brought that language into Canaan rather than adopting it from the inhabitants. There were others living in the land when he arrived, but their residence there was not of the longstanding nature that secular history anachronistically assumes. We also know that Abraham spoke other languages, such as Aramaic, from his interaction with the peoples in Canaan without the need for interpreters (e.g., Gen.14:13ff.). Just how different the various Semitic languages were at this time is not known, but it is very likely that they were still close enough to allow cross-communication as would be the case with close dialects as opposed to entirely different languages.⁵¹

From Abraham's day to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., beyond question Jews in the land spoke Hebrew as their mother tongue.⁵² A mere generation before its capture, we can see that the common people of Jerusalem were still speaking Hebrew and had as yet little knowledge

⁴⁹ Dr. Rigsby, a beloved former Hebrew teacher now with the Lord, was convinced that this language was in fact Hebrew (cf. Zeph.3:9).

⁵⁰ See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.9.b, "Days 4-3, and 2-1: Jewish and Gentile millennial days".

⁵¹ For example, from the surviving Phoenician inscriptions of the day (i.e., the "Byblos inscriptions), it is clear that even at a much later date – more than a millennium having passed – Biblical Hebrew was essentially indistinguishable from ancient Phoenician (cf. also Solomon and Hiram's correspondence and the seamless interaction between their workmen: 1Ki.5:1ff.).

⁵² The Pentateuch, after all, is sufficient evidence for Hebrew being spoken by the Israelites in spite of their 430 year sojourn in Egypt. While the Phoenicians are usually credited with the invention of the alphabet, it is entirely possible that it was invented with God's direct help for the writing of the first five books of the "book of books". At the base of Mt. Sinai, archaic alphabetic signs have been discovered (i.e., the so-called "Proto-Sinaitic script"), which may represent this first use of the alphabet.

of Aramaic:

Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in *Aramaic*, for we understand it; and do not speak to us in *Hebrew* in the hearing of the people who are on the wall."
2nd Kings 18:26 NKJV

However, following the deportation of the exiles to Babylon where Aramaic and not Hebrew was spoken, it is likely that the former language did gain a foothold among the Jewish remnant (cf. Ezra 4:2-3), and that this helps to explain the use of Aramaic among Jews in Palestine during our Lord's day. But the proposition, at one time very widely accepted, that Hebrew died out thereafter as a spoken language is incorrect. Hebrew letters among the Dead Sea scrolls and coinage inscriptions in Hebrew related to the Bar Kokhba revolt (mid-second cent. A.D.) demonstrate the continuing use of Hebrew well beyond the time of the gospels.

(1) "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." (2) And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language (*Hebraïdi*), they kept all the more silent.
Acts 22:1-2 NKJV (cf. Jn.5:2; 19:13; 19:17; 19:20; 20:16; Acts 21:40; 26:14).

This and the other passages referenced show any objective reader that Hebrew was spoken by the population of Jerusalem at this time, a generation after the life of Christ.⁵³

(46) And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (47) Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!"
Matthew 27:46-47 NKJV

This passage demonstrates that Aramaic was not the first language of the residents of Jerusalem since they misunderstand our Lord's words in that language here – and the same thing can be said for Peter's Aramaic-laced/Aramaic-pronounced Hebrew which gives him away as being from Galilee in the process of denying our Lord three times (Matt.26:73; Mk.14:70). Our Lord spoke Aramaic as is obvious from the above quotation (as well as from His direct Aramaic quotes listed earlier). Our Lord spoke Hebrew (as is obvious from His discussions as a young man with the teachers in the temple at Lk.2:46-47, from His reading of the Torah at Lk.4:16-19, from His preaching in the temple on various occasions, and from His direct conversations in Jerusalem with Jewish officials of every sort and at various times; e.g., Matt.21:23-27). And our Lord also spoke Greek – as is obvious from His conversation with the Syro-Phoenician woman ("the woman was a

⁵³ On this question see in particular: Gundry, R.H., "The Language of First-Century Palestine", *JBL* 83 (1964) 404-408; Hughes, P.E., "The Languages Spoken by Jesus" in *New Dimensions in New Testament Studies*, edd. R.N Longnecker and M.C. Tenney (Grand Rapids 1974) 125-143; *A Harmony of the Gospels*, R.L. Thomas and S.N. Gundry (Chicago 1978), 309-312.

Greek": Mk.7:26), from His direct discourse with Pilate sans interpreter (Matt.27:11; Mk.15:2; Lk.23:3; Jn.18:34-38; 19:9-11),⁵⁴ and from the fact that certain of His conversations in the gospels only "work" in Greek and therefore must have taken place in Greek (e.g., our Lord's distinction between *Petros* and *petra* in Matt.16:18, and Nicodemus' confusion of *anōthen* as meaning "again" when our Lord meant "from above" in Jn.3:3; 7:7; 3:31 [there being no such distinction in the first example and no such potential ambiguity in the second example for the corresponding Hebrew and Aramaic words]).⁵⁵ This same knowledge of Greek can be assumed for our Lord's brothers (the epistles of James and Jude are written in Greek), and for His apostles (all four gospels along with Peter and John's epistles and Revelation are written in Greek; and cf. Jn.12:20-23).⁵⁶

5. The Interpretation of the Bible

(24) The God who made the world and everything in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in man-made temples, (25) nor is he waited on by human hands, as if He needed anything from us. He is the One who gives us all life and breath and everything else. (26) From one man he created all the nations of mankind – that they should come to inhabit the whole face of the earth. He fixed and determined the specific times and extent

⁵⁴ There is no evidence that Pilate knew Aramaic and there was certainly no reason for him, the Roman Procurator administering a province for an empire whose official language was Latin and whose functional language was Greek, governing from his praetorium in Jerusalem where the local language was Hebrew, to have done so. He is said to have himself written the inscription hung on the cross (Jn.19:20), in "Hebrew, Greek, and Latin" (not in Aramaic). We may be sure of his Latin and Greek (no Roman aristocrat of that day would not be highly fluent in Greek), but attributing fluency in Hebrew to him is also doubtful (cf. Jn.18:35).

⁵⁵ In terms of the first example, the distinction is of critical importance because a *petros* is a small stone, while a *petra* is a massive rock-face cliff (more like El Capitan than something capable of being held in the hand), with our Lord making the distinction in Matthew 16:18 between Peter the believer in Him and Himself the Rock upon which the whole Church is built: "on this Rock" (*petra*) refers to Himself, not to Peter (*petros*). In terms of the second, in F. Delitzsch's masterful translation of the New Testament into Hebrew, for *anōthen* he uses *milma'lah* which means "up" but not "again" – because in Hebrew (and biblical Aramaic) one must choose one or the other since there is no such ambiguity as there is with the Greek word *anōthen*. Nicodemus at first clearly took the word in the other sense than Jesus meant it (not possible unless the conversation took place in Greek).

⁵⁶ Peter is a Greek name but not the only names by which he was known (Simon is Hebrew; Cephas is Aramaic), a not uncommon occurrence for multilingual individuals living in multilingual societies. Andrew and Philip are also Greek names. Additionally, it should be noted that the great majority of Old Testament quotations throughout the New Testament come from its Greek translation, the Septuagint, and not directly from the Hebrew.

of their habitations, (27) to the end that they should seek out this God, that they might go in search of Him and so might find Him – for He is not far off from any one of us.

Acts 17:24-27

(18) God's wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth [in their hearts about God] in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both His eternal power and His divinity – so that they are without any excuse.

Romans 1:18-20

While the construction of the world and everything within it is God's message to that world of His existence, power and perfection – designed to turn the hearts of men to seek Him in the face of universal sin and death and inevitable judgment (natural revelation)⁵⁷, the Bible is God's message for all who do respond to Him – and that message is salvation by His grace through faith in the One who came into this world and died for all of our sins that we might obtain it. Jesus Christ is the Word, the Message, the Plan of God. Jesus Christ is the Rock upon which everything is built, and the cross is the means God used to save all of us who were willing to be saved through Jesus' death for us all. Correct interpretation of the Bible never loses sight of the cross and the One who died on it to give us life eternal, because that is what the Bible is all about. Everything in scripture is ultimately designed to lead us to salvation and then to secure that salvation through response to all the truth which the Bible contains to the glory of Jesus Christ and to the service of His Church.

(24) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to follow Me, let him [first] abandon his own aspirations, [then] pick up his cross and follow Me. (25) For whoever makes it his purpose to preserve his life will end up losing it, but whoever forfeits his life for My sake will find that he has preserved it. (26) What point is there for a man to come to possess the entire world, if he should then come to lose his life? Or what can a man pay to regain his life? (27) For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin."

Matthew 16:24-27

Jesus Christ is the truth, the living Word of God. To follow Him requires giving oneself over to the truth, embracing the new life we have then been given in despite of the world, and following our Lord wherever He leads us. All this requires learning, knowing, believing, and applying the truth – and that truth is present only in the Bible. For this reason, nothing is more important than the Bible – and nothing is more important than getting its interpretation right.

⁵⁷ See BB 4B, section II.2: "Natural Revelation and Accountability".

a. The Translations

We have already explained above that the canon of scripture is inspired in its original form alone, and that this original form consisted of books written in Hebrew and Greek (with some small portions in Aramaic). As anyone who has ever studied a foreign language knows, modes of expression in other languages are often quite different from those we commonly employ in English, and while there may be English words roughly synonymous with those in other languages we may be learning, any language learner is quickly disabused of the notion that even these are exact equivalents. Many other differences between any language A and language B make it necessary when translating between one and the other to first understand precisely what is meant, and then find the best way to render that *meaning* into the target language. The very fact that language A is not language B means that there could never be an exact and precise "literal translation" of any complicated writing from one to the other. There is, in fact, no such thing as a "literal translation"; there are only some translations which hew more closely to the modes of expression in the original than others, sometimes at the cost of clarity and precision of meaning.

The fact is, there are better translations and worse translations, but none could ever be perfect by definition – and a translation will always be a translation, which is something very different from the original. Translating meaning correctly from, say, Greek to English, would require the translator of, say, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, to first have an absolutely complete and completely correct understanding of what every word and verse in that epistle means on every level of truth. Since all of us – even experienced and dedicated pastor-teachers – are learning new things every day, that standard is also impossible ever to meet fully. For that reason, even very good, very careful, and very highly esteemed translations have to be approached as such. While reading the Bible in one's own language is an important thing to do, even for a pastor-teacher, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the translation is a translation, and that therefore even knowing it well and fully understanding the English as it is expressed in any given passage cannot provide the full range of meaning which may become clear upon careful study of the same text in the original language. And in some cases, translations are wrong (cf. the KJV's inclusion of interpolations which are not actually part of the Bible such as the longer ending of the gospel of Mark), and in many others they are misleading or miss the actual point.

In general, however, most modern English translations of the Bible render the vast majority of passages of scripture in approximately the same way, even if the style and wording are different. A brief comparison of how different versions of the Bible treat one particular passage will be helpful in illustrating the essential differences between some of the more well-known major versions (apologies in advance for not including all of the dozens of presently available translations here):

And the inhabitants of the uttermost parts from Thy signs are afraid,
The outgoings of morning and evening Thou causest to sing.
Psalm 65:8 YLT

Young's Literal Translation is, in this case, very close to a word-for-word rendering of the

Hebrew. It is clear to see from just the example above how that this method can easily produce something close to gibberish. And yet even so it may still be objected that in the Hebrew: 1) the three definite articles ("the") are not present; 2) there is no "Thy" present; 3) there is no comma in the original (and that particular punctuation does influence the sense). But even with these adjustments, we scarcely have what could be considered easily lucid and pleasing English here. In many other cases with this version, either the "literal method" has been carried so far that the meaning is indecipherable, or more liberties have been taken to avoid that eventuality.

They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens: thou makest the
outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.
Psalm 65:8 KJV

Here we see the strengths and weaknesses of the beloved *King James* version. Its language is now unfamiliar to our ears (unless we have spent a good deal of time with this version), in the vein of Shakespeare (who died a scant five years after its publication). That fact, plus its somewhat poetic style does give the verse gravity and dignity, but at the expense perhaps of the average reader being able to easily understand what is meant. The KJV is known for its unquestioned scholarship in production, and it often uses italics for words not present in the original which it has supplied for readability (but it has not done so on this occasion and is inconsistent in this approach throughout). The KJV also leans towards creative ambiguity rather than spelling things out precisely where that is possible. In short, it is a very good, very careful translation which was readable at the time of its production, but which suffers mainly in its translation of the New Testament on account of being based upon an inferior Greek edition (since most of the major Greek mss. had not yet come to light).

They also who dwell in the farthest parts are afraid of Your signs;
You make the outgoings of the morning and evening rejoice.
Psalm 65:8 NKJV

The *New King James* version has much to recommend it. We can see from comparing the two different renderings of our verse that the meaning of the new is as identical as could be hoped to what is said in the older version, with merely the style and vocabulary having been updated. It should be noted, however, that in many places the NKJV goes much farther than that, changing the basic "take" of the KJV wherever the "updaters" decided that the KJV had "gotten it wrong". Often times this does represent a genuine improvement, but readers should be aware that the NKJV's mandate went beyond mere linguistic and stylistic updating.

. . . so that those who dwell at earth's farthest bounds are afraid at thy signs; thou makest
the outgoings of the morning and the evening to shout for joy.
Psalm 65:8 RSV

The *Revised Standard* version, an update of the *American Standard* version (ASV), which was itself an update of the KJV, is very similar to the KJV despite the two iterations of update. The RSV is a scholarly production, rendered in a smooth, homogeneous, literary language. But the

translation tends to be a bit too neutral, lacking much verve or impact. Additionally, in some instances preference have been given to liberal scholarly theories over the actual original texts.

They who dwell in the ends of the earth stand in awe of Your signs;
You make the dawn and the sunset shout for joy.
Psalm 65:8 NASB

The *New American Standard Bible* was an attempt to create a modern translation that would be just as faithful – and actually even more so – to the literal text of scripture as was the KJV, and as such is the best "literal" translation in modern English. As a result, it suffers from the same sorts of problems we saw with the YLT above, and without the charm. Furthermore, having been produced by a number of different scholars, NASB has a somewhat inconsistent, bumpy and far from seamless style, and its very desire to promote literalness over meaning (rejecting so-called "dynamic equivalence") has resulted in many instances of obscure and misleading translations. It is also a very difficult version to read with much pleasure.

Those living far away fear your wonders;
where morning dawns and evening fades,
you call forth songs of joy.
Psalm 65:8 NIV1984

Although much maligned in evangelical circles, the *New International Version* is (was – see below) a very thoughtful and fairly precise translation which at the same time is eminently readable. In the verse above we see how this translation brings out vividly the picture contained in the Hebrew poetic expression, but not without taking some liberties in translation – yet in this instance also without any true alteration of meaning. The NIV is thus a more interpretive and rather less literal translation, and it is true that sometimes the NIV has "gotten it completely wrong" in terms of its interpretation of the meaning of the original. Like the little girl of verse, "when it is good it is very, very good, but when it is bad it is awful". But those instances are scarce enough to make it a worthwhile translation to read in English.

The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.
Psalm 65:8 NIV

In 2011, the NIV went through a major update and, in the opinion of this writer, took a wonderful version and degraded it significantly. A large part of the change had to do with eliminating gender-specific terminology (as in replacing "men" with "people"), done so thoroughly that very often clumsy and unsatisfying renderings resulted. But the updaters did not stop at that. They also used the opportunity to change many of the 1984 NIV's translations, often for no particular reason this writer can discern, and inevitably gave us something not as good as what was changed.

Those who live at the ends of the earth
stand in awe of your wonders.

From where the sun rises to where it sets,
you inspire shouts of joy.
Psalm 65:8 NLT

As is often the case, the *New Living Translation* above takes the "interpret the meaning vs. be literal" method in rendering our verse as far as possible without producing a totally indefensible translation. That is typical of this version, so that the rule given about the NIV 1984 above (i.e., being either "very good" or "awful") is doubly true of the NLT. When this version is spot-on about the actual meaning of the underlying text it is translating, it often produces a rendering which is superior to all other versions. Unfortunately, it is very often wrong – far too often to have any confidence whatsoever that when its phraseology is greatly different from that of other translations that it might be correct in opposition to the majority (that is almost never the case).

This verse, Psalm 68:5, is a poetic appreciation of God's control of the entire world, expressing in a beautiful way how all things in His creation sing His praises (a sentiment ubiquitous in the Psalms and in scripture generally). There are no critical doctrinal points beyond this contained in the verse above, and none of the above translations fails to render the Hebrew original in an acceptable and understandable way. Since that is true of most passages of scripture – and since doctrinal issues can only be addressed adequately by an experienced pastor-teacher with expertise in the original languages – the extent to which the language and style of the English version preferred helps the believer understand and appreciate what is being said should at least be a consideration in choosing which one to read (and of course there is no law against reading more than one).

Bible reading is of critical importance for every Christian. It gives us a sense of what is in the Word of God generally, it reinforces the truths we know and believe as we encounter them, and it lifts us up at every turn through the examples of the great believers of scripture, through the multifarious deliverances wrought on their behalf by our dear Lord, and through the abundant promises and encouragement directly from God found on every page.

Just as daily prayer is so important for every believer to engage in, spending time with the Lord in His Word daily is a discipline no believer will ever regret. But Bible reading is not, however, a substitute for the other essential discipline required for spiritual growth: giving one's attention to a teaching ministry where what is taught is of the quality and quantity necessary to produce that growth. Knowing one's Bible well is a great contributor to growth – and an important asset in helping to assess potential teaching ministries so as to avoid the bad and choose the good – but it is not for no reason that the Holy Spirit has empowered pastor-teachers to provide spiritual nutrition to the Church of Jesus Christ. It takes that gift – along with diligent preparation and sufficient experience – to "rightly divide the Word of truth" (2Tim.2:15).

b. The Method of Interpretation

Orthodoxy in the field of hermeneutics (i.e., interpretation, from the Greek *hermeneuo*, "to translate or explain") is often described in terms of three basic areas: 1) Isogogics (the historical,

cultural, geographical and literary background of the Bible and the world of the Bible); 2) Categorics (systematic theology and doctrinal formulations); and 3) Exegesis (the application of all relevant information, particularly, in addition to the aforementioned, linguistic and contextual matters, to the explanation and interpretation of a biblical text). Hence the acronym I.C.E. Careful interaction with all of these scholarly areas are important in coming to a determination of what a passage of scripture actually means so as to be able to explain it properly for the edification of the believers who are being taught. It cannot be stressed too much, however, that the Holy Spirit's role in this process is paramount.⁵⁸ Contrary to what is sometimes taught in certain circles where pastoral authority is largely disrespected (based on the misinterpretation of passages such as 1Jn.2:27), the Spirit only uses men with the gift of pastor-teacher to bring believers to spiritual maturity – and only if they are sufficiently prepared and yield themselves to the discipline of doing so in sufficient quality and quantity to achieve that end. The uncommonness of this combination – of a prepared pastor-teacher doing his job and a group of believers prepared to submit to his teaching authority – explains the corresponding rarity of spiritual maturity in our lukewarm era of Laodicea.

As affirmed in the previous section, it is good and proper and beneficial for believers to read their Bibles every day. Growing spiritually, however, requires good teaching. Believers who are not gifted as pastor-teachers, who are not thoroughly prepared (in all manner of academic disciplines), and who are not experienced in teaching the Word of God, do not have the ability to feed themselves or grow from reading scripture to the point of spiritual maturity and beyond. Jesus Christ has appointed teachers in His Church for that very purpose of edification (Matt.28:20; Lk.12:42; Jn.21:17; Rom.10:14; 1Cor.4:1-2; 12:28-29; 2Cor.10:8; Eph.4:11-16; 1Thes.2:4; 5:12-13; 5:17; 1Tim.3:1; 4:6; 4:12-16; 2Tim.1:6; 1:13; 2:2; 2:24-26; 3:10; 3:14-17; 4:2; Tit.2:7-8; Heb.13:17; Jas.3:1; 1Pet.4:10-11; 5:1-4). "Rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2Tim.2:15) requires a deep measure of spiritual maturity in the first place (garnered from someone else' teaching ministry), the ability (which comes from the gift) to understand scripture on one's own beyond the superficial level, along with the skills to rightly determine these matters in response to the Spirit's guidance. Neither scholarship, nor experience, nor developed skills, nor gifting, nor the willingness to put oneself at the Spirit's command may be left out of the equation for a teaching ministry to be successful.

Interpretation itself of any given passage requires determining the correct text, vetting or producing a viable translation, understanding the meaning of the text in its specific, close context and also in the book in which it occurs as a whole, as well as in the doctrinal context of the truth of scripture throughout the entire Bible. This is all much easier said than done, for no human being has ever possessed a perfect understanding of the entirety of scripture – apart from our Lord who is the Word of God Himself. For that reason alone, it should be obvious to any objective

⁵⁸ It is the Holy Spirit, of course, who teaches the truth directly to the human spirit of anyone who respond in faith when the truth is heard – thus eliminating any sort of "epistemological" objections. See BB 5: Pneumatology, sections II.B.1.d.2, "Gospel Epistemology", and II.B.3.a.3, "Spiritual Growth Epistemology"

Christian that for getting the truth necessary to grow, a do-it-yourself approach engaged in during one's free time is not going to be sufficient. Providing truth distilled and refined to the point of being usable for spiritual growth and doing so in sufficient quantity and orthodoxy to be effective in that pursuit is the province of the gifted, experienced, and prepared pastor-teacher.⁵⁹

c. The Teacher

Pastor-teachers may be compared to gold-miners in their interpretation of the Word. To be successful, a miner has to look in the right places. Coming to the right mountain – the Word of God – and spending time prospecting it alone (as opposed to poetry or inspirational books or collections of sermons or other supposed fonts of wisdom) is the first step. And no miner will be particularly successful without bringing the proper tools for excavation (such as a sufficient grasp of Hebrew and Greek, a deep knowledge of the teachings of the Bible, systematic theology, and some basic understanding of interpretive methodology, ancient and church history, cultural and archaeological issues). Knowing the mountain well will also be beneficial (analogous to a sound overall knowledge of the Bible itself: prospecting for eschatology in Revelation, for example, will obviously be more likely to produce results than scouring Chronicles). The manner in which the excavation takes place is also important, carefully shoring up all the tunnels to avoid cave-ins (pastor-teachers should only teach what they are absolutely sure of and believe whole-heartedly based on scripture, and they should have a sound knowledge of traditional theology, its strengths and weaknesses, as well as of major heresies and heretical interpretations past and present). And once there is a "strike", the precious ore must be carefully extracted and refined for it to be of practical use (congregations need edifying truth, presented in an understandable way as opposed to raw data or abstruse technical discussions). Finally, only those miners who keep at it day and night ever amount to much, because the work is difficult and there is no quick or easy way to success. Likewise, pastor-teachers need to keep working the mountain diligently and in the correct godly way in order to produce the refined gold which is truly valuable to those they teach (cf. Rev.3:18).

(12) But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? (13) No mortal comprehends its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. (14) The deep says, "It is not in me"; the sea says, "It is not with me." (15) It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed out in silver. (16) It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir, with precious onyx or lapis lazuli. (17) Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it, nor can it be had for jewels of gold. (18) Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention; the price of wisdom is beyond rubies. (19) The topaz of Cush cannot compare with it; it cannot be bought with pure gold.

Job 28:12-19 NIV

The place of wisdom is the Bible. The place of understanding is the holy scripture. But beyond a few surface finds, these treasures must be extracted through a process of correct interpretation

⁵⁹ See BB 6B: Ecclesiology: the Study of the Church, section II.B: "The Pastor-Teacher".

which only a gifted and prepared pastor-teacher is able to do. The Bible contains all the truth that believers need, everything that God has prepared for those who are His. The job of the pastor-teacher is to unearth that truth, prepare it and present it to his listeners in a way that promotes their edification and spiritual growth. The job of the congregation is to accept the authority of the pastor-teacher, listen and learn and remember and believe and apply the truth presented – so as to reach spiritual maturity, progress successfully through the trials of this life, and eventually help others in the Church do the same. Bible reading reinforces this process, encouraging and directing believers through remembrance of the truths that dwell in their hearts. But it cannot replace sitting at the feet of a man whom Christ has called to dispense the truth to His believers in due season.

Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him,
Nor speak anymore in His name."
But His word was in my heart like a burning fire
Shut up in my bones;
I was weary of holding it back,
And I could not.
Jeremiah 20:9 NKJV

And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?"
Luke 12:42 NKJV

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep".
John 21:17 NKJV

Be zealous to present yourself to God [as one] approved [in what you do], a workman who does not need to be ashamed, [like a skillful carpenter] "cutting straight" the Word of truth.
2nd Timothy 2:15

Proclaim the Word! Keep at it, whether circumstances are favorable or not! Reprove, rebuke, [and] encourage with all patience [in your] teaching!
2nd Timothy 4:2

6. The Word of Truth

[This copy of the Law] is to be with [the new king], and he is to *read it all the days of his life* so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law (*torah*; lit. "teaching") and these decrees.
Deuteronomy 17:19 NIV1984

(1) Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of mockers. (2) But the teaching (*torah*) of the Lord is his delight, and in His teaching (*torah*) he meditates day and night.

Psalms 1:1-2

We began our "Bible Basics" series with the study of God (BB 1: Theology), then moved on to God's creation of angelic beings, the rebellion of some, and a consideration of the conflict this engendered (BB 2A: Angelology) along with God's prophesied, ultimate victory (BB 2B: Eschatology). Next came the creation of man as God's resolution to this conflict (BB 3A: Anthropology), his initial failure and resulting sinfulness (BB 3B: Hamartiology), and ultimate triumph through the incarnation of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ and His victory on the cross (BB 4A: Christology), followed by a consideration of the salvation of all who accept Him, the Gift of God, receive (BB 4B: Soteriology) – these two areas forming the centerpiece of truth: the person and work of Jesus Christ. The study of the Spirit who gives us rebirth and empowers us after salvation for all things for which we remain on earth came next (BB 5: Pneumatology), followed by a study of how we should then live in His power individually (BB 6A: Peripateology) and collectively as Christ's Church (BB 6B: Ecclesiology). The capstone for this series, our present study (BB 7: Bibliology), has been all about the holy book God has given us so that we may know and understand and believe everything He has done for us – and will do. But it might well have been the first installment . . . because the truth of the Word of God is the foundation of everything we believers believe and of everything we do here in this world after salvation, following in the footsteps our dear Lord and Savior who is the very Word of God.

And *the Word* became flesh and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about *the Word* of life, [Jesus Christ].

1st John 1:1

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated on it is called "Faithful and True", and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war. (12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself. (13) And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and His Name has [always] been called, "*The Word* of God".

Revelation 19:11-13

Reading the Bible is reading about God. Paying attention to the scriptures is paying attention to the Lord. Focusing on the Word is focusing on Jesus Christ. And there is no way to "see Him" apart from His Word, for He is the living Word of God (Ps.16:8; Phil.1:21; 1Pet.1:8-9; Heb.11:27; 12:1-2).

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:29 NIV

Everything we know about Jesus Christ, the living Word, comes from His book, the written Word. For that reason alone there can be little of comparable importance to learning – and believing and applying – the truth found in scripture. For its words of truth are the words of life whereby we have life eternal in the first place and through which alone we can follow our dear Savior in this life in the way in which He commands us to do (Matt.10:38; 16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23; 14:27).

"So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

Deuteronomy 8:3 NKJV

But [Christ] answered [the devil] and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "

Matthew 4:4 NKJV

Beyond the essential truth about God which shouts forth from every aspect of His creation, the Bible is the only and the ultimate source of all other divine truth available to us His creatures here in the world. And it is the absolute truth – rightly translated, interpreted and understood. The Bible is not a lump of malleable clay which may be molded into anything the reader desires; rather it is the instrument in the Potter's hands to mold us as He desires – when we are willing to be molded into His image. The Bible is not a blank canvas onto which any image may be painted to suit the reader's pleasure; rather it is a brilliant and infinitely detailed depiction of all that is worth knowing painted by the Great Artist Himself for the benefit of all those who are willing to open their eyes to the truth. And the Bible is not an empty vessel into which may be poured whatever the reader fancies; rather it is the ultimate repository of all God's truth for those who love Him, capable of filling the emptiness of our hearts and souls to the brim through the Holy Spirit who illuminates that truth for us.

I shall run the way of Your commandments,
For You will enlarge my heart.

Psalms 119:32 NASB

The Word in whose paths we run is not at all subjective but complete, absolute truth. Contrary, therefore, to the despicable modern notion that subjective engagement with scripture causes it to "become the word of God to you" (thus essentially remaking God in your own image), it is the hope and purpose of this ministry that in allowing the written Word to thoroughly transform you, you may become one with the Living Word in your heart, using the image of God you have been given to respond to Jesus Christ unto salvation, spiritual growth, progress and production, resulting in a hearty "Well done!" from our dear Savior on that glorious day to come. For all those who open their hearts to the truth in the Bible, everything accessible through reading and

appropriated through teaching, there is just such spiritual transformation, as we all strive to "reach that unifying [goal] of belief in and full-knowledge of the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity of the fullness of Christ" (Eph.4:13), where there is finally no difference between our thinking and God's thinking, so that there is no difference between what He wants us to say and do and what we actually say and do – for that is the essence of true godliness. Only the truth of the Word of God properly responded to, heard and believed and acted upon, can accomplish this most noble goal. Therefore any person or group claiming to follow Christ which does not put the Word of God first is making a false claim. As believers in Him who is the truth, only the truth gives us the freedom to follow Him as He has told us to do (Jn.8:32; Gal.5:1; cf. Matt.10:38; 16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23; 14:27).

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119:105 KJV

In this dark world, only the light of the truth illuminates our path, the high road to Zion which we believers walk, carrying our crosses resolutely toward our meeting with Jesus Christ. In light there is no darkness. So that even when our path takes us through the darkest valleys, we are given to see the way forward through the light of the truth (Ps.18:28; 27:1; 36:9; 43:3; 89:15; 97:11; 112:4; 139:11; Prov.4:18; Is.2:5; Is.60:1; Mic.7:8-9; Jn.1:4-5; 1:9; Eph.5:8; 1Thes.5:4-5; Jas.1:17; 1Jn.1:5; Rev.22:5).

For God who said, "Let light shine forth from the darkness!", is He who has shone forth [His light] into our hearts to illuminate our knowledge of God's glory in the person of Jesus Christ.
2nd Corinthians 4:6

You too would do well to pay the closest attention to [the Word of God], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. the Living Word, Jesus Christ, returns).
2nd Peter 1:19b

And this Word is perfect in every way. God is perfect. His plan is perfect. And His Word is perfect, the perfect luminescent reflection of the Light of the world, Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior, and the perfect revelation of the One who saved us from the darkness and who is soon coming to deliver us and to usher us into His glorious, unapproachable light (Rev.22:5; cf. 1Tim.6:16).

(9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part, (10) but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.
1st Corinthians 13:9-10 ESV

The Bible is the perfect repository of all of God's truth. The only way any of us knows anything of substance about our perfect Savior Jesus Christ. And it is only by yielding ourselves to the perfect truth it contains that we have been made perfect in principle, are being perfected through

that glorious truth, and will one day stand before our perfect Lord Jesus Christ to be rewarded for our response. He who is perfect will return. Until that wonderful day, the Bible is the one thing in our tangible possession which is in fact perfect, *the* perfect. And we would "do well" to keep giving it our complete attention (2Pet.1:19b).

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Romans 15:4 NIV

Yes, we began this series with the study of God and are ending it with the study of His holy Word, the truth of Him who is the truth. God provides the truth; and the truth leads us ever closer to Him. So we have come full circle, we are the recipients of God's truth given by Him who is the source of all that is true. And the Bible is our rainbow bridge that spans the gap of the unseen between where we are now and the glorious presence of God Himself. It is the rope firmly tied to our anchor of hope lodged securely in heaven above (Heb.6:18-20), the inseparable and unbreakable ribbon of truth by means of which our dear Lord Jesus Christ is drawing us ever closer to Himself (Jn.12:32; cf. Jn.6:44; 10:28-29; Jas.4:8).

(23) Thus has the Lord spoken, "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor let the strong man boast in his strength. Let the rich man not boast in his riches, (24) but let the one who boasts boast in this: in understanding and in knowing Me. For I am the Lord, the One who renders mercy, judgment and righteousness upon the earth. For these are the things in which I take delight.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (cf. 1Cor.1:31; 2Cor.10:17)

Such godly boasting is impossible without the Bible. We cannot know the Father without Jesus Christ (Jn.14:6-11), and we cannot know Jesus Christ without the truth of His Word. To love Him, we must know Him and follow His requirements (1Jn.5:2-3), and to know Him, we must hear and know and understand and believe His Word (1Jn.4:7). All eternal reward is based upon trusting in the Lord and in His promises, such faith only being possible when it is given a proper object, the truth about Jesus Christ present only in the Word of God. Loving God presupposes knowing about Him – that is our boast (Jer.9:23-24), and pleasing God presupposes knowing how to do so – so as to have hope in the resurrection and in being rewarded through doing what He has called us to do (Heb.11:6).

(24) For it is in this hope [of the resurrection of our bodies] that we have been saved. Now a hope that is visible is not [really] a hope. For why should someone wait expectantly for what his eyes can see? (25) But we have set our hope on what cannot be seen, and so are patiently awaiting its fulfillment.

Romans 8:24-25

Since everything we know about God, about salvation in Jesus Christ, and about the correct way to walk in this world so as to be rewarded and receive a "Well done!" from Him comes from

scripture, it is impossible to separate scripture from a healthy relationship with the Lord, however defined. All Christian virtue and virtuous behavior is necessarily based upon knowing, believing and following the truth.

(2) May [God's] grace to you and [His] peace be multiplied by means of the **full-knowledge** (*epignosis*: truth believed) of God and our Lord Jesus, (3) inasmuch as His divine power has bestowed upon us [every]thing we need for life and to live in a godly way (i.e., physical and spiritual provision) **through** this **full-knowledge** (*epignosis*) of Him who has called us for His own glory and renown. (4) [It is] through these [divine blessings] that the great and honorable **promises** have been granted to us, so that through them we might become partakers of the divine nature (i.e., in contrast with our earthly sinful nature), having [through salvation] escaped earthly corruption and its lust.
2nd Peter 1:2-4 (cf. 2Pet.1:8)

As we have had occasion to study many times before, "full-knowledge" or *epignosis* – described above as the means of increasing in God's grace and peace and through our response to which all of our needs and ability to live a godly life are supplied – is the Bible's way of expressing truth resident in our hearts, having been solidified there and made understandable by means of the Holy Spirit whenever we believe the truth.⁶⁰ Peter testifies here that the means of accessing God's grace and peace, that is, His favor and complete provision, is *epignosis*, for this is the means by which everything we need for this life, spiritual and physical, is provided to believers. Thus, to fulfill the purpose for which we have been called – to glorify God – every believer must commit him/herself to the process of spiritual growth, the only way that *epignosis* can be attained. Full-understanding of the truth requires that we seek out the truth, hear, learn, and most especially believe the truth (for only through faith in the power of the Spirit is knowledge transformed into "full knowledge"). That is the path to spiritual maturity, progress and production, the proper Christian walk wherein God's "grace and peace" are "multiplied" and whereby God's many promises to us are attained in full. Only in this way do we become "partakers of the divine nature" (i.e., in contrast with our earthly sinful nature), so as to "escape earthly corruption and its lust" ultimately at the resurrection, becoming one with the Word our Savior through having sought out, learned, believed and obeyed His written Word.

The Bible is the sole source of this blessed and essential truth – beyond what may be gleaned by anyone through God's revealing of Himself in His creation. Without the ministry of the Spirit, without believing the truth He makes known to us, and without a good Bible-teaching ministry to make these things understandable to us, it is true that we will never appropriate the Bible's truth as "full-knowledge". But whether we do or we don't – and whether the rest of mankind does or does not – the fact is that all of God's truth meant for human beings on this earth is stored in one place

⁶⁰ See especially BB 4B, section II.6.e, "Faith Epistemology", BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.1.d.2, "Gospel Epistemology", and section II.B.3.a.3, "Spiritual Growth Epistemology", and BB 6A: Peripateology, section I.A.6, "The Holy Spirit and the Truth (epistemology and *epignosis*)".

and in one place only: the canon of the holy scriptures. All of the promises of God are contained in the Bible. They must be sought out, they must be believed, they must be ministered to us by the Spirit and through a solid teaching ministry. But they are all right there. In the Bible. And nowhere else.⁶¹

And seeing the multitudes, [Jesus] went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

Matthew 5:1 NKJV

Many of those who heard our Lord and benefitted from His many miracles did not believe, or did not remain faithful to Him in the end (e.g., Jn.6:15; 6:66; 12:37). And many who were eager to see the wonders He performed were not much interested in His teachings. It was for this very reason that He taught them in parables that "Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand" (Mk.4:12; Lk.8:10). And for this reason too, in the passage quoted immediately above, our Lord often separated Himself in this way precisely so as to require genuine desire and some resultant effort on the part of His listeners (i.e., hiking up the mountain after Him) in order for them to hear the truth He was teaching them. The Bible is this way too. It contains all of the truth we need – but it may not yield that truth to us immediately, being pleasant to hear like a parable, yet often difficult to understand at first. To gain the benefit of the truths contained within its blessed covers often requires some effort on our part, to read it even when we do not fully understand it, to persevere in seeking out a worthy ministry to teach us about it, and to have the humility to accept the truth as it is explained to us – and believe it. That is what seeking God is all about.

But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Deuteronomy 4:29 ESV

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Proverbs 8:17 ESV

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.

Isaiah 55:6 ESV

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13

For who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?'

Jeremiah 30:21b NIV

⁶¹ Again, apart from what may be gleaned from natural revelation. The rainbow, after all, is a promise from God for all mankind (Gen.9:13), and a clear indication – for all who have yet to harden their hearts – of the glory of God.

(7) "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."

Matthew 7:7-8 ESV

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Hebrews 11:6 ESV

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

James 4:8 ESV

Truth is the one essential issue for Christians (Jn.8:32). Truth is what we are all about; truth is why we are still here in this world after salvation. Our God is the God of truth (Ps.31:5), and it is in the truth illuminated by the Spirit that we are to worship Him (Jn.4:24). Without believing the truth, we cannot please Him (Heb.11:6), and only by listening to His truth can we grow close to Him and serve Him effectively (Zech.1:3-4; Mal.3:7; Jas.4:8). God's word is truth (Jn.14:6; cf. Jn.1:1; 1:14; 17:17). It is the word of God which Jesus Christ, the living Word of God (Jn.1:1), always made the issue (Jn.18:37b), and it is only by our acceptance of and allegiance to the living Word through the written word that we even become "believers" in the first place (Jas.1:18). Those who accept and respond to the truth of what God has to say are the ones born again, born from above by the Spirit through the "washing of rebirth" (Tit.3:5).

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Matthew 16:24 NKJV

The first principle of truth is Jesus Christ (Jn.14:6). Once we accept Him, the truth of what the Father and the Spirit say about Him (Jn.14:16-17), then we enter into a life of learning about Him, about what He has to say to us, about what He wants from us (1Tim.2:4). Everything that emanates from the Father is truth, the prime example being His Son who is, in fact, "*the* Truth" (Jn.17:17). Our Christian lives involve a great many issues, activities, decisions, tests and trials, but central to everything we do and everything we are as Christians is the truth that comes from God contained in the holy scriptures. To the extent that we appropriate His truth, learn it, believe it, test it, rely on it, live by it and are ready to die for it, we advance, we grow, we honor Him. Apart from what He says, we can do nothing, for apart from the truth of God, we do not even know what to do or how to do it. No action, no thought, no word from our lips can be right, can be true, without the knowledge of, the belief in, and the commitment to God's truth, as Jesus' final prayer on our behalf shows so well:

(14) "I have given them *Your word*, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (15) I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. (16) For they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (17) So make them holy *by means of Your truth – Your word is truth*."

(18) And just as you sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (19) I am consecrating Myself for their sake, so that they too may be made holy *through truth*."
John 17:14-19

Today, we know where to go to find the truth: God's truth is found in the Bible, "the word of God, the word of truth" (Jn.17:17; Heb.4:12). But that truth must still be sought after and prized, treasured in our hearts and lovingly applied in all we think and say and do. And this must come from the heart of each and every one of us. No vision, no sign, no dream, no epiphany, no personal appearance of God Himself, no rapture to the third heaven, nothing, in fact, will serve to turn unbelief into belief, absent the willingness on our part to open ourselves up to the truth contained in the Bible – and to the ministering of that truth through whatever Bible ministry the Lord leads us to. The hard heart of unbelief is more impenetrable than any other material known to Man. But God is just, and faithful, and merciful, and He well knows what manner and means will reach those who truly wish to seek Him. And He never disappoints.

(7) Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: (8) For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.
Matthew 7:7-8 KJV

The Word of God is more necessary than the bread we eat; the Word of God is more important to our survival than the water we drink. For this reason, the communion ceremony is given to us to represent the living Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, His perfect person (He is the Bread of Life: Jn.6:35; 48), and His perfect Work (the blood of Christ).

(53) Then Jesus said to them, (Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. (54) Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (55) For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. (56) He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."
John 6:53-56 NKJV

Wine in communion represents the blood of Christ (the potent symbol of His death for all by bearing our sins⁶²), and as our Lord makes clear, all must drink and eat to be saved, the eating and drinking being symbols of faith, of tangibly trusting in Him, who He is (the perfect Savior, God and man, the Bread of Life), and what He has done for us (in figuratively spilling His blood, dying in the darkness, suffering judgment for every single human sin). But we are saved, "once and for all" (Heb.10:10), and so need only to eat and drink the body and blood of Christ when we first enter into union with Him (communion is a memorial of Him and His work to save us, "in remembrance of Me": Lk.22:19; 1Cor.11:24-25). Thereafter, believers need the milk (1Pet.2:2) and solid meat (1Cor.3:2; Heb.5:12) of the Word of God, which is at once also the water of the

⁶² See especially BB 4A: Christology, section II.4, "The Blood of Christ".

Word, ministered by the Holy Spirit to our hearts, turning what we hear into usable truth therein when we believe it. Therefore "the body and the blood" are ours forever as part of the Body of Christ; what we need daily to survive and thrive as believers is a continuing partaking of the water of the Word, the truth which flows from the eternal spring of holy scriptures alone.

7. The Water of the Word

"Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Exodus 17:6 NKJV (cf. Num.20:8)

While physical thirst compels us to seek water and to drink thereof, hardness of heart keeps many from seeking out the even more necessary water of truth. Literal water is necessary for physical life, but the water of the Word, the water of truth, is necessary for spiritual rebirth and spiritual life after salvation.

(5) Jesus responded, "Truly, truly I tell you, that unless a person is born from water and Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God."

John 3:5 (cf. Jn.3:8 Greek)

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

John 4:10 NKJV

And all of them (i.e., the Exodus generation) drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water symbolizing the truth in which one believes). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ.

1st Corinthians 10:4

Just as the Lord tested the Israelites in respect to food to show them that man "does not live by bread alone", but "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut.8:3 NKJV), so also the "no water test" at "Massah and Meribah" (Ex.17:7; Num.20:2-13) was designed to show the children of Israel that the water of the word of God is every bit as important as the literal water which sustains physical life. And to make the bitter waters of this evil world sweet requires their sweetening by Him who is the Branch, the only One through whom we have the sweet water of the Word of truth unto life eternal and spiritual growth.

(23) When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah [i.e., "bitter"]) (24) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?" (25) Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood (representing the Branch: Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Jer.23:5; 33:15; Zech.3:8; 6:12; cf. Ezek.17:22ff.; Rom.1:3; Rev.5:5). He threw it into the water,

and the water became fit to drink.
Exodus 15:23-25 NIV

For all who truly desire the water of truth, God always provides, and abundantly so – even if it may require some patience on our part before we find the right Bible teaching ministry or before our particular questions are answered.

(1b) The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. (3) He restores my soul (i.e., life, physical and spiritual).
Psalm 23:1b-3a NKJV

(8) They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. (9) For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.
Psalm 36:8-9 NKJV

You will joyously draw water from the fountains of salvation.
Isaiah 12:3

Ho, everyone who thirsts, let him come to the waters!
Isaiah 55:1

Water cleanses, water refreshes, and water restores and sustains physical life – and the water of the Word of God does the same in a spiritual sense (Ps.110:7; Jer.31:25 [Hebrew]; Ezek.36:25; Zech.13:1; Jn.3:5; Acts 22:16; 1Cor.6:11; Eph.5:26; Tit.3:5; Heb.10:22; 1Pet.3:20-21; cf. Lev.8:6; Ps.19:2; 51:2; Is.11:9b). Just as plants require water to grow and thrive, so every believer needs the water of the Word for spiritual growth and health.

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.
1st Corinthians 3:6 NIV (cf. Heb.6:7)

On the other hand, lack of such spiritual sustenance can be disastrous; just as plants wither and die without necessary moisture, so it is that failure to continue receiving and retaining the water of the Word that can lead to the death of faith.

(5) "Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. (6) And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away (lit., "dried out").
Mark 4:5-6 ESV

"Some [seed] fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture."
Luke 8:6 NKJV

For this reason, water in scripture represents blessing (Ps.68:26; 107:35; Is.30:25; 35:6-7; 41:17-20; 44:3-4; Ezek.47:1-12; cf. Ps.110:7) . . .

(5) Happy is everyone whose strength is in You. Their hearts are set on the highways [of pilgrimage to Zion]. (6) As they pass through the [dry] valley of Bachah (i.e., the wilderness of life), they make it a place of springs. Even the early rains enwrap it with [their] blessings. (7) They go from strength to strength, until they appear before God in Zion.

Psalm 84:5-7

. . . while lack thereof represents cursing (Ps.143:6; Is.19:5-7; Is.8:6-8; Jer.2:13; 12:4; 12:11; 14:4; 17:6-13).

O God, You are my God;
Early will I seek You;
My soul thirsts for You;
My flesh longs for You
In a dry and thirsty land
Where there is no water.

Psalm 63:1 NKJV

Let us all therefore resolve to make the sweet water of the Word of God our greatest delight in this world – even as He who is the Word of Life is our greatest delight for all eternity.

(1b) As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. (2) My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Psalm 42:1b-2 NIV

(5) Jesus responded, "Truly, truly I tell you, that unless a person is born from water and Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God."

John 3:5

Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

John 4:13-14 NKJV

(38) "The one who believes in Me as the scripture has said [to do], out of his belly will flow streams of living water" (i.e., the Spirit illuminating this scripture, which is the life-giving "water of truth").

John 7:38

(16) They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], (17) because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd

them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., "fountains of waters of life"), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes".

Revelation 7:16-17

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life."

Revelation 21:6 NIV

And He showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal[s of ice], coming forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Revelation 22:1

And the Spirit and the bride say "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

Revelation 22:17

Conclusion:

And I fell before his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "See that you don't [do that]! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers who hold [fast] the testimony about Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony about Jesus is the essence (lit., "spirit") of [all divine] prophecy".

Revelation 19:10

Overcome by the anticipated marvels of Jesus' return and moved to worship by the assurance that these things "are the true words of God" (v.9), John falls to the ground in praise of the angel – but the angel rebukes him. John is told to "Worship God!" instead, and is further instructed that it is the message of Jesus Christ that is at the heart of all prophecy and prophetic revelation because Jesus Himself is the Word of Truth. Amen!

As we have affirmed from the beginning of this study – and from the beginning of this series – and will continue to affirm as long as the Lord grants life to this ministry, this life we believers are living is ALL about Jesus Christ and His Church, the very Body and Bride of Him who is the truth, the Word of truth incarnate. And that, dear reader, is the fundamental truth of the book of truth, the Bible, the written Word of God.

And *the Word* became flesh and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

"And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 8:32 ESV

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

John 17:17 ESV

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about *the Word* of life, [Jesus Christ].

1st John 1:1

And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and *His Name* has [always] been called, "The *Word* of God".

Revelation 19:13