



Chapter 2: Is the Bible Credible?

What do you think about the Bible? Is there anything special about it? Is it possible to make too much of it? Why do some people call it an Owner's Manual for Life, while others call it science fiction or a collection of fairy tales?

That's What They Say?

"The Bible is a product of man, my dear, not of God."

*Sir Leigh Teabing,
The Da Vinci Code*

"Looking for loopholes."

W.C. Fields' reported reply when seen reading the Bible on his deathbed

"No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says: He is always convinced that it says what he means."

George Bernard Shaw, playwright

"Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand."

Mark Twain, author

"One never really lives unless he has something to die for."

*Soren Kierkegaard,
Danish philosopher
(1813 - 1855)*



WHAT QUOTABLE SUMMARY WOULD YOU LEAVE THE WORLD REGARDING THE BIBLE? 

WHERE DID YOU GET YOUR VIEW OF THE BIBLE? IS IT FROM YOUR UPBRINGING, A FRIEND, OR A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE? 

A Controversial Book

Heated discussions. Debate. Denominational splits. Military crusades. And the centerpiece of all this drama? The Bible.

What is it about this book that elicits a struggle? Is it the book itself, or the people who handle it? It may be you formed your view of the Bible in the crucible of conflict. Even if not, it's hard to miss the polarity of opinions in our culture about this controversial book. It isn't a benign coffee table book, that's for sure.

The last words of the Scriptures were penned almost 2000 years ago. The Bible hasn't changed since then. Neither has the controversy. In the 1300s, John Wycliffe translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into the English language and risked excommunication for his efforts. Two centuries later, William Tyndale, a contemporary of Martin Luther, translated the New Testament directly from the Hebrew and Greek texts to produce the first genuine English translation. He was burned at the stake for his belief that the Bible was written to be accessible to everyone.

Yes, the Bible deserves our attention. And our personal beliefs about this book require serious contemplation. In fact, an honest look at the Scriptures may spark an inner controversy. As you consider the questions on the following pages, two other questions will probably seep into your thoughts:

- What do you believe about the Bible?
- What impact will you allow it to have on your life?

“Certainly the Bible is a remarkable book—unquestionably the world’s all-time bestseller with countless millions of copies in print.”

What Is the Bible?

How do you begin to discuss a book like the Bible? Try a few vital statistics:

- > It's actually a library of 66 books, ranging from Genesis to Revelation. These are divided in two principle parts, the "Old Testament" (39 books) and the "New Testament" (27 books).
- > Forty different writers took over 1500 years to produce it. These included kings and peasants; philosophers and fishermen; poets and scholars.
- > It was written on three different continents in three different languages.
- > Despite all of the above, a consistent, complete message unfolds across its pages.
- > It has been read by more people and published in more languages than any other book.



WHICH OF THESE STATEMENTS IS MOST NOTEWORTHY TO YOU?



Why Was the Bible Written?



Ruth Graham once declared that she would rather spend what little time she had with Billy than spend a lot of time with anyone else. As the wife of “America’s Pastor,” she had ample opportunity to prove that sentiment. Much of the Grahams’ long, satisfying marriage was spent apart, without the connecting tissue of cell phones or email. During those years when their children were small and Billy’s travels kept him away for months at a time, they wrote letters. Lots of them.

In 1955, Billy wrote to Ruth from Glasgow:

I don't have to tell you that you are in my mind every moment and that I love you with all my heart, and miss you so much that it hurts... Naturally, I think of you a thousand times a day and each little experience I wish I could share with you.

Billy Graham’s letters reveal a surprising vulnerability in the very public man. He wrote, not only to keep his wife informed, but to solicit her help. He expressed the tenderness that was understood between them. Ruth, on the other hand, often wrote to lighten his load with humor and truth. She reserved her loneliness for her prayer journal. The sum of their letters reflect a growing intimacy and devotion that flourished despite—perhaps because of—their many separations.

Could it be the Bible is meant to connect us intimately and personally to God? That would make it far more than a theological treatise, wouldn’t it? Instead of a document designed to fill us with knowledge, the Scriptures would be a divine love letter for us.

“Your letters have given me inspiration, quieted my nerves. They bring me so close to you.”

Billy to Ruth, Glasgow, 1955

Three Purposes for the Bible

Let’s examine three purposes for the Bible.

1. For God to reveal Himself to people

The Bible gives finite people a way of knowing something about an infinite God.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” *John 1:14*

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” *John 14:21*

Today, we possess over 5,600 ancient Greek manuscripts for the New Testament, and 19,000 copies in other ancient languages. Latin and Coptic copies go back to the 2nd century. We even have a papyrus fragment of The Gospel of John from 29 years after it was first written. Complete volumes of the New Testament date to the 4th century A.D.

Compare this with the second best-preserved literary work of antiquity, Homer’s *Iliad*, which has only 643 preserved manuscripts. The *Iliad* is believed to have been written in the 8th century B.C.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE IDEA THAT GOD USES THE BIBLE TO REVEAL HIMSELF? WHY IS THIS A GOOD IDEA? HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THIS IDEA MISUSED?



2. To reveal to people how to live



“Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’” *Deuteronomy 4:6*

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” *Joshua 1:8*

DOES THE BIBLE STRIKE YOU AS PRACTICAL AND RELEVANT FOR LIFE IN THE WORLD TODAY?

3. To reveal how God interacts with people through time



“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.” *Hebrews 1:1*

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

WHAT DO GOD’S INTERACTIONS WITH ANCIENT PEOPLE SUGGEST ABOUT HIS NATURE? IS THIS INFORMATION USEFUL TODAY?

Is the Bible Credible?

Passing It On

It’s easy to forget that the Bible predates the printing press by over a thousand years. To preserve it, the

words were copied laboriously on papyrus. Very few people ever saw a manuscript. That privilege was reserved for religious officials. Over centuries, the Jews nurtured and preserved the writings, carefully recopying each letter and punctuation mark. They adhered to strict guidelines. If a single letter or syllable was wrong, the entire copy was destroyed and the process was started over. The early Christians continued the practice of precision, passing the written Word along carefully from generation to generation.

Archaeological Findings

“Probably the Dead Sea Scrolls have had the greatest Biblical impact. They have provided Old Testament manuscripts approximately 1,000 years older than our previous oldest manuscript. The Dead Sea Scrolls have demonstrated that the Old Testament was accurately transmitted during this interval. In addition, they provide a wealth of information on the times leading up to, and during, the life of Christ.” (Dr. Bryant Wood, *archaeologist, Associates for Biblical Research*)



Fulfilled Prophecy

Fulfilled prophecies also validate the authenticity of the Bible’s contents—including Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God. There is an amazing consistency between the prophecies which preceded Jesus by hundreds of years and His fulfillment of those ancient words. The predictions and the features of Christ’s life cohere at every detail. The chart below is a brief list of some of the prophecies made concerning the Christ and how Jesus fulfilled them.

Late on Christmas Eve, a frustrated father sits on the floor in front of the tree. Stray parts of a new bicycle litter the room. His wife surveys the mess, and says, “When all else fails, read the instructions.” Are you the type who likes to skip the manual? When you travel do you stubbornly refuse to stop and ask for directions?

A past bestseller is entitled *Life’s Little Instruction Book*. Actually, that title better fits the Bible. God knew we would frequently need to “read the directions”—perhaps before we find ourselves in a mess!

“Approximately 2,500 prophecies appear in the pages of the Bible, about 2,000 of which already have been fulfilled to the letter—no errors. Since the probability for any one of these prophecies having been fulfilled by chance averages less than one in ten, and since the prophecies are for the most part independent of one another, the odds for all these prophecies having been fulfilled by chance without error is less than one in $10^{2000!}$ ”

Prophecies about Jesus Christ

TOPIC	PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
PLACE OF BIRTH	"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." <i>Micah 5:2</i> (700 BC)	"Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea." <i>Matthew 2:1</i>
BORN OF A VIRGIN	"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" <i>Isaiah 7:14</i> (700 BC)	"His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." <i>Matthew 1:18</i>
HIS TRIUMPHAL ENTRY	"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." <i>Zechariah 9:9</i> (500 BC)	"They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it." <i>John 12:13-14</i>
BETRAYED BY A FRIEND	"Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." <i>Psalms 41:9</i> (1000 BC)	"Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them." <i>Mark 14:10</i>
HIS REJECTION	"He was despised and rejected by men... Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not." <i>Isaiah 53:3</i> (700 BC)	"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." <i>John 1:11</i>
CRUCIFIED WITH SINNERS	"He... was numbered with the transgressors." <i>Isaiah 53:12</i> (700 BC)	"Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left." <i>Matthew 27:38</i>
HANDS AND FEET PIERCED	"They have pierced my hands and my feet." <i>Psalms 22:16</i> (1000 BC)	"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side." <i>John 20:27</i>

TOPIC	PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
HIS RESURRECTION	"You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." <i>Psalms 16:10</i> (1000 BC)	"You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead." <i>Acts 3:15</i>
HIS ASCENSION	"You ascended on High." <i>Psalms 68:18</i> (1000 BC)	"He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight." <i>Acts 1:9</i>

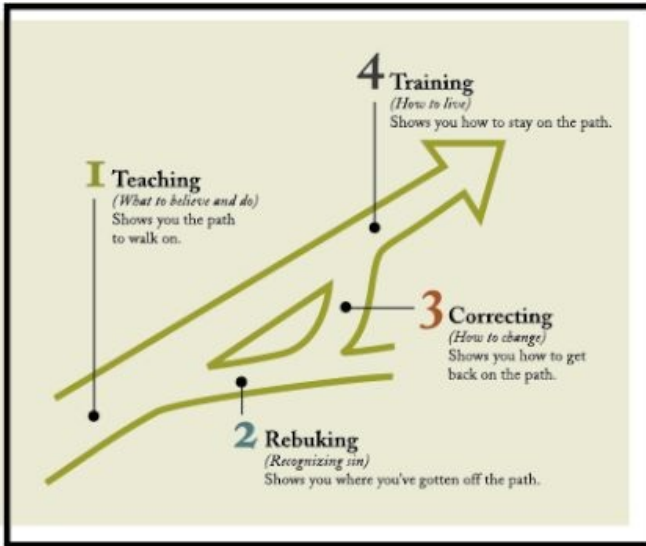
What Does the Bible Say about Itself?

Let's say you've written an email to one of your top employees. The sole purpose of your message is to commend a job well done on a recent project. You're not only grateful for this man's performance, you know the value of good people and you're making sure you accurately express your thoughts. You copy a draft to a co-worker before sending it.

Imagine your chagrin when your employee tenders his resignation that afternoon. You have a glowing email in your outbox ready to send to him and you mention it. "Oh, I know about that," says the man, "I heard you were about to fire me, so I decided to save you the trouble." Somehow—you can't imagine how—your co-worker could have misrepresented your words and passed along a completely erroneous message. He didn't allow your words to speak for themselves—with disastrous results.

If God has spoken, shouldn't we let His words speak for themselves? In addition to the abundance of commentaries about the Bible, the Bible makes some important statements about itself. Consider what the apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy about the Holy Scriptures:

"But as for you, continue in what you've learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." *II Timothy 3:14-17*



The words “God-breathed” in this passage can also be translated “filled with the breath of God.”

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF PAUL'S CLAIM THAT THE BIBLE'S CONTENTS ARE INSPIRED BY GOD? ☆

HOW DOES THE DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATE THE VERSE FROM II Timothy 3:14-17? ☆

In the Old Testament alone, the writers claim to be writing or speaking God’s words over 2600 times. The New Testament writer refers to these men in II Peter 1:19-21: ☆

“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

ACCORDING TO THESE VERSES, WHERE DID THE PROPHECY ORIGINATE?

The *Take It Further* section is to help you go a little deeper through challenging questions, audio recommendations, and reflective exercises. This section is optional for use in your study. You may do all, one, or none of the suggestions.

Take It Further



THINK: WHAT PROBLEMS ARISE WHEN A BOOK GIVES ENDORSEMENTS FOR ITSELF?



LISTEN: *IS THE BIBLE REALLY TRUSTWORTHY* BY KEN BOA



CONSIDER: LISTEN TO "A CELEBRATION," by U2. IS THERE A MESSAGE ABOUT THE TRUTH OF THE BIBLE IN THE WORDS OF THIS SONG?



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