

Introduction:
WAITING TO HEAR
GOD SPEAK

“Speak to me!”

Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman whispered these words while standing next to a portrait of Christ in a cathedral in Europe. He waited, but encountered only dead silence.

That experience, I’m told, was the motivation for Bergman’s movie *Silence*, which portrayed people who despaired in trying to find God. In our world, he concluded, we hear only ourselves. No voice comes to us from outside the universe; when we seek a word from God, we are confronted with dead calm.

Bergman’s story reminds me of a friend who is adamantly convinced that God has not spoken to us. He was irritated when I told him that Christ’s opinion of heaven and hell is what really mattered. “Why should I accept what the Bible says?” he asked. “The *Bible* was written by men, and by the way, *who decided what books should be in it anyway?*”

I’m not discounting the intellectual problems the Bible might have posed for this young student, but I also knew that, for him, belief in the Bible would entail a major lifestyle adjustment. I got the impression that he not only didn’t believe that the Bible was the Word of God, but that he *wanted* to not believe it.

Why should anyone accept the Bible as a book from God? Our culture offers a long menu of religious options and assures us that they differ only in minor matters. We are invited to stand before this smorgasbord and choose whatever is “right” for us. Just the idea that there might be one book from God that judges all other religious opinions is discounted as narrow-minded bigotry. Then there’s the atheism option that’s getting trumpeted of late. This naturalistic, materialistic worldview denies the existence of anything supernatural, especially God, and maligns its God-fearing opponents as deranged, deluded, and even evil. It wants to free the world from religion, all the while looking much like a religion itself. “The total dogmatic conviction of correctness which pervades some sections of Western atheism today . . . immediately aligns it with a religious fundamentalism that refuses to allow its ideas to be examined or challenged,” according to one Oxford professor who transitioned from atheist to Christian.¹

Case in point, Sam Harris wrote his book *Letter to a Christian Nation*, “to arm secularists in our society, who believe that religion should be kept out of public policy, against their opponents on the Christian Right.”² Not exactly broad-minded tolerance.

Despite these cultural pressures, Christianity claims to be a special, revealed religion. This sets it apart from what we might call the naturalistic religions. Hinduism, Buddhism, and a host of so-called New Age options are based on the insights of gurus, prophets, and “enlightened” leaders who presumably had more insight than the rest of us. These teachings, based on inner musings and personal experiences, are largely dependent on the subjective feelings of the teacher. No wonder the religions of the world offer an array of conflicting claims!

Of course there are also non-Christian prophets who claim to have messages from God. Whether it be Mary Baker Eddy, Mohammed, or Joseph Smith, all said that God has spoken through them. Understandably, many people surveying the religious landscape are confused. Some have given up on their quest for truth and assume that there is no one right path, no objective body of religious knowledge.

We must remember that revelations from God must be tested for consistency, authenticity, and truth. If God has spoken, we should expect that such a message is capable of serious investigation. It must stand above

competing claims. Surely, such a revelation should have nothing to fear from fair-minded scholars and honest doubters intent on examining the credibility of the message.

Christianity says that God revealed truths about Himself that the most enlightened prophet could never discover. It claims that God personally sent us letters—written in human languages to be sure—but nevertheless containing His words. The book called the Bible claims to lead us into the metaphysical realm (that which lies beyond our senses) where no unaided human mind has the ability to venture. Indeed, it purports to give us privileged information about God and His relationship to the world. Here, finally, we find some answers to the great mysteries of our existence. If the Bible is a message from God, then we can say, “If the Bible says it, God says it.”

Even if the Bible contained only an absolute moral code, it would have to be a book from God. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein did not believe in the Bible, but he knew that we as finite human beings cannot discover moral absolutes on our own. He said that if an objective ethical standard existed, it would have to come to us from a being independent of the universe. He wrote, “If a man could write a book on Ethics which really was a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the books in the world.”³ In this book I hope to show that the Bible is a reliable book on matters about God, man, salvation, eternity, and morality too. *With an explosion, it does destroy all other books in the world!*

Here are some questions the Bible answers: Do we exist after death? If yes, what can we expect on the other side? Can we be sure that we will spend eternity with God? Will the future be brighter than the past? How can we best interpret both the joys and sorrows of this present existence? Most important, does God love the world or should we interpret cruel natural disasters and human suffering as proof that in the end He is sadistic and indifferent to our plight?

Now, if God has *not* spoken, if we are on our own on this cosmic speck in a vast purposeless universe, then we must do the best we can with the cosmos as we find it. Let us not flinch from the frightful conclusions to which we must come. In a world where there is no existence beyond the

grave and everything will ultimately be destroyed, we must agree with the atheist Bertrand Russell, that in such a world everything is meaningless. The scales of justice will never be balanced and our desire for significance will have to be squelched. As Woody Allen put it, “We have no spiritual center. We are adrift alone in the cosmos.”

Atheists are now promising “a world of new hope and unlimited horizons—once we have shed this delusion of God. . . . The reality is the emptiness that results from the loss of the transcendent is stark and devastating, both philosophically and existentially. . . . One finds oneself in the vise-like grip of despair in a life without ultimate purpose,” as Ravi Zacharias learned for himself. While a young atheist, Zacharias came to prefer the oblivion of death “to the sheer weight of the emptiness of a God-less world” until he encountered Jesus, who “spelled the difference between despair and hope” for him.⁴

Friedrich Nietzsche, who prepared Germany for Hitler by his belief in a superman, said, regarding God, “We have killed Him, but who will wipe the blood from our hands?” Yes, if God either does not exist or is fundamentally unknowable, there is no answer either for our guilt or for our deepest longings for significance.

But if God *has* spoken, we can probe His words, study His ways, and heed His commandments. The Bible, if it is true, is like a light shining in a musty basement, guiding us to the door that leads to eternal life.

The Purpose of This Book

The purpose of this book is to give reasons why I believe God has left us with a written revelation. In short, I shall present the reasonableness of the Christian conviction that the Bible is the Word of God. This evidence is open to investigation, it is “out there,” and it invites discussion and argumentation.

If you are already a believer in the Bible, this book will validate your belief; if you are a fair-minded skeptic it will challenge your thinking about a book that has had an immeasurable impact on the history of the world. Take it or leave it, the Bible is not a book that can be ignored.

Can I “prove” that the Bible is the Word of God? The answer, as you

might guess, depends on what is meant by “proof.” No matter what evidence is presented, there must always be room for faith, a reasonable faith to be sure, but faith nonetheless. (Since the question of “proof” and “assurance” needs a fuller explanation, I discuss these matters in more detail in the “For Further Consideration” section in chapter 1.)

I have a friend who says he saw a beautiful house standing opposite Mont Blanc on the border between France and Switzerland. What puzzled him was that the shutters on the windows that faced the beautiful mountain were always closed. No matter how remarkable the Bible is, it will not have an appeal to those who refuse to give it an honest hearing. At the end of the day, whether we believe it or not depends on whether we are willing to fling the shutters open and see what is before us.

With the onslaught of the modern *zeitgeist* (spirit of the age) that chips away at the notion of biblical authority, I trust that this rigorous review and restatement of the trustworthiness of Scripture will stimulate discussion and inspire confidence. I pray that those of us who already love the Bible will love it more; and that those who have, for whatever reason, come to distrust it, will be led to the conviction that God has indeed given us a letter that can be believed. We can be thankful we are not alone in the cosmos.

I have chosen seven reasons why I believe we can trust the Bible; others might believe that there are many more arguments that can be examined. I have selected those that I believe are most relevant and accessible to the modern thinker. I attempt to answer questions such as:

- Isn't it illogical to say that the Bible is the Word of God just because it claims to be?
- Can we trust the history of the Bible?
- What about the miracles?
- Why are the Dead Sea Scrolls important?
- Can we believe the prophecies of the Bible?
- Could not the disciples have made up the stories about Christ?
- Doesn't science contradict the Bible?
- Who decided what books would be in the Bible and when was the decision made?
- What about the gospel of Thomas and other lost books?

- What does the Bible teach us that other books don't?
- What benefits come to those who study the Bible?

We'll try to answer these questions and more along the way. Perhaps you will be surprised at the reasons why we can be sure that the Bible is a unique book that originated in the mind of God. In contrast to all the other religions of the world, only Christianity has a book with purpose. Only a personal God can faithfully intervene in our lives.

I don't agree with everything Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, but I like his assessment of truth. "Truth is tough. It will not break like a bubble at a touch; nay, you may kick it about all day like a football, and it will be round and full at evening."⁵

And so I invite you to come with me on a journey, to examine the Bible with a critical eye to see whether it has the marks of a supernatural revelation. Let us look at the evidence as it exists, willing to learn, ask, probe, and evaluate. I promise that the Bible will not break, and the truth will be around at the end of the day.

Understanding Dual Authorship

When theologians say that the Bible is the Word of God, what do they mean? Many people interpret this phrase to mean that God dictated the Bible to the authors who did little more than write word for word what they were told. Like a good secretary who has learned to transcribe dictation, the authors of the Bible, it is said, were passive vehicles while God told them what to write.

This is *not* what I mean when I say that the Bible is the Word of God. Even the casual reader notices that the authors of Scripture wrote with different styles, literary organization, and even grammar. These differences become even more apparent to those who read the Bible in the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

The apostle Paul wrote carefully reasoned treatises, often betraying his own disappointments, encouragements, or even anger. Mark, in his account of the life of Jesus, used the vivid present tense when he described Christ's walk throughout the land. His Greek was so rough that he even

appears to have used odd grammar, no doubt reflecting his own speaking habits. Sometimes New Testament authors just paraphrased the Old Testament, not quoting it word for word. When they reported the number of people who died in a plague, they used round numbers, just as reporters do today.

We can identify at least three different kinds of inspiration. For example, some things the authors wrote they knew by *ordinary means*. Luke, for example, said that he did careful research before he wrote his account of the life of Christ, just as did others who were eyewitnesses of Jesus: “It seemed fitting for me as well,” he wrote, “having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3–4). Perhaps he was not even aware that he was writing Holy Scripture when he wrote his account of Christ’s life and ministry. He just recorded what he had investigated and what he had seen.

Second, in some instances God endowed the authors with *ideas that they were allowed to write in their own words*. This freedom allowed Paul, for example, not only to write with his own style, but also to transition from doctrinal to personal matters. In his second letter to Timothy he could speak with authority about God’s knowledge of us in eternity past (2 Timothy 1:9) and yet later say, “When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13). God’s ideas were written in Paul’s style and in line with his interests and abilities.

Then, also, some of the Bible was *dictated by God word for word*. Moses did not add his own style when he wrote, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” On many occasions the prophets received revelations from God, word for word. At other times they put the message in their own words. But dictation, as such, was rare; almost always the author’s style can be recognized.

A moment’s reflection will tell us what has happened in the history of biblical scholarship. Naturalists who balk at the idea that God has supernaturally revealed Himself conclude that the Bible is a purely human book. It is, they say, a history of what men have thought about God.

Miracles are discounted as exaggerations, or even mythology. These scholars emphasize that the Bible was written by men, and *only* by men. Sometimes brilliant, sometimes boring, sometimes accurate, and sometimes riddled with error, it was simply a history of what biblical writers believed was the revelation of God. For such scholars the human authorship of the Bible overshadows its divine origin.

More recently a rash of books and films by atheist zealots have mocked the Bible's authority and the existence of God Himself.

Sam Harris, atheist author, points out, correctly, "There are many books that pretend to divine authorship, and they make incompatible claims about how we all must live."⁶ While not all of these conflicting accounts can be true, that does not mean that none of them can be true. Harris fails to show that he has looked deeply into whether the one true God and creator of the universe has revealed himself in the Bible, along with His will for how we must live.

Beyond denying God's written revelation, some atheists are very loudly and publicly proclaiming their denial of God's existence as well: "I am not attacking any particular version of God or gods. I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been or will be invented," says Oxford professor and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.⁷ His religion is materialistic naturalism—only observable matter exists, nothing else, and everything can be explained by natural causes.

One scientist goes so far as to claim in his book that science proves that God does not exist.⁸

He and some atheist scientists like him try to do that by using probabilities. It's the best they can do. That's because every worldview comes with assumptions. In the end, every religious worldview, including atheism, requires some faith. Norman Geisler and Frank Turek explain why in their book *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*:

"As limited human beings, we do not possess the type of knowledge that will provide us with absolute proof of God's existence or nonexistence. Outside of the knowledge of our own existence . . . we deal in the realm of probability." Using good evidence concerning the big questions about God and life and the truth of Scripture, one can conclude with, say,

95 percent certainty. That's the best fallible and finite humans can do, and it's sufficient for the biggest life decisions, they explain.⁹

Older fundamentalists and a few evangelicals have frequently swung to the opposite extreme. Some at least have been at pains to shun historical and critical studies of the Bible, fearing that the very process would eclipse its divine authorship. A few have actually held to the dictation theory of inspiration, teaching that the biblical authors acted as stenographers, passively recording God's message word for word. In their zeal to defend the Bible as the Word of God, these scholars have allowed the divine origin of the Bible to overshadow the human side.

We can avoid these extremes by admitting that the Bible is of *dual* authorship. It is a book of God *and* a book of man. God's part was to superintend the writing of the books, revealing His will. Man's part was to write this revelation using a human language and style so that God's message was preserved for future generations.

But "to err is human," we are told, and, since the Bible did not fall out of the sky but was written by fallible human beings, it must have its flaws. But such reasoning discounts God's omnipotence. If He wished to speak to us, it is easy to believe that He could superintend and inspire the writers to accurately record His revelation.

Although we are all fallible human beings, we all have written some infallible statements (for example, "Winston Churchill was at one time the prime minister of England"). In the case of the Scriptures, such accurate statements are made not only about history, but also about theology and even science. The point, of course, is that *fallible human beings can write an infallible message*.

The Bible has dual authorship, just as Christ has two natures. Christian theology maintains that Christ was fully God and fully human, the two natures united in one person. And just as Christ was fully human and yet sinless, just so the Bible is fully human and yet without error.

Again we can see that liberal theologians have emphasized Christ's humanity to the exclusion of His divinity. Just look at Him as He sits on the well, weary with His journey. See Him as He sleeps on the boat and when He cries, "I thirst." Surely, say the religious liberals, He was a remarkable man, but *only* a man nevertheless.

Interestingly, in the early centuries of the church, some went to the opposite extreme. They denied Christ's humanity and affirmed only His deity. They thought that if God were to become man, He would have had to accept imperfection. So they said Christ only *seemed* to be man; His divinity canceled His humanity.

Just as the humanity of Christ is a stumbling block to many who then deny His deity, even so the humanity of the Bible is a stumbling block to those who deny its divine origin. But the Scriptures present Christ as *both* fully God and fully man. Yes, even when He was weary, perplexed, and in the throes of Gethsemane, He was God. And when He said, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58), He was man. *Just so, both the divine and the human authorship of the Scriptures must be fully appreciated.*

Consider the similarities between the Christ (the incarnate Word) and the Bible (the written Word).

- Both are eternal.

OF CHRIST: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

OF THE SCRIPTURES: "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89).

- Both are conceived by the Holy Spirit.

OF CHRIST: "The angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God'" (Luke 1:35).

OF THE SCRIPTURES: "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21).

- Both are human and yet without error.

OF CHRIST: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

OF THE SCRIPTURES: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

- Both have a unique authority.

OF CHRIST: “He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22 NKJV).

OF THE SCRIPTURES: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 1:2 RSV).

No wonder Christ is called “The Word of God”! When He returns to earth, John describes Him: “He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God” (Revelation 19:13). Just as it is difficult for us to explain the divine mystery of the *Incarnation*, even so it is difficult for us to explain the mystery of divine *inspiration*. In both instances God accommodated Himself to human beings; in both instances He has given us a revelation that is at once human and divine.

The following tribute to the Bible was written by an unknown poet:

*Deep strike Thy roots, O heavenly vine
Into our earthy sod
Most human, yet most divine
The flower of man and God*

In this book we shall not shield ourselves from the human characteristics of the Bible, nor shall we shrink from the evidence for its divine origin. Let us boldly affirm that God who became man is the same God who inspired common men to write a very uncommon book.

The Challenge of Definition

I believe that the Bible, as it was written in the original manuscripts, is the *infallible* and *inspired* Word of God. What *does* this mean? And what does it *not* mean?

First, we mean much more than that the Bible is free from error. It might be possible for a historian to write a history of Rome that is accurate, yet the author claims no special inspiration from God. Thus, the Bible is not only accurate, but also the “breath of God,” coming to us endowed with a power that is not the property of other books. In short, the

Bible carries the *authority* of God.

Second, we mean much more than simply that the Bible is an inspiring book. We have all read novels or poetry that have inspired us. Through these means we have been given moments of insight, emotional energy, and a vista of new ideas. But when we speak of the *inspiration* of the Bible, we mean something else.

Parts of the Bible might not inspire us at all; indeed, there are whole chapters that might appear irrelevant and dull. This does not diminish the fact that the Bible is the Word of God. The question is not whether the message is exciting, whether we feel good about it, or even whether it changes our lives. The question is, is the message presented *true*? Does it come with God's signature?

Third, it means more than simply saying that the Bible is inspired in matters of doctrine, but not in matters of science and history. Some scholars have insisted that the Bible is inspired when pointing toward Christ, but may contain contradictions and errors in matters of lesser importance.

Such reasoning is wrongheaded. As we shall point out later in more detail, the historical and the doctrinal matters are interwoven and can't be separated. Is the resurrection of Christ a historical event? Or is it a matter of doctrine too? Obviously, it is both. What is more, if we cannot trust the Bible in matters of history, why should we trust it in matters of doctrine? In fact, we shall argue that the reliability of the Bible in earthly matters gives us confidence to believe the Bible in heavenly matters.

Fourth, we must understand that the very words of Scripture are important. We cannot say, as some have, that the ideas are inspired but the words are not. Linguistic analysis has demonstrated that every genuine word carries a genuine meaning; a wrong word, therefore, carries a wrong meaning. No wonder Christ said, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18).

Often the writers of Scripture were free to choose their own words, as long as the meaning of those words was within the bounds of truth. This explains why different words might be used to explain the same event. Matthew, when describing the reaction of the disciples to Christ's walking on the water, used the word *proskuneo*, meaning "to worship"

(14:33). Mark, recording the same event, used the word *existēmi*, which means “to be amazed” (Mark 6:51). Each word gives a different meaning, but both are accurate.

Obviously, since tape recorders were not available, the writers often recorded the gist of a conversation without pretending to write it down word for word. Inerrancy (that the Bible is without error) means only that there was a faithful representation of the content, not that the speeches were recorded verbatim or in full.

We must also keep in mind that a report can be imprecise and yet true. Wayne Grudem of Phoenix Seminary gives the example “My home is not far from my office” as a statement that is completely true, but imprecise. In the Bible, we sometimes find round numbers or approximations in measurements and battle figures.

Also, the authors of the Bible employed the language of description when speaking about scientific matters. We cannot say the writers of Scripture erred because they spoke of a sunrise, even though Copernicus taught us that what we call a sunrise is actually the earth rotating toward the sun. The authors of the Bible used the same descriptive language as a modern almanac. By speaking of the sunrise, the Bible does not teach that the sun goes around the earth.

Finally, we must keep in mind that *infallibility* (freedom from error) is applied only to the original manuscripts, the parchments upon which the Old and New Testament authors wrote their messages. What we have today are copies of copies, and hence it is possible that errors in transmission have crept into the text.

Of what value is the doctrine of inerrancy if the original manuscripts no longer exist? The answer is not difficult to grasp. *It is the inerrancy of the originals that makes the reconstruction of the original text so important.* Thanks to careful scribes in centuries past and thoughtful scholars today, we can have before us a text that, for all practical purposes, reflects the original manuscripts. *We can say with confidence that the Bible we hold in our hands is “The Word of God.”*

Think of it this way. Suppose a schoolteacher were to receive a letter personally written and signed by the president of the United States. She is excited to share the letter with her pupils so asks them to record it in

their notebooks, word for word. Then, let us suppose the letter is lost and she must use her student notebooks to reconstruct the contents. She discovers that one student has two misspelled words, another misunderstood a phrase, and yet another missed the last word of a sentence. Yet with the notebooks in front of her, would anyone deny that she has the resources to essentially reconstruct the contents of the president's letter? Precisely because each word of the letter came from the president, the attempt to get all of the words accurate is a very important task.

If you have ever looked at a Hebrew Old Testament or the Greek New Testament, you will see numerous footnotes indicating variations in the text (many of these are found in the margins of English Bibles too). Please keep in mind that the manuscripts of the Bible have been carefully copied, and from these copies other copies have been made. Some were copies made in the same language; others were translations. Today, centuries later, we have thousands of copies of various ages and degrees of accuracy. Obviously, there are bound to be innumerable variations among these later manuscripts. Most of them have to do with spelling and word order.

But the good news is that each variation can be evaluated, based on careful scholarship and painstaking comparisons. Virtually no variations would affect doctrinal matters. No credible scholar would dispute the fact that the content of the Bible we have in our hands is essentially that found in the original manuscripts.

Thanks to archaeology, the discovery of ancient manuscripts (like the Dead Sea Scrolls), and the study of textual criticism, we can be more confident than our forefathers that we do indeed have, for all practical purposes, the contents of those original texts. With all due allowance for human error in copying, we can rejoice that we have the undiluted message of God in our hands.

A Promise for You

"If I were the devil," wrote J. I. Packer, "one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into the Bible. . . . I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorns, hedges, and man

traps to frighten people off.”¹⁰ Thanks be, the devil cannot keep us from probing the depths of Scripture.

Certainly, secular attacks on the Bible’s credibility have stepped up lately: “Ever since the nineteenth century, scholarly theologians have made an overwhelming case that the gospels are not reliable accounts of what happened in the history of the real world,” says Dawkins. “All were written long after the death of Jesus, and also after the epistles of Paul, which mention almost none of the alleged facts of Jesus’ life. . . . All were then copied and recopied . . . by fallible scribes who, in any case, had their own religious agendas.”¹¹

Here, Dawkins attempts to make liberal theologians representative of biblical scholarship in general and just ignores the large body of conservative scholars who would disagree.

The late systematic theology professor Bernard Ramm noted the meticulous care that scribes took in transcribing copies of the Scriptures by hand: “In reference to the Old Testament we know that the Jews preserved it as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. . . . They kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word, and paragraph. They had special classes of men within their culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity—scribes, lawyers, massorettes. Who ever counted the letters and syllables and words of Plato or Aristotle? Cicero or Seneca?”¹²

Through textual criticism, scholars have studied and compared a great many ancient Bible (and other) manuscripts with the goal of reconstructing the original version as closely as possible.

Author Josh McDowell writes: “Compared with other ancient writings, the Bible has more manuscript evidence to support it than any ten pieces of classical literature combined. . . . There are more than 5,686 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions, and we have close to, if not more than, 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers.”¹³

“We are informed by no less an authority than Kenyon [F. G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 3–5] that of the plays of Aeschylus there are 50 copies; of the works of Sophocles, 100 copies; of the Greek anthology, one copy; and of Catallus, 3 independent manuscripts. The earliest manuscript of Sophocles is 1400 years after his death; and the same holds for Aeschylus, Aristophanes, and Thucydides. For Euripedes it is 1600 years, 1300 for Plato, 1200 for Demosthenes, 900 for Horace, 700 for Terrence, 500 for Livy, 1000 for Lucretius, and 1600 for Catallus. The New Testament has an attestation of [thousands of] Greek manuscripts, coming from the second (John Rylands fragment of John, P56) and third century (Chester Beatty Papyri) and fourth century (Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus),” writes Professor Ramm.¹⁴

In fact, one Dallas Seminary professor, Daniel Wallace, has been progressing on his goal to photograph 1.3 million pages of New Testament manuscripts known to exist, so as to preserve them for future study. Some of those nearly complete manuscripts exist from roughly 300 years after Jesus’ birth.¹⁵

The Scriptures themselves give us this promise. “Blessed is the man . . . [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers” (Psalm 1:1–3). The following quote from Robert Chapman is long, but it deserves a careful reading.

This book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts binding, its histories are true and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword, and the Christian’s charter. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, test the heart, and guide the feet.

Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, it will be opened at the judgment, and be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, rewards the greatest labor and condemns all who will trifle with its sacred contents.¹⁶

The Bible is a book of answers, not a book of questions. It guides us in matters where the mind cannot penetrate, and where human reason leaves us unsatisfied. Many blessings are given to those who begin an honest search, willing to follow the trail of truth wherever it might lead.

The famous preacher George Whitefield said, “God has condescended to become an author, and yet people will not read His writings. There are very few that ever gave this Book of God, the grand charter of salvation, one fair reading through.” The love letter is before us, waiting to be read. We owe it to ourselves to give this book “a fair reading through.”

Voltaire said that in a generation the Bible would be outdated, but after his death, his house was purchased by the Geneva Bible Society to spread Bibles throughout Europe. As we shall see, the Bible has often been pronounced dead, but the corpse never stays put.

In France there is a monument to the Huguenots who died as martyrs for the cause of Christ. Acknowledging that the Bible has been able to withstand the hammer blows of its critics, these words are inscribed on the monument:

Hammer away, ye unregenerate hands
Your hammer breaks, God’s anvil stands.

The Bible is strong enough to withstand the blows of its severest critics; it is able to assuage our doubts and inspire confidence that God has spoken. Join me on a journey that will investigate the most remarkable book in the world.

Bring your questions, bring your doubts, and don’t forget your heart.

for REFLECTION & Discussion

- *Discuss some of the implications of the Bible's dual authorship by God and man.*
- *What does it mean to say the Bible is inspired?*
- *How is the Bible infallible?*