

*by Bruce F. Levi, ICARE Ministries*

Having a correct attitude toward and understanding of the Scriptures, the Bible, is of utmost importance. For the Bible is the bestselling book of all time, and, as such, continues to have a profound effect on the world's philosophies, governments, people, and institutions. Therefore, even if one does not believe the Bible's teachings, but wants to have a thorough understanding of world history, one must have some understanding of the Bible.

In addition, the Scriptures make clear statements about the origin of the earth and even the universe. The Bible makes definitive statements that the ultimate reality is God, the Creator, and Sovereign Ruler of the universe. It teaches about the nature of humankind, the purpose of life, the meaning of history, future events, the very nature and source of Truth, and its own inspiration and preservation. Such clear-cut, often controversial, teachings demand our attention, examination, and response.

The Bible presents to us a worldview, which is a system or collection of suppositions, beliefs, convictions, and ideas with which people try to understand and make sense out of the world and their lives. One author offers the following as a working definition of the Christian worldview. "The Christian worldview sees and understands God the Creator and His creation- man and the world- primarily through the eyes of God's special revelation, the Holy Scriptures, and secondarily through God's natural revelation in creation as interpreted by human reason and reconciled by and with Scripture, for the purpose of believing and behaving in accord with God's will and, thereby, glorifying God with one's own mind and life, both now and in eternity." [1]

Indeed, one cannot separate the Bible from Christianity, or Christianity from the Bible. However, more relevant to our topic, The Doctrine of the Scriptures, is that the various denominations, ministries, and teachers of Christianity claim the Bible as their source and/or guide for doctrines and practices. [2] And not only Christianity, for Judaism has its basis in the Old Testament. Even Islam has a relationship to the Bible. Thus, over two billion people look to the Bible, in varying degrees, as a book of importance. Moreover, even organizations that offer significant modifications to, and claim to be replacements for, the historic Christianity of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, use the Bible, at least in part, as a source of their doctrines. [3]

The Bible itself claims almost 3,000 times to be the very words of God. Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, affirmed during his lifetime the then-existing Scriptures as the words of God. The early followers of Jesus, the Apostles, considered the Old Testament and their own writings, later preserved in the New Testament, as Scripture.

Even from a negative aspect, "The root from which all heresy springs is a faulty view of the inspiration and the inerrancy of the Word of God." [4] How can one discern whether the claims of any person or group are biblical without a good understanding of the Scriptures?

Based on the above, and what is written below, learning about the Scriptures is the natural and logical starting place regarding the various Doctrines of the Christian Faith. [5] The following "Doctrine of the Scriptures" is an overview of ICARE's position on the Scriptures. This position is one that can be correctly described as orthodox, historical, protestant, evangelical, reformed, conservative, fundamental, and biblical in its scope.

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## A Unique Book

The Bible is a unique book in all the history of the world. Its 66 books were written during a period of over 1,500 years, by over 40 authors, who came from a great variety of backgrounds: king, peasant, philosopher, fisherman, poet, statesman, a doctor, scholar, general, public official, etc. The writers wrote in the wilderness, a palace, a prison, a dungeon, a prison isle, etc. They wrote in times of war and in times of peace. They wrote out of the heights of joy and the depths of sorrow and despair. They wrote in Africa, Asia, and Europe. They wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Despite the diversity just described, and that the Bible contains controversial topics, the authors wrote in harmony and continuity from beginning to end.[6] It is no wonder that “The Bible has been read by more people and published in more languages than any other book.” In fact, the first book printed was the Bible, on Gutenberg’s famous printing press.[7] The Bible has been translated and retranslated and paraphrased more than any other book in existence.[8]

The Scriptures are also unique in what they teach. For example, rather than minimize the evils that humankind commits, or flatter humankind, as the vast majority of worldviews do, the Scriptures describe the nature of humankind as “condemnable as debased in character and sinful in conduct.”[9] The books of the world do not go anywhere near this far with blanket statements of the culpability of humankind. Romans 3:10-12 says: “...There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Related to humankind’s culpability, is the Bible’s doctrine of the eternal punishment of sin. If the Bible “...were a mere human composition, it certainly would not have taught the eternal and conscious torment of all who die out of Christ.”[10]

The Bible offers a unique and singular remedy for this sin problem of humankind. It is a solution that is both initiated and completed by God. It describes how God Himself came to earth as a man, died a horrible death in the place of sinful people, and grants salvation to those sinful people out of His love (John 3:16). Such a concept goes against the “grain of human nature...man’s pride... Man would never invent a standard of righteousness which he could never hope to attain”[11] and then have his God, the creator, be humbled by death in an act of salvation. The uniqueness of the Scriptures demands our attention and response.

## The Inspiration of the Scriptures

The Apostle Paul wrote, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God...” (2 Timothy 3:16). Paul used the Greek word *theopneust*, which means “God-breathed.” It is translated in the King James Version as “given by inspiration of God.” This simply means that God Himself is the actual source of the words of Scripture. God originated the Bible.

However, this does not mean that the human writers of the Bible, such as Moses, Isaiah, Matthew, Paul, etc. were given the words via dictation, in some robotic fashion. The Bible itself does not describe its own inspiration in such mechanical terms. “It is clear from a study of the Bible itself that the authors’ individual styles remain intact. The inspiration of the Bible refers then to the divine superintendence of the Scriptures, preserving it from the intrusion of human error. It refers to God’s

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preserving his Word through the words of human authors.”[12] The Sovereign God moves, guides, and directs all people and all history to His own ends, purposes, and glory (Psalm 24:1; 47:2-8; 75:7-8; 127:1; Ephesians 4:6; Revelation 4:11) and that includes the production and preservation of His written Word.

The Bible itself claims to be the very words and teachings (doctrines) of God. Almost 3,000 times, the writers of the Old Testament stated that their words came directly from God with their frequent use of phrases such as, and similar to, “Thus saith the Lord” (Exodus 4:22; 5:1; 8:1; 9:1).[13] The Bible even quotes God Himself in passages such as “...that ye may know that I am the Lord” (Exodus 10:2).

The opening pages of the Bible describe the very high standard of accuracy, and the devastating consequences of failing to adhere to them, which God pronounced on His words. After God created the earth and the first man, Adam, He gave a simple command that had a clear punishment for violating it (Genesis 2:15-17). Satan, who had become the archenemy of God by his own prideful rebellion (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:13-17; Revelation 12:4), came to God’s created earth, twisted, and misrepresented God’s words, which deceived the first woman, Eve, into violating the simple commandment. Adam then also violated this simple commandment (Genesis 3:1-13). This action brought sin, or the breaking of God’s laws (1 John 3:4), physical death (Romans 5:12), and spiritual death, which is separation from God (Isaiah 59:2). Thus, we see that to doubt it, or to claim that God’s revealed word is deficient, is an alignment with God’s archenemy.

## The Inerrancy and Infallibility of the Scriptures

Inerrancy refers to the idea that the Bible is actuality, right now, in the present, does not err. This implies a level of precision for the words of Scripture that is perfection. One author stated regarding the inerrancy of Scripture, “...God so superintended the writing of Scripture that what he intended to be written was written the way He wanted it to be written, through prepared human instruments with all their inadequacies and failings. This is the sense in which the Bible must be considered inerrant or infallible. There is no logical inconsistency in ascribing “inerrancy” to a written product so communicated to men.”[14]

Infallibility of the Bible “... refers to its indefectibility or the impossibility of its being in error. That which is infallible is incapable of failing. When we say the Bible is infallible in its origin, we are merely ascribing its origin to a God who is infallible.” We are saying here that the Bible cannot err. Because the Bible claims to be inspired by God, if the Bible did contain error [which it does not], then God inspired error, is evil, or is not omniscient.[15] But, the Bible itself teaches that God is none of these. God is both inerrant and infallible, and therefore produced, through imperfect and fallible men, His infallible Scriptures.

## Jesus Christ’s Teaching on the Scriptures

Anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ, a Christian, by definition, believes what Jesus taught, as best as he understands it. Especially, a topic He was very clear about, namely, that the

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Bible was inspired by God and will be preserved. “And he [Jesus Christ] said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). His use of “the law of Moses,” “the prophets,” and “the psalms” was a reference to the three main divisions of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, Jesus affirmed the accuracy of the Old Testament. In Matthew 22:31 Jesus held the Pharisees accountable for all the writings of the Old Testament, and thus affirmed its inspiration and preservation, when he asked them, “...have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God...?” Thus, Jesus affirmed the reliability of the entire Old Testament.[16]

One writer said this about Jesus’ view of the Bible. “Whenever our Lord referred to the Scriptures, He invariably did so in terms calculated to inspire the utmost confidence in every word. And the whole record of His life fails to furnish one single exception to this rule.”[17]

Jesus taught that the Scriptures would be preserved: “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth shall pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). Because “jots” and a “tittles” were the smallest parts of Hebrew letters, Jesus was saying that not even the very smallest part of scripture would be lost, let alone any major or significant parts or teachings. In addition, because the Bible contains predictions of events that are yet to be fulfilled, it is necessarily still being preserved today.

Moreover, if Jesus was wrong about the Bible being inspired and preserved, as some people claim is the case, then He is not trustworthy and reliable as the founder of Christianity. In other words, if the Bible has not been preserved, then Jesus lied, or at the least was mistaken. He, then, is not really who He said He was, and His followers are mere dupes of a liar. Why would anyone, who believes Jesus was wrong about the Bible want to use an unreliable Bible and follow a leader who was so mistaken? Such is the logical dilemma of those who deny the Bible’s inspiration and preservation.

However, Jesus taught that the words He had spoken will judge us at the coming “day of judgment”. “...the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). If His words will judge us, then they must necessarily be preserved until the “last day” so that we can read or hear them and be held accountable at the judgment.

## The Apostles’ Claim

As Jesus Himself had done, Jesus’ closest followers affirmed the reliability and truthfulness of the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul said, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God...” (2 Timothy 3:16). He also stated plainly that what he taught was the “word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13), thus placing those teachings on par with the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul described how, after his Damascus road conversion, he was not instructed by men for three years, but by the Lord Himself (Galatians 1:15-18).

The Apostle Peter said of the Bible writers: “...holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21) and that the “word of God abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23). Peter also affirmed the inspiration of the New Testament when he named Paul’s writings “scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15-16) and that the Apostles’ writings were just as much Scripture as was the Old Testament (1

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Peter 1:10-12). Peter wrote regarding the teachings he had received from God and were put into Scripture: "...his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness..." (2 Peter 1:3). Thus, to claim to be a Christian as were the Apostles, is to affirm the inspiration and preservation of the entire Bible. Conversely, to disavow the inspiration and preservation of the Bible, is to deviate from the teaching of both the Apostles and Jesus.

## The Church Fathers

The "Church Fathers," men who lived in the few centuries after the deaths of the Apostles affirmed the Scriptures as inspired and reliable. The list of such men includes Clement, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianus, Basil the Great, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Jerome, and Augustine.[18]

The Fathers lived during the time that the Bible came to completion. They had a "high view" of the Scriptures. It has been said that the entire New Testament could be reproduced from the many quotations of it that are recorded in the writings of the Fathers. Speaking, as it were, for the Fathers as a whole, Augustine said, "...I have learned to yield this respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error." [19]

## The Canon of Scripture

The word canon is from the Greek *kanon*. It means "reed." Reeds were used for measuring rods and the word came to mean "standard." Thus, the canon of the Bible is the list of standard books, or books of the Bible that are recognized as the authoritative, inspired words of God.[20]

The canon of the Old Testament was determined by the nation of Israel many years before the birth of Christ. In addition, Jesus Christ affirmed the entire Old Testament canon. Consider Jesus' statement in Luke 11:51 where He held his Jewish audience accountable for the "blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah." Abel was the first martyr in the Bible (Genesis 4:8) and Zechariah was the last (2 Chronicles 24:21) in the last book (Chronicles) of the Hebrew canon. Thus, Jesus affirmed the entire Old Testament as we know it today, as canonical, as trustworthy.

The canon of the New Testament was a product of the consensus of the body of believers at large, "the church," not of a council or edict, in the first few centuries after the ascension of Jesus back to heaven. The Church (the true believers) "...regarded them [the various books that later came together as the 27 books of the New Testament] as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority..." [21] It was on the wide consensus of the early believers that the canon was ultimately decided. For the various books of scripture had become widespread throughout the Greco-Roman world and were then recognized by the believers as truth.

Because the New Testament writings had been spread so wide throughout the then-known world, no one group could, or did, gain control over the canon of scripture. Because "...the church was 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets' (Ephesians 2:20) whom Christ had promised to guide into 'all the truth' (John 16:13) by the Holy Spirit...it is apostolic authority, or

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apostolic approval, that was the primary test for canonicity..." [22] The Apostle Paul himself established this practice of spreading the collection of apostolic books (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27) throughout the early church. The early believers, being close to the Apostles and Church Fathers, recognized the inspired books and used them as authoritative documents.

Finally, in 393 at Hippo Regius, and in 397 at Carthage, Church councils recognized the books that the Church (the believers) had already canonized by their universal approval and usage of those books.[23] The canon has not been seriously challenged since.

How do we know that the canon of Scripture is now closed? First, we see in Jude 3 that the body of Christian teachings ("the faith") was delivered only once and for all time.[24] The only books of the Bible not written at the time of Jude were those of John. And he warned in Revelation 22:18-19 against adding to the Scriptures.

Secondly, since God is sovereign over His creation, in order to fulfill His prophecies of preserving the words that He wanted to preserve, He must have preserved them. If God did not preserve His Word, then He failed, and is not trustworthy and the entire Christian faith is a sham.

Thirdly, the early Christians, even amidst their persecution took great care in the selection of the canon. They did not do this hastily. The questionable books were never added to the canon. The decisions regarding the canon by those close to Christianity's founding Apostles and the Fathers was decisive and firm.

Fourthly, since the canon was comprised of the writings that were approved by the apostles, when those apostles died, there were no more authoritative spokesmen available to write any new and authoritative books.[25] This, also, was God's plan. For the Christian faith and church were "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 2:20), that is, their God-inspired writings. And, because Jesus pronounced the church to be permanent (Matthew 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:11; 11:26; Matt. 28:20; 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 3:21), we know that its foundation (the writings of the apostles and prophets) must also be permanent.

John give us a sense of this in John 20:31-31, when he states that there were many things that Jesus did, which were not written in the Gospel of John, but that "these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have eternal through his name." God could have caused volumes to have been written about Jesus Christ. However, He did not. He instead caused just enough and just what was needed to be written. Luke describes this same thing in Luke 16:27-31.

The canon of Scripture is closed and the Scriptures are the only authoritative source for Christian doctrine and practice. Therefore, visions, revelations, feelings, humanistic reasoning, the pronouncements of religious leaders, other books, etc. are not equal in authority to the Bible. All such phenomena are subject to the scrutiny, interpretation, and authority of the Bible and can never be elevated to equal status with the words of Scripture.

## The Reformers

The great leaders of the Reformation, in 1500s and 1600s, clearly understood the importance of

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relying on an unchanging standard of truth, the Bible. At his famous trial, Martin Luther offered to recant only on the condition that he be proven wrong from the scriptures and sound reasoning regarding them. In just a few volumes, we "...find more than a thousand statements of Luther which unequivocally assert a verbal inspiration and identify Scripture as the Word of God." Luther affirmed Augustine's view of inerrancy.[26] Luther's entire life showed his conviction that the Bible was inspired and preserved.[27]

Likewise, the Reformer John Calvin, affirmed Scripture. "To Calvin the theologian an error in Scripture is unthinkable." [28] Packer says of Calvin, "...it is clear that, so far from admitting that biblical authors fell into error, Calvin's concern in his treatment of all these passages is to show that they did no such thing..." [29]

In the face of condemnation, excommunication, and the very real threat of torture and death, the Reformers held firm to the Bible as the only source of truth about God. They coined the term *solus scriptura*, Latin for the idea that the Bible alone is divinely authoritative. This doctrine was in direct opposition to the Roman Catholic teaching that the Roman Church's pronouncements, customs, and practices were of equal authority with the Bible.

"The Reformers were convinced that, because the Bible has its origin in God and was superintended by his inspiration, it is infallible. Infallibility refers to its indefectibility or the impossibility of its being in error. That which is infallible is incapable of failing." [30]

The Westminster Confession of Faith, a statement of Christian doctrine published during the Reformation in England, in 1646, affirms the Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and practice.[31] This is also true of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.[32]

## British and American Baptists' View of the Scriptures

British Baptist Pastor and Bible Teacher of the mid-1800's, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, oft-named "The Prince of Preachers," was a leader in defending the inspiration and preservation of the Bible. His sermons and writings are still in wide use today. He said in 1855, "O Bible! It cannot be said of any other book, that it is perfect and pure... without a particle of folly... This is the book untainted by any error, but is pure, unalloyed, perfect truth. Why? Because God wrote it." [33]

The two modern-day Baptist denominations that came out of the Northern Baptist Convention (now the American Baptist Convention) after it had adopted Bible-doubting Modernist philosophies, also affirm the inerrancy of the Scriptures. These are the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, founded in 1932, and the Conservative Baptist Association of America, founded in 1947.[34] Reformed Baptists also hold to the inerrancy of the Scriptures.[35]

Other modern-day Protestant denominations also affirm the inerrancy of the Bible. The reader is urged to research the statements of faith of these groups and especially his own denomination, to determine whether he is associated with a Bible-believing group.

## The Preservation of the Scriptures

Even if one agrees that the Bible was infallibly and inerrantly inspired in their original writings, the question can legitimately be asked: Do we have the words of God today? Can we trust the Bible

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today? Have the original words, thoughts, doctrines been preserved throughout history, so that we can trust them and rely on them today?

The answer to this question is, of course, yes. Numerous passages teach that the Scriptures have been, and will, be preserved by God's providence. For example, Psalm 119:160: "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever." Jesus Himself, the very founder of Christianity, taught that the Scriptures would be preserved. As discussed above, He said, "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth shall pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18). If one is truly a follower of Jesus Christ, and thereby relies upon what Jesus said – is a Christian, in other words - will affirm this doctrine of preservation of the Scriptures.

Because a "jot" and a "tittle" were the smallest parts of Hebrew letters, Jesus was saying that not even the very smallest part of scripture would be lost, let alone any major or significant parts or teachings. And because the Bible contains predictions of events that are yet to be "fulfilled," it is still being preserved today. In addition, Jesus taught that the scriptures will judge us in the future time of judgment (John 12:48). Therefore, He will preserve the Scriptures in order that we can properly learn what He wants of us, and so that He can judge us in proper accountability. Therefore, based on the very words of Jesus, God the Son, Himself, we can trust that the Scriptures have been preserved.

In addition, the facts of scientific research in various disciplines are in agreement with this teaching. One expert said, "Though we do not possess the autographs [the original Old and New Testament documents], we can reconstruct them with remarkable accuracy. The science of textual criticism demonstrates the existing text is remarkably pure and exceedingly reliable." [36] This same author provides an analogy. If the National Bureau of Standards were to lose the normative yardstick in a fire, would we not be able to accurately determine the distance of a yard? But of course we could. With the many copies of the normative, original yardstick, "...we could reconstruct with almost perfect accuracy the original yardstick."

Like the above analogy, in which perhaps thousands of excellent non-original, but well copied, yardsticks could be located, there exist today literally thousands of copies of the Bible's original text. By comparing them and studying them, one can see that they attest to the accuracy of Bibles we have today. Indeed the very text of the Bible, both Old and New Testament, can be reproduced to within an insignificantly small percentage of the original, so that Sir Frederic Kenyon could plainly state, "...any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established." [37] This is a very strong, conclusive statement.

Although there are some variations in the many manuscripts of the Bible "...careful study...reveals that none of them affects a single doctrine of Scripture." [38] Another scholar affirmed that not one of the variations altered "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching." [39] Many Bible scholars have reached this same conclusion of the reliability of the text of the Bible. [40] Dr. Henry Morris stated, "Not more than a dozen verses in the New Testament could have their meaning af-



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affected by any of [the variant readings among the various manuscripts] and no doctrine would be affected by them.”[41] Thus, we can be sure that the words and teachings that God gave to the human scribes of the Bible have been preserved and are available to us.

## Manuscript Evidence

There are over 24,000 copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. There are over 5,000 manuscripts in Greek, the language in which the original New Testament books were written. No other ancient document has anywhere near the volume of such evidence. In fact, manuscript evidence for any other ancient work is a mere fraction of that for the Bible. In addition, the interval of time between its original writing and the manuscripts is shorter by far for the New Testament than for any other ancient document. Homer’s *Illiad*, for example, has only 643 manuscripts and the first complete text of it dates from the 13th century, some 2,000 years after its original writing.[42]

“The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no-one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.”[43]

The evidence of the New Testament is so voluminous and so close in time proximity to its composition, especially in comparison with all other ancient writings, that one writer stated, “to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.”[44]

Sir Frederic G. Kenyon (1863-1952), Director of the British Museum, stated about the manuscript evidence for the New Testament: “...the general result of all these discoveries [the many manuscripts of the Bible] and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures...” [45]

What about the Old Testament? There is not the volume of manuscript evidence for the Old Testament that exists for the New Testament. But, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, and their subsequent examination and translation, only the hardened, prejudiced skeptic or one with a prejudiced mindset can now deny the reliability of the Old Testament text. The Scrolls provided samples of all the Old Testament books, except one, dating from the third century B.C. to the second century A.D.[46] Some 40,000 fragments were discovered, from which over 500 individual books have been reconstructed.[47]

Previous to the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery, the oldest Hebrew text of the Old Testament was the Massoretic Text that dated from 916 A.D. It is the underlying text of the King James Version’s Old Testament. When the biblical texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some 1,100 years older than the Massoretic Text, were compared to the Massoretic Text, the two were found to be nearly identical. This leaves no reasonable doubt about the reliability of the Old Testament.[48]

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## Textual Scholarship and Greek Texts

Although thousands of hand-copied manuscripts and Bibles had been in existence over the centuries since the original New Testament books were written, the first printed Greek text of the New Testament was produced in 1516 by the famous European scholar Desiderius Erasmus. The version of the Bible in most widespread use at that time was Jerome's Latin translation of about 400 A.D., the "Vulgate," the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. Preceding it were Coptic, Syriac, Gothic, Old Latin, and Armenian translations.

After he discovered some problems with the Latin Vulgate translation, Erasmus published a complete Greek New Testament in 1516 that he had translated directly from Greek manuscripts. Erasmus had five or six Greek manuscripts (copies of copies of the original Greek New Testament) available, none of which contained the complete Book of Revelation. Erasmus' printed Greek text was used later by Luther for his German translation of 1522 and by Tyndale for his English translation of 1525. The Bible that the Pilgrims brought to America in 1620, the Geneva Bible of 1550, was greatly influenced by Erasmus' text. The 1611 King James Version is based on Erasmus' text.[49]

In 1633, the publishers named their revised edition of Erasmus' Greek text the "Received Text," sometimes rendered in Latin, *Textus Receptus*. A minority of today's Bible scholars advocate the Received Text, known also as the Majority Text, as the best and most accurate Greek New Testament text. Often, it seems that they hold to this Greek text, and the King James Version translation that derives from it, "...more for theological reasons than for textual ones.[50] Some King James Version Only advocates go so far as to teach that the King James Version was specially inspired by God, so that the original text was restored, however oddly, in English.[51]

The majority of textual scholars do not recognize the Received Text/Majority Text as being a restoration of, or even the closest to, the original Greek New Testament. Two reasons are [1] that the Church Fathers, as described above, "did not quote a text anything like the [Received Text], and [2] because most of the early manuscripts are vastly different from the [Received Text] in significant ways (which suggests that the originals were different from the [Received Text] as well)."[52] The scholar's language here must not be taken to mean that there are doctrinal differences between the so-called Received Text/Majority Text and the modern Greek New Testament texts. This language of comparison refers to language and style features of the two classes of texts.

After the publication of the King James Version in 1611, many significant discoveries were made of ancient Greek manuscripts of the Bible. These newly discovered manuscripts were hundreds of years older than those which Erasmus used for his Greek text, and upon which the King James Version and the earlier English translations are based. These discoveries included manuscripts that date from the second and third centuries A.D., and in them we see again God's promise of preservation fulfilled.[53] The serious student of the Bible is wise to understand the significance of these discoveries. He/she should also have some familiarity with the issues, and the conclusions, of textual scholarship, rather than merely rely on his/her traditions in this important issue.

I, the author of this article, read the King James Version and Martin Luther's German translation, which are based on the Received Text. They are good translations of the Hebrew and Greek texts

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that used well the limited number of manuscripts and the limited knowledge of languages those translators had in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I also read the New King James Version, which updates the King James Version to modern English. I read the New American Standard Bible, Amplified Bible, New International Version, etc., which are based on a modern Greek Text.

Using the many ancient manuscripts and principles of textual scholarship, Bible scholars have produced a Greek New Testament text that represents the majority consensus of the experts on the subject. They have studied and compared the various manuscripts, the result being the Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Greek New Testament.), now in its 27th edition. This Greek text is also published as the Greek New Testament, by the United Bible Society.[54] Most modern translations of the Bible, including the New International Version and the New American Standard Bible are based on this Greek text. The New King James Version makes use of this scholarship in marginal notes.

This way of arriving at the original text of the Bible is similar to how the early Church arrived at the canon of Scripture. As discussed above, over a period of about 200 years, God led the early Christians, His people that He had redeemed, to recognize which books He wanted in the Scriptures. This widespread, universal, approach prevented any one group from corrupting the Bible, because other copies in circulation served as standards of comparison. Likewise, God then led His people to preserve, collect and study the many manuscripts, scrolls, books, translations, etc. over a wide time period and several continents so that no one group could gain absolute control over the text of the Bible and then destroy all other non-complying manuscripts and change doctrines in a process of false "harmonization." Those who know the history and treachery of the Roman Catholic Church can appreciate this. Thus, in all of this, one can see the wisdom of God as He works through human agents to preserve His Scriptures.[55]

## Prophecy and the Scriptures

The Bible is not only objectively verifiable in its phenomenon of fulfilled prophecy, but it is unique among all religious books in this respect. While some people have occasionally made accurate predictions of future events, the Bible has made literally hundreds of predictions that have come true hundreds of years after the prediction was made.[56] This is not surprising, and is, in fact, consistent with God's own teaching on this subject: "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isaiah 46:9,10).

Over 300 prophecies came true regarding just the first coming of Jesus Christ. The odds of this happening by chance are beyond comprehension. Let's consider just three of them. The prophet Jacob, in Genesis 49:10 predicted that Jesus would come through the lineage of his son, Judah. The prophet Micah, in Micah 5:2, predicted Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus some 700 years in advance. Daniel predicted, in Daniel 9:24-26, the timing of Jesus' birth.

Regarding only the above three fulfilled prophecies of Jesus Christ, there is a "combined probability of chance fulfillment, therefore, equal to one out of 12 X 200 X 25... one chance out of 60,000.[57] Although someone might think that 60,000 to 1 odds are merely coincidental regarding these three

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fulfilled prophecies, it is completely irrational to think that mere chance was the cause for over 300 prophecies being fulfilled at the first coming of Jesus Christ. For the odds regarding those 300 prophecies is astronomical in magnitude. This would be similar to a variety of European writers, beginning in say, 1,200 A.D., accurately predicting 300 specific events and even personal characteristics of an American President in 2004.

## Science and the Scriptures

In addition to the science that studies the thousands of manuscripts of the Bible that affirm the Bible has been preserved, other areas of scientific study also affirm the reliability of the Bible. Jewish historian of the first century A.D., Josephus, said this of the Hebrew Bible: "...during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as to either add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any change in them..." [58]

John Warwick Montgomery stated, "What, then, does a historian know about Jesus Christ? He knows, first and foremost, that the New Testament documents can be relied upon to give an accurate portrait of Him. And he knows that this portrait cannot be rationalized away by wishful thinking, philosophical presuppositionalism, or literary maneuvering." [59]

Concerning history and the Bible, Dr. Morris states, "...it becomes obvious that the writers of the Bible narratives not only were contemporaries of the people and events so named, but that they were extremely careful in what they wrote, and, furthermore, all those who later copied and transmitted their writings were extremely careful. Nothing at all exists in ancient literature which has been remotely as well confirmed in accuracy as has the Bible. Even those names which once were doubted by the critics (e.g., Belshazzar, Darius, etc.) have now long since been confirmed." [60]

"Archaeological discoveries prove that the peoples, places and events mentioned in Scriptures are found just where the Scripture locates them, in the exact locality and under exact geographical circumstances described in the Bible. All scriptural statements concerning the races with which they deal are shown to be in harmony with the ethnological facts... The scriptural record of the names and titles of the kings are in complete harmony with the secular records..." [61] Jewish archaeologist, Nelson Glueck, wrote, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference." [62]

Dr. Henry Morris, scientist, wrote this strong conclusion regarding archaeology and the Bible, "... there exists today not one unquestionable find of archaeology that proves the Bible to be in error at any point." [63]

Dr. Morris makes clear another significant truth about the Bible and two foundational laws of science: the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics. [64] The First Law of Thermodynamics is also known as the Law of Conservation of Mass and Energy. This, the most certain of scientific principles states that matter is not now being created in the universe. This scientific principle was stated in the opening chapters of the Bible, Genesis 2:2, "God ended His Work which He had made." It is stated in various places in Scripture, such as Ecclesiastes 1:9-10: "The thing that hath been, it is the thing that shall be: and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun."

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God had created the various kinds of plants and animals, so that no new “kind” can be generated from some existing kind (Genesis 1:11). This verse mentions the concept of seed, by which God assures the continuance of each form of life after its kind. The New Testament affirms this truth in 1 Corinthians 15:37-39. Modern genetic research confirms this biblical truth with its discovery of the genetic code that transmits hereditary information so that any specific kind of plant or animal only remains that specific kind. It is no wonder then that the long held “scientific” idea of spontaneous generation stands debunked and that no evidence has ever been found for the transmutation of species, Darwin’s theory of origins.

The First Law of Thermodynamics also states that matter is not being destroyed in the universe. This, also, is stated in the Bible. Among other Old Testament locations, Nehemiah 9:6 teaches that God created everything and that He now preserves all. The New Testament likewise teaches, in Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3, and 2 Peter 3:7, that God sustains and holds the universe together. The Second Law of Thermodynamics, also a firmly proved, universal law of science, states that all processes are increasing in entropy, or disorder. Whereas mass and energy are being preserved (The First Law of Thermodynamics), mass and energy are becoming less and less available for the work of maintaining the processes of nature. Thus, the entire universe is heading toward disorder and chaos.

After God had created the Earth, He declared it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Yet, His creation is now obviously increasing in entropy. Again, the Scriptures contain the scientifically compatible explanation. God created the universe “very good” and ended His work in that regard so that no mass or energy is now being created or destroyed. Then, corruption entered into the creation and along with it increasing entropy or disorder. This is how the First and Second Law coexist. This event is explained in the opening chapters of the Scriptures.

God told the first people, Adam and Eve, the rules for preserving the “very good” earth He had created (Genesis 1:28-30). He also told them the consequences (Genesis 2:17) of choosing to counter His perfect plans. Alas, they chose against God’s ways and brought death (Romans 5:12) and a curse (Genesis 3:17) into the world. Romans 8:20-22 describes the condition of the world after Adam and Eve’s sin as “the bondage of corruption.” In this description, we again see the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the law of increasing decay or corruption.

Significantly, the Bible frequently mentions various scientific processes and phenomena. These are not described in today’s scientific nomenclature, but in the everyday language of the writers whom God inspired. However, such descriptions of science are amazingly accurate in a multitude of scientific disciplines. These include in Hydrology: the hydrologic cycle of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation; in Geology: Isostasy, or the gravitational equilibrium of the earth; in Astronomy: descriptions of the universe, stars, and orbits; in Meteorology: atmospheric circulation and protection, and the oceanic origin of rain; in Biology: blood circulation, uniqueness of humankind, the chemical nature of flesh; in Physics: the mass-energy equivalence, the source of the earth’s energy. Whoever says the Bible is not a scientifically accurate book, has certainly not read it much at all. [65]

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## Translations of the Bible

We know, as described above, from the words of God Himself, history, the multitude of manuscripts, the science that deals with the manuscripts, wisdom, reason, and science that we can trust the original Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament that has been preserved in the various manuscripts and texts. Now, it is logical to ask, “Can we trust that our English translations accurately convey the words and message of the original text of the Bible?” The answer to this question is, “yes, we can trust that our translations convey the words and the message of the original writings.” As straightforward as this answer is, there are some things which must be considered in relation to Bible translation.

First, one must realize that translations of the Bible are not what Jesus promised to preserve. Inerrancy and infallibility do not apply to translations.[66] Consider that the English language was not even in existence in 33 A.D. when Jesus made His promises of preservation, as recorded in the New Testament and discussed above. The variety of English in use today, Modern English, did not even come into usage until just before the time of William Shakespeare (d. 1616). In fact, because languages change over time, if you think about it, you actually want translations to change, to be updated from time to time. For this allows the Bible to be understood by its readers as the English language changes, which it noticeably has over the centuries. Virtually no one today reads Wycliffe’s English translation of 1384, because the English of his day is so different from English today. And, although the differences are not so great as with Wycliffe’s work, the English of the 1611 King James Version is not the English spoken today.

Today’s English translations of the Bible come directly from Hebrew and Greek texts and manuscripts of the Bible. For example, the 1611 King James Version did not come from a German edition, which came from a Latin version, which came from a Greek version, etc. It was translated directly from the original languages of the Bible: the Masoretic Hebrew Old Testament text and Erasmus’ Greek New Testament Text, although the translators did refer to a few other manuscripts and to previous translations for help. [67] Likewise, modern English translations have been translated directly from Hebrew and Greek texts.

Therefore, the central issue regarding translation is whether a particular translation accurately conveys the words and meaning of the texts upon which it is based. A trustworthy translation is a matter of grammar, vocabulary, understanding of the idiomatic phrases, and knowledge of customs and practices of the persons who wrote the original text. A good translator must have a command of the receiver language so that he will chose words that the meanings of the Greek and Hebrew words into English words the reader can understand in today’s English. Anyone who has ever become fluent in more that one language will attest to the role of the above skills, and the difficulties in doing the work of translation.

An example illustrates the challenge to the translator. In German, after someone has said *danke* (“thank you”) one replies, *bitte*. However, *bitte* is the German word for “please.” A literal translation of such a conversation into English would sound strange to English speakers. We do not reply “please” when someone thanks us. We say, “you’re welcome.” Germans, however, say “you’re welcome” (*Willkommen!*) as a greeting to guests who arrive for a visit. A translator would need to know this in order to make a proper translation from German into English.

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One challenge of translating the Greek New Testament into English has to do with the Greek language's aorist tense, which has no equivalent in English. This tense is for actions that have taken place in the past, the results of which cannot be reversed and will continue on forever into the future. Romans 5:1 is an example of the challenge the Greek tense presents to the English translator. The King James Version translators rendered the Greek, "Therefore being justified by faith." But, this does not convey the complete meaning of the Greek aorist tense to the modern reader. In fact, this translation causes some people to come away with the complete opposite meaning. The word "being" in the KJV causes some to think justification is an ongoing process.

But, the Greek verb tense here is clear that justification is something that God has done to the benefit of Christians, which cannot be undone and will continue forever. The New International Version's "we have been justified" and the New American Standard Bible's "having been justified" better convey the aorist tense nature of God's permanent act of justification of Christians. Even the New Revised Standard Version's "we are justified" indicates at least a present condition of justification. The doctrine of justification is taught clearly in the Bible.[68]

Not only does the translator have much work to do to communicate the words and meaning of the Bible, as the above examples show, the Bible reader must, if he is to be sure of the reliability of the translation, do some work of his own. Serious Bible students study individual verses of the Bible in their immediate context, in the context of the book of the Bible, and then in context of the entire Bible, which is properly viewed as a complete, unified work of God's inspiration that does not contradict itself. Also, at the Bible student's disposal are excellent tools such as concordances that list all the words of the Bible and their various meanings and acceptable translations, Bible dictionaries, interlinear translations that show the English directly next to the Hebrew or Greek text, and various commentaries and lexicons on the meanings and nuances of the words of the Bible.

The reader of the Bible must also be aware that there are two main kinds, or styles, of translations of the Bible into English. Translations like the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible, are primarily word-for-word, or "formal translations. Others, such as the New International Version and the New Living Bible are primarily thought-for-thought, or "dynamic equivalence" translations.

The serious Bible student is wise to consult several conservative translations.[69] For, if one puts his trust in one translation as the "one and only trustworthy translation," he will be disappointed at some point after he discovers the weaknesses of it, no matter how small those weaknesses may be. In the several good translations, the weaknesses are small and insignificant, and rather easy to deal with for the faithful believer. However, all translations are the work of fallible men, and cannot be perfect down to every single word, although good translations are accurate and trustworthy to a very high degree.

Our example for the practice of using several good translations can be seen in the way the early Church recognized the canon of Scripture. As a group, the early Christians were familiar with all the books of the Bible. They were able to spot counterfeits, and excluded them. This did not happen in some "magical" way. Rather, the early Christians discussed the various manuscripts of the letters and gospels of the New Testament and made reasonable judgments about them regarding their authenticity.

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Some early Christians were described by the Apostle Paul as “more noble” in Acts 17:11, when they used their minds and “searched the scriptures daily” to determine the truth. Even, before that, as recorded in Acts 2:5-41, “devout Jews” were the ones who recognized that Peter’s preaching had to do with the Messiah (“Greek word is Christ), and came to a saving faith in Jesus. “Devout Jews” were those who were serious about their faith, studied the writings of the Old Testament, and were, therefore, able to recognize the true Messiah, Jesus Christ, when influenced by the Holy Ghost unto belief. Thus, we see that God expects us to put forth some effort in the search for truth regarding the Scriptures.

This process of studying a variety of writings to arrive at a consensus regarding truth did not occur in Christianity only regarding the determination of the canon of Scripture. In our modern era, textual scholars exhibited this same methodology in arriving at today’s Greek New Testament Text. These scholars studied various Greek manuscripts. By familiarity with the various manuscripts, the variant readings, human tendencies to “correct and amend the text,” and patterns, and using sound reasoning skills and principles of scholarship, textual scholars have arrived at a consensus of what was the original New Testament Greek text. And, although there are just a few places where questions remain as to the exact word, they do not affect any doctrines of the faith.[70]

In fact, a study of the topic of the Bible’s manuscripts and their relatively minor differences, will serve to shore up the conservative Christian position that the Scriptures are reliable. Therefore, the study of conservative commentaries, written by authors who actually believe in the doctrine of a supernatural Bible, is also highly recommended.[71] In such, he will be challenged to think about and study the reasons for the variations among translations and will come to conclusions based on evidence, the whole of scripture, expert scholarship, and sound reasoning. This is exactly what God desires of His people.

## How to Read and Study the Scriptures

Now that we know the Bible was inspired by God, preserved by God, and that we can trust English translations of the Bible, in what manner should we study it to determine its meaning? How does one approach the Bible, so as to not arrive at merely subjective, personally biased, incorrect, or even ridiculous interpretations? The science of biblical hermeneutics answers these questions.

During the Reformation, scholars recognized the need to establish sound principles, or rules, for biblical interpretation, so that arbitrary interpretations would be avoided. The first principle of biblical hermeneutics is that the Scriptures are to interpret themselves. Because the Scriptures are from God, Who is not confused, and nor is He the author of confusion, His written words are not confused. Therefore, we do not pit one part of Scripture against another part, for: “What is unclear or obscure in one place may be clarified in another. We are to interpret the obscure in light of the clear, the implicit in light of the explicit, and narrative in light of the didactic.”[72]

Another important principle of interpretation is that the Bible is to be interpreted literally, or in the manner in which it was written. Often, this principle is misunderstood and over simplified. However, it is obvious that the Bible makes use of “narrative, poetry, metaphor, simile, proverb, parable, hyperbole, parallelism, and many other literary devices that must be recognized”[73] Therefore, in order to arrive



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at a correct interpretation, the reader must recognize and deal with these in the proper manner.

The Bible must also be interpreted in its grammatical-historical context. This means that its readers must pay attention to the grammatical structure of Scripture. In other words, in the Bible, verbs are verbs, nouns are nouns, etc. The Bible must be read, like any other book, according to rules of grammar that are common to all of literature. Martin Luther said it this way: “On the contrary, we must everywhere adhere to the simple, pure, and natural meaning of the words. This accords with the rules of grammar and the usage of speech (*usus loquendi*) which God has given to men.” [74]

Because, without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6), the proper attitude, or state of mind, when reading God’s words is one of faith – faith that God caused the Scriptures to be written the way He intended and that God caused His Words to be preserved the way He intended. The reader should trust (have faith) that “All scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man [women and children, too] of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Based on all the above, the reader would be wise to view and treat the Scriptures in the way King David did, as recorded in Psalm 19.

First, God’s Word is more valuable than “much fine gold.” Material blessings are valueless compared to the truth of God’s Word.

Second, Scripture is so infinitely precious because it is the source of life’s greatest pleasure, described in verse 10 as being “sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”

Third, the Bible is valuable as the greatest source of spiritual protection:  
By them is your servant warned” (v. 11).

Fourth, Scripture is the source of our greatest profit [“great reward” in verse 11].

Fifth, The Scripture is also valuable as the supplier of the greatest purification [verses 12-14].

No wonder King David concluded the 19th Psalm: “...cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the mediation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.” [75]

## Footnotes

[1] MacArthur, John. Think Biblically. 2003, pp. 13-14, Crossway.

[2] Examples are: the doctrinal statement of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches: [http://www.garbc.org/news/?page\\_id=31](http://www.garbc.org/news/?page_id=31); the doctrinal statement of Providence Evangelical Church: [www.providenceevangelical.org](http://www.providenceevangelical.org); and the doctrinal statement of ICARE Ministries: [www.icareministry.org](http://www.icareministry.org).

[3] For example, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. See its publication, Gospel Principles, pp. 52-53, 1997 and the Watchtower Society (“Jehovah’s Witnesses”): [www.watchtower.org/e/publications/index.htm](http://www.watchtower.org/e/publications/index.htm).

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- [4] Culburtson, William, former president of Moody Bible Institute, quoted in *The Battle for the Bible*, by Harold Lindsell, 1976, P. 152, Zondervan.
- [5] Lindsell, Harold. *The Battle for the Bible*, 1978, p. 17, Zondervan. Such Doctrines include those on God, Jesus, Mankind, Salvation, the Church, the End Times, etc.
- [6] McDowell, Josh. *A Ready Defense*, 1993 pp. 27-28. Thomas Nelson, Inc. and *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 1979. pp. 16-18. Here's Life Publishers, Inc.
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- [21] Bruce, F. F. *The New Testament Documents*, 1982, p/ 27, InterVarsity Press.
- [22] McDowell, Josh. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 1979, p.36, Here's Life Publishers, Inc.
- [23] Bruce F. F. p. 27.
- [24] The KJV has Jude 3 simply "once delivered." But the Greek is better translated, "once for all" as in the NASB, NIV, and Martin Luther translation's "ein fuer allemal."
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