

The Sacred Book

How We Got Our Bible – Part II
Why We Know It's True

Romans 3:2

Introduction

The Swedish film director, Bergman, stood in a cathedral in Europe one afternoon, staring at an ancient painting of Christ which hung on the wall. He whispered repeatedly, passionately to it the words, "Speak to me. Speak to me!"

His experience that day, I have read, would become the motivation of his movie entitled, *Silence*, which portrayed people who despaired in trying to hear from God.ⁱ

Another film director, by the name of Woody Allen, once lamented, "We have no spiritual center – we are drifting alone in the cosmos."ⁱⁱ

The Jew asked Paul, in Romans, chapter 3, "What advantage is there to being a Jew? If our blood line to Abraham isn't good enough; if our rituals and observances don't find us a place in heaven; if our suffering as a nation doesn't get us in favor with God, then what good is it that we are Jews?"

In Romans, chapter 3, verse 2, Paul answered, "Oh, your advantage is incredible – you were the first people to receive the oracles from God! You were the ones through whom God delivered the sacred Book."

That statement alone, generates a lot of questions from the believer and the unbeliever today. I believe we need to stop, for at least one discussion, and answer some of them.

Four Views of the Bible

There are four basic views of the Bible.

The Bible is the Word of God

1. The first view is that the Bible is the Word of God – this is obviously the fundamental belief of the believer.

The Bible is a collection of fables, folk tales, myths, and legends

2. The second view is that the Bible is a collection of fables, folk tales, myths, and legends. The Bible is simply rejected outright.

Recently, I read about one author, named Ernest Renan, who has evaluated the text of the gospels and written a book entitled, *The Life of Jesus*. He says that all the miracles of the Bible are legends. For example, he writes that:

- Lazarus never completely died. Instead, the family wanted people to believe in Jesus so much that they staged the whole thing and had Lazarus pretend to be dead in order to set up a phony resurrection. Mary and Martha helped plan this, as well.
- Also, Jesus never healed anyone, but only aided sick people, by His gentleness, so that they felt better.

Here is one I especially liked. I found it hard to believe he could write this and keep a straight face at the same time. According to Renan:

- At the Sea of Galilee, Jesus never actually walked on the water. Instead, He was stepping on a very heavy growth of lily pads.

What about the feeding of the five thousand? Renan declares:

- A large quantity of food was stored in a nearby cave, which Jesus knew about. He ordered His disciples to sneak it out and bring it to Him to disperse to the crowd.ⁱⁱⁱ

Frankly, it takes as much, if not more, faith to believe Renan than it does the record of Scripture.

The Bible is a combination of God’s Word and fables, myths, and legends

3. Perhaps a more challenging view of the Bible is the growing, popular view that the Bible is a combination of God’s Word and fables, myths, and legends.

Of course, the problem with that view is, no one has any apparatus for determining objectively which are the words of God and which are the words of man. In fact, once you get into this particular canoe, the raging water of unbelief will sweep you to a tragic end.

For several years, a group of pseudo-Bible scholars, known as the Jesus Seminar, have met to discuss and vote on what Jesus truly said and what is make believe. Their stated purpose is, “to change the way people think about Jesus”. I assure you, it is not to think better of Him. They want to, “free the Bible from the religious right”. They want a Jesus that “speaks to things that concern modern society, like feminism, multiculturalism, and political correctness”.^{iv}

After studying the gospels, they concluded that only about eighteen percent of the words ascribed to Christ were actually spoken by Him. That means, eighty two percent of them, Christ never said. They met and voted recently, on the Lord’s prayer. After much scholarly debate and discussion, they decided that the only words Jesus actually said in that prayer, were the words, “Our Father”. Frankly, though, I was surprised they agreed on the word, “Father”.

Others, out of their unbelief, have rejected the New Testament as authoritative – whatever you want to believe about Christ, you can believe. Some have written that He was a Jewish reactionary, a charismatic rabbi, and even a homosexual magician.

The famous Albert Schweitzer wrote his own biography of Christ. He concluded that Christ went insane and, in His insanity, claimed to be divine.^v

One British author wrote that Christ was simply a good, Jewish lad with a brilliant flair for moral teaching – He would have been shocked to think that people would ever worship Him as God.

One woman, who has taught on the college level, wrote that Jesus was part of the sect living in Palestine, that He married and had three children, and then, He divorced and remarried.

One author believed that Jesus never died on the cross, but lived and traveled with Paul on his missionary travels. And, that it was with Paul in Philippi that Jesus met His second wife.

If that was true, then what in the world was Paul talking about in his letters? They are filled with references to Christ’s death and resurrection!

Several authors, including some I have just referred to, were at least honest enough to admit that,

In order to reach such speculations, we are obliged to read between the lines, fill in certain gaps, deal with omissions and with references that are, at best, oblique.

One author made the jump from John, chapter 11, where Mary poured ointment on Jesus’ feet and then, dried it with her hair, which was the role of a slave, to believing that He actually married her and had six kids. That is reading an awful lot between the lines!

Why not? As soon as you view the Bible as anything less than the Word from God, and not man, you are open to all sorts of fanciful and even blasphemous notions. You have, in fact, placed yourself as the authority over the Bible, which means, you now determine what is true and what is not.

Augustine said, centuries ago, to his own generation,

If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don’t like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself.^{vi}

The Bible is the Word of God, but it is not the last word from God

4. A fourth view that has, unfortunately, found a warm welcome inside the evangelical church, and also leads to doctrinal danger and abuse, is that the Bible is the Word of God, but it is not the last word from God.

Men who believe this usually parade about their church platforms announcing their latest revelation from God, saying, “God told me this . . . and God told me that . . .”

Their congregations are given additional revelation from God – and, tragically, they have opened the door for the Muslim, who says, “I believe that too – and Mohammed, in the seventh century, heard from God too.”

Of course, Muslims believe that Jesus will one day come back to earth as a Muslim, marry, have children, die, and be buried near Mohammed. Other Muslim traditions state the belief that when Christ comes back, He will kill all the Jews, convert the Christians to Islam, and reign as King of all Muslims.^{vii}

And what can the Christian say about that, after being taught, implicitly and explicitly, that God is still speaking to their leaders? If this is not God’s final Word, who can say the Muslim is wrong?

Who is to say they are wrong? Who is to say that Benny Hinn was wrong when he announced, in his crusade in Nairobi the week before I visited the believers there, that God had told him that Jesus would appear with him on stage one night during the crusade? I was asked the question, “Did Benny Hinn get that word from God?”

The churches were actually splitting over that crusade – into those who believed Christ had appeared and those who believed He had not appeared.

I was able to tell them, “No.”

Why? Because the Bible does not end with a comma. It is the last Word from God until Christ appears.

The only thing the true teacher and preacher of God will do is teach what God has already said, not come up with something God supposedly just said. That is why you have never heard, and will never hear me say, “God said to me one night . . .”

There are many today, who hold to the equal authority of apocryphal books, such as the Gospel of Barnabas. This is not actually included in the Roman *Apocrypha*, but is one of the disputed books that circulated in the ancient church.

If you read the Gospel of Barnabas, which may have been written as late as the fourteenth century, you discover the life of Christ rewritten to agree with the tenets of Islam. It denies that Jesus is the son of God; denies the crucifixion.^{viii}

By the way, many Muslims believe the Gospel of Barnabas contains the ultimate truth about Jesus Christ. In other words, they believe that God spoke again in the fourteenth century.

The Mormons believe that God spoke again to Joseph Smith and that Smith’s writings, *The Book of Mormon*, *The Pearl of Great Price*, and *Doctrine and Covenants*, are equal to Scripture.

The Christian Scientists follow Mary Baker Eddy, who believed that she, in her own words, was “the revelator of truth for this age”. She said, “My *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* has God as its author – I was only a scribe.”

The Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that their publication, *The Watchtower*, is “a magazine without equal on earth, because God is the author.”

David Berg, who leads the Children of God, refers to himself as a latter day prophet. He said, in an interview with *Christianity Today*, that his letters, written to his followers, are “God’s word for today.”

This fourth view of the Bible, that it is God’s Word, but it is not the last word from God, also, of course, has, for centuries, been the belief of Roman Catholicism.

I am, obviously, trying to offend nearly everyone today. If you feel as if I have left you out, contact me afterward!

I am not trying to offend you; I am not trying to upset you – I am trying to warn you and protect you. As Paul told all who would lead and teach the people of God, in Acts, chapter 20 – our role is to protect the flock from false teaching that would lead them astray.

My friend, the greatest danger facing you has to do with what God has revealed – and whether you take it seriously and live it, or rebel against it.

The very first temptation recorded in the Bible was when Satan slithered up to Eve and said, in Genesis, chapter 3, verse 1b,

... *has God said* ...?

In other words, “Does God really know what He’s talking about? Is God’s Word the final authority in your life?”

And that temptation is still his favorite one.

What are you going to do with the Bible? Is God’s Word the final authority in your life?

In the Roman church, the Pope claims to speak the very words of God. He speaks the words of God on whatever subject he addresses and he makes no

error. In other words, God is still speaking, and He speaks through him.

These are four views of the Bible:

- The Bible alone is the Word of God.
- The Bible is a collection of fables and legends.
- The Bible is a combination of God's Word and legends.
- The Bible is the Word of God, but not the last word from God.

We believe that the Bible is, in fact, a closed book; that it is the last Word from God until Christ comes again.

How do we know that? Because we believe what the Bible says. If it, indeed, is the Word of God, then it says of itself, "Don't add anything else to me – and don't take anything away."

In the book of Revelation, chapter 22, verses 18 through 21, we read,

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Someone might say, "But that's only talking about adding to the book of Revelation."

Before you follow that reasoning too far, remember that Revelation was placed last because of its obvious content – it contains the revelation from God about the end of the world as we know it. This is the end of human history – as it empties into divine, heavenly eternity. Because of that, it was placed last in the order of sacred books. Therefore, if you add to the book of Revelation, you are adding to the Bible.

In this life, perhaps not, but in the eternal life to come, oh, the horrors, the plagues, the torment upon those who trifled with the Word of God and invented their own systems of belief, so that people would follow them – are they not plagued now?

Where is Nostradamus now? The man who came from a long line of astrologers and occult soothsayers, who claimed to know the future of the

world and future events through the year 8000 A.D. A man admitted to be wrong many times by his most ardent followers. And how often could a true prophet of God be wrong? Never!

One prophecy that was proven false was a death sentence to that supposed prophet.

Was it possible for a false prophet to get it right? Was it possible for a false prophet to predict some near event correctly, evidently given information by the underworld? Yes. But, listen to the Lord's warning in Deuteronomy, chapter 13, beginning with verses 1 and 2.

If a prophet . . . arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,"

In other words, if a supposed prophet comes along and says, "I predict that you're going to break your leg tomorrow, and your favorite cow is going to run away, and lightning is going to hit your barn, and all of that will prove that Jehovah is not the God to follow anymore, but to follow after me and my gods."

And, guess what happens tomorrow – your cow runs away, lightning hits your barn, and you break your leg trying to put the fire out. You might think, "Man, this guy must be for real!"

Continue, in Deuteronomy, to verses 3 and 4.

you shall not listen to the words of that prophet . . . ; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

It is possible for a supposed prophet to predict something that actually comes true. But, if it does, it becomes a test to the believer – will they continue to follow the revealed Word of God, or follow the prophet who, ultimately, leads them away from God?

It is possible for miraculous things to happen, even in the name of God, while the messenger, claiming to be a man of God who is speaking in the name of God through Jesus Christ, is, in fact, a false prophet.

You may remember, in Matthew, chapter 7, verses 22 through 23, that the Lord said,

Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”

What if an angel did visit Mohammed and deliver to him, in Arabic, the *Quran* (or *Koran*) and call it, further words from God? It denies the virgin birth of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ, and that Christ is God in the flesh.

What if an angel did visit Joseph Smith, centuries later, and deliver to him new words from God, in Egyptian hieroglyphics, which became the *Book of Mormon*? It denies that Christ is God in the flesh, the only true and living God who, as God, was uncreated and eternal.

Listen to Paul, in Galatians, chapter 1, verses 6 through 9.

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

And what of the prophets of Scripture? How do we know they told the truth?

One author that I read, told a story that came right out of the CIA files to illustrate proof of identity.

A Soviet double agent was stranded in Mexico. The secretary of the Russian ambassador in Mexico would meet him and hand a passport to him. He received his instructions as to how to identify himself to the secretary. Five prearranged signs were given, to the ambassador and to the spy, so there would be no possibility of misidentification. The signs were:

- When in Mexico City, the spy was to write a letter to the secretary confirming his presence and to sign his name on the letter as, “I. Jackson”.

- After exactly three days beyond the postmark, he was to go to the Plaza de Colon in Mexico City.
- He was to stand before the statue of Columbus.
- He was to have a guidebook open, with one of his fingers pointing to a paragraph in the guidebook.
- When approached, he was to say, “Isn’t it a magnificent statue?” and then, he was to say that he had traveled to Mexico from Oklahoma.

Following the fulfillment of those five signs, the Russian ambassador would be convinced that this was truly a Russian agent.

Just five signs. Frankly, if all those came true, at the right time and in the prescribed manner, the odds were incredibly high that he was, in fact, the double agent.^{ix}

There are literally hundreds of prophecies in the scriptures. In fact, a huge percentage of the Bible is prophecy.

Prophecy About Jesus in the Bible

What did they prophesy about the Messiah, and did it come true in Jesus Christ? Let me give you five signs.

The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem

1. The prophet Micah, in chapter 5, verse 2, said,

But as for you, Bethlehem . . . from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. . . .

In other words, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

This was fulfilled, according to Luke, chapter 2. However, someone might say, “Yes, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but He didn’t go on to rule in Israel.”

That is right – you need to keep reading the Prophets.

The Messiah would be oppressed and afflicted, yet would not speak

2. A second sign is the prophet Isaiah, saying, in chapter 53, verse 7,

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His

mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers . . .

This was fulfilled, according to Matthew, chapter 27, verses 13 through 14.

Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so that the governor was quite amazed.

The Messiah’s hands and feet would be pierced and, after lots were cast, His clothes would be divided

3. A third sign comes from the pen of King David. He wrote, in Psalm, chapter 22, verses 16 and 18,

. . . a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet . . . they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

Can you believe that? Centuries later, those very things happened at Christ’s crucifixion.

The Messiah would speak specific words on the cross

4. A fourth sign would be the words of Christ on the cross. David began Psalm, chapter 22, by writing the words of the future Messiah,

My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? . . .

This was also fulfilled, according to Matthew, chapter 27, verse 46, as Christ uttered those very words in agony as fully man, abandoned by the Father and the Spirit.

The Messiah would be with a rich man in His death

5. The fifth sign that Christ was in fact the Messiah, comes from the prophecy of Isaiah, who wrote with incredible precision of the Messiah, in chapter 53, verse 9,

His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death . . .

“His grave was assigned with wicked men . . .”, in other words, Christ, like any other criminal, would

have been taken from the cross and thrown into a garbage heap or open grave with others who had died as criminals. Yet, Isaiah said that He would be with a rich man in His death, adding in verse 9,

. . . because He had done no violence [crime] . . .

This was fulfilled in Matthew, chapter 27, as well, in verses 57 through 60,

And when it was evening, there came a rich man . . . named Joseph . . . This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given over to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock . . .

Christ was with a rich man in His death.

It is simply not possible for several men to have seen so far into the future, writing at different times, yet having their words come to fruition with exact precision.

Someone might say, “But, I want another sign that the Bible is telling the truth about Christ and redemption. Give me something else besides the scriptures and I will believe. I want more proof!”

To you, I refer to that time when Jesus was preaching to a crowd of people and He told the story of Lazarus and the rich man.

The rich man was an unbeliever who died and went to Hades, which is the place of torment while one is awaiting final judgment and placement in hell, according to Revelation, chapter 20. The rich man begs that Lazarus be allowed to come back from the dead to tell his father and brothers about eternity and their need to follow after God.

Luke records, in chapter 16, verses 27 through 31, this amazing afterlife event. The rich man is begging Abraham, with whom he is being allowed to converse.

And he said, “Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father’s house – for I have five brothers – that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.” But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” But he said, “No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!” But he said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will

they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.”

Did you catch that? If a person does not believe the Prophets, they will not believe a man who comes back from the dead!

My friend, what is your view of the Prophets? What is your view of the Bible?

- Is it a Book of wonderful stories, fanciful legends, and moral teachings?
- Is it a combination of God’s Word and things men made up to feel better about themselves and life in general?
- Is it God’s Word, but you want more – you want some additional word and then, you will believe?
- Or, is it the Word of God – completed, finished, sufficient to equip you for life and eternity?

Have you found the Redeemer calling from its pages? Have you found light for your path in its guidance? Have you found conviction of sin from the wounding of its words? Have you known the forgiveness of God from its bloodstained pages?

Have you felt the pleasure of God as you have wandered through its truth?

To love this Book, my friend, is to love its Author. And to obey and love its Author, is to love and obey this sacred Book.

Listen to what John Wesley wrote, in the eighteenth century, about the Bible,

I am a creature of only a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God, just hovering over the great gulf ‘till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing – the way to heaven. How to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach me the way. For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one Book. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone. Only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book [and I find] the way to heaven.^x

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/13/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Erwin Lutzer, Seven Reasons You Can Trust The Bible (Chicago, Moody Press, 1998), p. 15.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 18.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, Jr., “How To Get The Most From God’s Word,” online

^{iv} Lutzer, p. 114.

^v Ibid., p. 115.

^{vi} Ibid., p. 117.

^{vii} Patrick Sookhdeo, A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Islam (Berkshire, Great Britain, Christian Focus Publications and Isaac Publishing, 2001), p. 22.

^{viii} Ibid., p. 71.

^{ix} Lutzer, p. 102.

^x James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume One (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1991), p. 279.