Why Believe the Bible?

Second in the Series: The Bible is Our Guide.

# Scripture: 2 Peter 1:12-22

# Key thought: There are sound reasons for trusting the Bible above any other book.

# Intro:

Over the last few weeks, at Copper Hill Church, we have been reading our Bibles more and more. The question arises, “How do we view the Bible?” To many, the Bible is just an ancient book. But to Christians, the Bible is an inspired book. The Methodist Discipline says, “It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice” (Para. 103 Article IV). Why do we give the Bible that kind of authority in our lives?

The late Scottish Bible scholar, John Murray, of Westminster Theological Seminary, began his essay on the [Bible] with a brilliantly simple but carefully crafted summary:
“CHRISTIANS of varied and diverse theological standpoints aver that the Bible is the Word of God, that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and that it occupies a unique place as the norm of Christian faith and life.” (https://www.crosswalk.com/print/11804955/)

How do we support that kind of statement? How do we answer Bible detractors – those who don’t really believe that the Bible is what it claims to be? Why do Christians call it the Word of God?

# The Bible was written by prophets and eye-witnesses.

As I mentioned briefly last week, the key to the reliability and trustworthiness of our Scriptures is the relationship of the writers to God. Nearly all theories that undermine the Bible’s accuracy or inspiration try to put distance between the text and the people that the Bible says wrote it. They might posit long periods of oral tradition between an event and its being recorded. Or they might ascribe more of the text we have to editors and compilers than to the authors. But the writers were the people to whom or through whom God spoke. And the evidence is that they indeed did write or speak it. They saw what God did among the Israelites. Oral tradition played a role but especially for the NT, only for a few years. And some OT books do show evidence of editors and/or compilers, but their role is very small compared to the original writers.

The Bible writers are the key because they were self-conscious about having received what they are writing or speaking, and they often mention it. In the NKJV, for example, you will find the phrase “The LORD spoke to Moses” more than 100 time in the first five books of the Bible.

It was the same for other prophets. Consider the words of the prophet Samuel.

“The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: 2 Sam 23:2-3

Or think about the experience of Jeremiah.

The Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth. Jer. 1:7-10 NIV

In the NT, the writers were either among the twelve who walked and talked with Jesus or they were their close associates. Then there was also Paul and his associate Luke. It is significant that Paul considered himself an apostle who was “abnormally born” (I Cor. 15:8). Why did he use that phrase? -- Because he was not an eye-witness in the same sense as the other apostles. He had seen Christ in his vision on the Damascus Road while all the others had been followers of Jesus during his years of ministry. Peter spoke of the eye-witness quality of his writing.

We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. 2 Peter 1:16-18 NIV

Here Peter emphasizes that the disciples were there. They are writing about what they saw. The immediate reference of this passage is to the transfiguration. But the concept applies to all that they wrote. Eye-witness was the role that they claimed. The Apostle John was up-front with the same claim.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. 1 John 1:1-3 NIV

First John emphasizes in three ways that he is an eye-witness. He insists that he is writing about what he has heard, seen and looked at, and touched. Then he repeats the concept three times, once each in the first three verses.

The first key to understanding the authority of the Bible is to understand that the proximity of the writers to the saving acts of God in the Old and New Testaments is partly what gives them authority – they were there.

# The Bible is inspired by God.

But there is more.

The writer of Hebrews gives us an overview of how the apostles viewed the Bible they had.

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,” ([Heb 1:1](https://www.biblestudytools.com/esv/hebrews/1-1.html)).

When teaching in the temple, Jesus gave a riddle based on Psalm 110:1. When he introduced his quote from the OT, he said,

“David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared…” (Mark 12:36 NIV)

Jesus gives us here in this phrase the basis for an understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. The writers wrote and spoke “by the Holy Spirit.”

Both Peter and Paul wrote about the inspiration of the Bible. Peter wrote:

 We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, 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 of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:19-21 NIV

Peter triply emphasizes the divine agency in the generation of Scripture. First. he uses a negative to state that it did not happen simply by the will of humans. It is not purely a human product. Then he makes two positive connections. People spoke “from God,” that is, ultimately the message can be described as not their own but coming from God. Then he says that they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. This speaks to the how. The root idea of the word is to carry, hence the NIV and ESV translation “carried along.” The Message paraphrase interprets it very well.

Prophecy resulted when the Holy Spirit prompted men and women to speak God's Word. 2 Peter 1:21 THE MESSAGE

And Paul expressed it:

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”
[2 Timothy 3:16](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=2ti+3:16) ESV

The Greek word sometimes translated “inspired” (NRSV) in this verse literally means “God-breathed,” hence the ESV translation. But remember that the Greek word for breath and Spirit are the same. So again, Paul is implying that the Holy Spirit is involved in the creation of the Bible.

But exactly how did God inspire the Bible through the Holy Spirit?

Does inspired mean that God mechanically directed the hand of each biblical author to record God’s own voice? Absolutely not. What is so marvelous about the Bible is that God’s Word comes to us through the personalities, the circumstances, the challenges, the joys and sorrows with people just like us…He revealed His Word to us in a way that we could understand, in a way that is accessible, and a way that is both beautiful and unified. https://www.crosswalk.com/print/11804955/

Each writer used his own words and spoke with a voice that reflected his own personality and his own circumstances. Yet each one had the assistance of the Holy Spirit as they spoke or wrote. This assistance kept the results accurate to God’s intentions for our instruction.

# The Bible checks out internally and historically.

That’s another reason we can trust our Bibles.

## Internally evidence of inspiration

Critics might say that we have no way of establishing that the Bible is the Word of God – we just believe it. But that is not true. The Bible is self-authenticating.

Though there are 66 books written over a span of about 1500 years, there is a consistent story being told in them together of God’s dealings with humanity. It is a story that has a consistent plot line with indications in the earliest writings in Genesis and Job that God has plans for a future ruler and redeemer (Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 49:10; Job 19:25).

As the Westminster Confession of Faith says, “The consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole…are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God.” (“How I Know the Bible is God’s Word” by D. James Kennedy Ministries)

One simply cannot compare the prophecies of the OT that speak of Jesus to what happened in the Gospels and not be compelled to admit the OT writers had been inspired. “There are some 350 specific prophecies in the OT that Jesus fulfilled in His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection.” (“How I Know the Bible is God’s Word” by D. James Kennedy Ministries)

For specific examples, Micah 5:2 predicted the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Psalm 22:15-18 predicted that Jesus’ hands and feet would be pierced, and that people would cast lots for his garment as the soldiers did at his crucifixion. Isa 53:9 predicted that Jesus would die with the wicked and be buried with the rich. He was crucified between thieves yet buried in a rich man’s tomb. Zech. 9:9 predicted that in his coming, Jesus would ride a donkey as he did on the day we call Palm Sunday. These are just the tip of the iceberg.

## External checks on the Bible’s accuracy

Another great evidence of the reliability of our Bible is that wherever the Bible reports events that can be verified in other historical sources, the Bible has proven to be accurate.

### NT confirmations

For example, the only mention of Pontius Pilate outside the Bible is in the records of the Roman historian Tacitus. Tacitus wrote histories of Roman emperors from Augustus to Domitian. He mentions Pontius Pilate as the ruler who Christ to death. (Josh McDowell in The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict pp. 120, 121)

Historians outside the Bible mention the midday darkness that the Bible records as happening during Jesus’ crucifixion (Matt. 27:45) (Josh McDowell in The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict pp. 122, 123). One of them was Phlegon, a Greek author from Caria who wrote soon after 137 A.D. or about 100 years after Jesus’ death. He reported that in the 4th year of the 202nd Olympiad, (33 A.D.) there was the “greatest eclipse of the sun” and that “it became night in the sixth hour of the day” (noon). This was non-Biblical attestation of the darkness that happened at the time of the crucifixion. The same Greek author mentions earthquakes at that time in different places (Lee Strobel in The Case for Christ p. 85) (see also Matt. 27:51).

Archeological finds have also shown the Bible to be accurate. For example, in recent years, in Palestine, archeologists found an ossuary – a box of bones– with the label of James, brother of Jesus.

Whether or not you believe the Bible – the facts of history shout out the question of Pilate to everyone since his time, “What will you do with Jesus?”

### OT confirmations of the Bible’s reliability abound as well

The Assyrian King Sargon mentioned in Isaiah 20 was unknown outside the Bible’s references until his palace was found by archaeologists and excavated. A wall painting was found of the battle mentioned in Isaiah 20 (Josh McDowell in The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict pp. 381).

The stories of the Patriarch’s in Genesis reveal details that for many years people categorized as myth – until archaeologists began to dig up stone tablets from civilizations in the time when Abraham lived–sometime between 1900-1700 B.C. What they found was mention of the people groups that the Bible mentions, and descriptions of otherwise unique customs that the Bible describes.

In short, the more archaeology is done, the more confirmations we receive of the accuracy of the historical details of the Bible. This points to a more basic fact. The Bible is what it claims to be – a record of the events of the times about which its authors are writing.

# The Bible is living and active in our lives today.

There is another tremendously important reasons why we treat the Bible as God’s Word. It is God’s Word because it has a powerful effect on our lives when we read it and put it into practice.

## The Bible expects that it will change lives

The Psalmist expected that God would renew his life through the written Word.

Ps 119:50 “Your promise preserves my life”

Ps. 19:7 “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul”

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that when we read God’s Word, it judges us.

The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Heb 4:12 NIV

Jesus told us that hearing his words and putting them into practice would make a firm foundation for our lives, even when troubles come (Matt. 7:24,25).

## If we come with openness God’s Word will change us

The key to making this transformation happen in us is to come to the Word of God with a willingness to hear. As Jesus often said,

 “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” Mark 4:9

I found a great explanation of this in my devotional guide this week.

The how of the role of Scripture in spiritual formation is not so much a body of information, a technique, a method, a model, as it is a mode of being in relationship with God that we may bring to the Scripture… I suggest that your top priority be to listen for God. Seek to allow your attention and focus to be on listening for what God is saying to you as you read… Listen for God to speak to you in and through, around and within, over and behind and out front of everything that you read. Keep asking yourself, “What is God seeking to say to me in all of this?” By adopting this posture toward the text, you will begin the process of reversing the learning mode that establishes you as a controlling power who seeks to master a body of information. Instead, you will begin to allow the text to become an instrument of God’s grace in your life. You will begin to open yourself to the possibility of God setting the agenda for your life through the text. Not only will this exercise begin to transform your approach to reading (and prepare you for the role of Scripture in spiritual formation), it will also begin to transform your whole mode of being in relationship with God in a way that will enhance genuine spiritual formation. (M. Robert Mulholland Jr. in Shaped by the Word quoted in A Guide to Prayer For All Who Seek God by Norman Shawchuck and Rueben P. Job p. 122, 123)

## Conclusion: It’s our choice

So, we have three choices when the Bible condemns our own sins, confronts our selfishness or points our own glaring omissions.

* *Disqualify the Bible.*
* *Dismiss the Biblical vision for Holy Living as impractical or impossible.*
* *Repent and ask God to enable you to follow God’s guidance.*

The third reason we believe in the Bible is that when we take this third path we find it energizing, renewing and life giving – just as the Bible promises.