THE STORY of SCRIPTURE
THE FAITH WILL TOTTER IF THE AUTHORITY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES LOSES ITS HOLD ON MEN. WE MUST SURRENDER OURSELVES TO THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE, FOR IT CAN NEITHER MISLEAD NOR BE MISLED.

– AUGUSTINE
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In the current world, many things are falling and crashing to the ground, such as leaders, families, relationships, companies, and nations. Things that were once strong and stalwart lie in ashes. In a world where nothing is permanent and where all things fade with time, it’s crucial to latch on to something that is permanent and will never fade away. For our lives to persevere through uncertain times, we must hold on to timeless truths. We can endure if we are sustained by something stronger than ourselves.

With the past behind us and an unknown future before us, these present times demand an unquenchable commitment and devotion to the Word of God. When all other things falter and fail, it will continue to stand as our refuge and strength. I Peter 2:2 admonishes us as newborn babes to desire the sincere milk of the Word that we may grow. In this sense, the word “desire” means to crave, long for, and yearn for. It may also mean to thirst and hunger for. These are verbs that should describe our attitude toward the Word of God. It must be a desire of our hearts, because without it we will not grow.

As powerful and life-changing as the Bible is, it’s a great tragedy that it’s neglected by so many. When Christ returns to the earth and erases the sinful mark of man, only what has been grafted into His kingdom will remain.

Speaking to the Pharisees in Matthew 22:29, Jesus said their error was that they did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God. Though they were deeply religious and experts of the Old Testament law, the true essence of Scripture evaded them. The Word was in their heads, but not in their hearts.

Alongside the tragedy of biblical illiteracy that plagues modernity, there is hope. That hope is you and I. We have an opportunity to spread the light of Christ throughout a dark world. The world doesn’t have to be as bad as it is. We can make a difference. Every time we open our Bibles and share its truths with friends or family, we are turning the tide.

We should know the Word not just for ourselves, but also for the sake of others. There are countless people around us who need the salvation message it carries. They live in darkness and they wait on us. Let’s not hesitate.
As you stand to speak, remember to accomplish the following objectives. They will increase your effectiveness as a communicator, provide a standard of excellence, and make it easier for your students to remember the material.

**Be Prepared**

Before you attempt to convey the material in this curriculum:

- Study all four lessons as a whole. Make written notes on your copy and highlight what sticks out to you. Understand the main theme of each session and do your best to convey it to your audience. You may even commit to memorizing each Scripture Focus and encourage your students to do so as well.
- Consider the setting for your class. Will it be a classroom, larger church auditorium, kitchen table, or living room? Ensure that you have enough chairs for your students and provide pens or pencils.
- View the handouts before you pass them out so that you will be familiar with the content.
- Encourage your students to follow along using the handouts and give them time at the end of the session to discuss what was covered.
- Be sure that all your students understand the questions and are able to fill the blanks provided.

You may even consider writing certain things on a chalkboard or whiteboard, or possibly putting some of the material in a PowerPoint presentation if the technology is available. Also, be sure to remain aware of whom you are teaching. Stay after each session and mingle with your audience. If certain people are new to the Bible, consider spending more time on certain passages. Make yourself available to answer any questions that arise.

**Be Prayerful**

If we desire to have a lasting influence and make any spiritual impact on people, we must have the help of Heaven. The week before the course begins, spend extra time in prayer. Clean out your heart in repentance and ask Jesus to guide and direct your thoughts. Pray that your students will understand and remember what they hear. Cover your students with a blanket of prayer, and ask the Lord to shine in their lives. Begin and end each session with a time of prayer.

It is likely that as Jesus leads, certain individuals will express a desire to know more or possibly experience a spiritual new birth if they have not done so already. Prepare your heart to respond if this happens and be ready to tell them about repentance, baptism in Jesus’ name, and what it is like to be filled with the Holy Ghost. In every situation, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

**Be Passionate**

With a topic like God’s Holy Word, we should not act like it is common. The Bible is more than a book; it is a living Word. As you study it, teach it, and explain it, do so with passion. Be enthusiastic about the privilege of telling people about its truths. In certain countries, the Bible is against the law and not available to people. We encourage you to develop an appreciation of the Bible and be thankful that God has orchestrated ancient history so that the modern world can embrace His Word. So many individuals throughout history have died so that you may read the Bible in your language. Build your life upon it and tell others about it. Study it, listen to it, live it, breathe it, and you will do well.
1. Tyndale’s Passion

Did you know that in a different age, tucked away in the pages of history, it was against the law to read the Bible? A study of the various Inquisitions put into action across Europe by the Catholic Church between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries gives light to this. They were efforts within the Catholic Church to “purify” itself, but really these efforts were a way for a corrupt religious system to maintain its monopoly on the Bible.

In thirteenth century Europe, the Bible was written in Latin, but the common man of the day could not read Latin. It was a language of pious priests and pompous scholars of the day. Anybody found translating the Bible into English was treated as a criminal. Common people who knew the Bible and could quote the Bible in English were persecuted, tortured, and even executed. Certain historical records indicate that inquisitors brought suspected people before religious leaders to be questioned. If these “suspects” confessed to being liars, drunkards, immoral, or thieves, they were released and let go. But if they were able to quote any part of the Bible, they faced execution. Parents were burned alive at the stake for teaching their children the Lord’s Prayer in English.

During this time, people in England had such a hunger for the Bible they smuggled copies of the New Testament into the country in sacks of food coming from Germany. People who were found possessing a copy of the Bible were marked as outlaws.

It was in a world like this that a man named William Tyndale was born. Driven by the idea that God meant all people to understand His Word plainly, Tyndale risked his life to work tirelessly to translate the Bible into English—the common language.

King Henry VIII’s bounty hunters furiously pursued him across Europe for translating and distributing portions of the Bible. Leaving England, William Tyndale did most of his work in secret in Germany. As a reason for his passion, he stated, “I perceived that it was impossible to establish the laypeople in any truth, except the Scriptures were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.”

On one occasion, a priest irritated at Tyndale’s persistent rant about the authority of the Scriptures said, “We are better to be without God’s laws than the Pope’s.”

To this, Tyndale replied, “I defy the Pope and all his laws, and if God spare my life, in the coming years I will cause the boy that driveth the plow to know more of the Scriptures than you.”

Of course, this kind of attitude and passion got Tyndale in trouble. Eventually, he was tracked down, caught, and burned at the stake. History says that with his last breath he cried out, “Lord, open the King

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1 Benson Bobrick, Wide as the Waters (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 90
2 David Teems, Majestie: The King behind the King James Bible. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 225.
of England’s eyes!” Interestingly, nearly 75 years later, King James I of England, authorized a translation of the Bible that all of Europe and the world could read – the King James Version of the Bible.

William Tyndale willingly gave his life so that his world and the generations after would have the freedom to glean from the Scriptures plainly and clearly.

The many trials of the Inquisitions have come and gone. The days of Tyndale are no more. The Bible in all its shapes and sizes is freely available in many parts of the world. According to the Wycliffe Bible Translators, 1,276 language groups have access to the New Testament in their native language, and 513 language groups have access to the entire Bible in the language they understand best.3

This gracious availability of the written Word did not come easy. It was birthed through immense struggle, persecution, and sacrifice. In spite of this, there are many in the world today who neglect the Bible. This life-establishing Word, forever strong, preserved since the ancient days, sits on shelves, dashboards, and decorates coffee tables. This mighty and glorious Word has become a bookend in the business of our lives. The Center for Bible Engagement tells us:

- In an interview with Assist News Service, Ron Rhodes, president of Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries, quotes a recent poll which indicates that 35% of born-again Christians do not read the Bible at all.
- Among those who say they read the Bible, the vast majority only read it during the one hour they attend church each Sunday.
- Today, basic Christian truths are virtually unknown to a majority in this nation. Our research indicates that if current trends of biblical illiteracy continue, by 2040 the Bible will be a “thing of the past” for most people who claim to be Christ-followers.

For the sake of illustration, imagine that you were brought into a thirteenth century court of an inquisitor. Marked as a possible heretic, priests begin to bitterly barrage you with questions.

- Do you have a Bible in your home?
- Can you quote the Scriptures?
- What kind of life are you living?

Standing there, how would you answer? Do you know enough of the Bible to be dangerous, or are you simply one among the masses of common people, tossed by the whims of popular culture? If you lived in that day, would you deserve the death of a martyr? Is your hunger for the Word enough that it would drive you to break the law? Would you take the mark of an outlaw to smuggle copies of the Bible to those you know? Standing on that day with crooked and corrupt fingers pointed in your face, how would you answer?

2. Learning to Study

“It is such a significant and important book. . . so often quoted that all of us have some idea of its general character. However, the large majority of people have but a very limited knowledge of this remarkable book because their study of it has been

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3 Statistics given by the Wycliffe Bible Translators at http://www.wycliffe.org/about/statistics. Wycliffe also states that there are 6,800+ languages spoken in the world today. Of these, there are 2,000+ language groups without any access to the Bible. In these 2,000+ language groups, there are about 239 million people who have no access to the Bible. Though Bible translation is progressing at a more rapid rate today than ever before, an overwhelming amount of work has yet to be done.
In his first epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul urges each of us to study and become a “workman” of the Word, so that we can rightly divide its truths:

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

If we truly desire to know who Jesus is and what He can do in our lives, each of us must adhere to this calling. To better understand the mission before us, let’s dissect Paul’s challenge to Timothy word by word:

STUDY (be dilligent) to show thyself APPROVED (strong or worthy) unto God, a WORKMAN (a user, laborer; one who toils) that NEEDETH NOT (will not, not allowing oneself) to be ASHAMED (be shown lacking), RIGHTLY (by using this word, Paul tells us that there is a wrong way to do it; we must do it in a righteous or upright manner, with pure motives) DIVIDING (understanding; to take apart; to survey) the word of TRUTH (the Bible is a book of truth; it will not lie to us).

With this word study, we can conclude that the Apostle Paul is urging us to intentionally strive, using the Scriptures to show ourselves strong and worthy; laborers who use the Word and toil in it; not allowing ourselves to be shown lacking; rightly (with pure motives and in an upright manner) dividing, taking apart, and surveying the Word which will not and cannot lie to us.

3. When Studying the Bible... Begin with Prayer

If we keep prayerful, teachable spirits as we travel through our study of the Word, we will discover that the Bible will reveal precious treasures of truth. Like a great light shining into a dark room, it will help us to see things we’ve never seen before.

Jesus will be the one to open our eyes to the Scriptures. If we really want to get all we can out of the Bible, we must have His presence as we study. In Luke 24:45, before His ascension into Heaven, Jesus appeared to His disciples and opened their understanding of the Scriptures. We, too, are His disciples and need His touch. In Acts 16:14, it took the presence of God to open Lydia’s heart so that she could see the truth and know that she needed to be baptized. We need that same presence to open our hearts and lead us to revelation. Knowing this, we should keep prayer as the fabric of our lives.

4. When Studying the Bible... Keep Things in Proper Context

We must remember to interpret Scripture in light of its context. Each verse and each nugget of truth contained in that verse must be considered in the context of the whole chapter.

To see a single Scripture without knowing the part it plays in the larger story of the book that contains it is a bad practice of study. That would be like reading a single line of a play and then assuming you know the full plot.

If you are familiar with only a few verses of the Bible, keep studying. Go deeper and strive to watch the story of the verses unfold as part of the larger message of the Bible. Don’t forget that each chapter and each truth contained in that chapter must be considered in the context of the whole book. Likewise, with each book of the Bible, see it through the eyes of the Testament that contains it. Scriptures
lifted out of their context can become distorted, even developing into false beliefs.

5. When Studying the Bible... Be Like the Bereans

Berea was a Macedonian city located near the modern country of Greece. Luke records something very particular about the Berean people.

They were a people who were open to the Word of God. When Paul and Silas preached and taught, the Bereans received and welcomed their message. Then they studied the Scriptures daily to make sure that what they heard was the truth.

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

The Bible (at that time, the Old Testament) was their standard upon which they measured truth. Many of the Bereans came to believe in Christ because of their open and ready attitude and because their daily lives centered on the Word of God.

Before the Bereans accepted what they heard, they made sure it aligned with the Bible. This is a practice we should develop in our own lives. We must resist the urge to go to commentaries, handbooks, or scholars until we’ve done our own work with the text. Don’t let others’ conclusions be your own. God is a personal God and His Word is as well. He will speak to you in a personal way.

Don’t rely only on outside sources. Let the Bible speak for itself. Its words have authority and power. The sources of others should only be used to complement what you find. Take ownership of your study of the Bible and don’t rely only on what others say about it. The Bible is the sole source of truth and is its best commentary. Let it be your ultimate source.

6. The Ethiopian Eunuch

In the book of Acts (8:26–40), there’s a story of an Ethiopian eunuch, a man of great authority and finance. Scripture says that he was an overseer of his queen’s treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, and as he was returning to his queen and home country, he stopped near the dirt road. Sitting in his chariot, he began to read a portion of Scripture written hundreds of years before by the famed prophet Isaiah:

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter... like a lamb before his shearer. ...who shall declare his generation... his life is taken from the earth” (Isaiah 53:7-8).

As the Eunuch read the Scriptures, he wondered, Who is this sheep, this lamb before the shearer? What generation is Isaiah writing about? Whose life was taken? He read but did not understand.

Then suddenly, Philip, a man sent from God, walked up to his chariot. Noticing the Eunuch’s confusion he asked, “Do you know what you’re reading?”

“How can I,” replied the Eunuch, “without someone to guide me?” Looking for an answer, he asked Philip, “Who is the prophet writing about? Is it himself or is this ‘lamb’ another man?”

Philip then used what Isaiah wrote and he opened the Eunuch’s eyes to the identity of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the prophesied Messiah. He was the lamb whose life was taken. That day, through the experience in his chariot, the Eunuch realized that this “lamb” whose life was taken paid the price for his sin
and opened the door of eternal life to the entire world.

Prior to this moment, the Eunuch had read the Bible but understood little. It took the revelation that Philip had in order to open his eyes to the truth of Scripture. Once he read the Scriptures, not with his eyes of ignorance, but through the eyes of truth, he was enlightened to the power of Jesus and was ultimately given direction for his own life. The truth that Philip spoke impacted him in such a way that he compelled Philip to baptize him. As he heard the truth, he was compelled to change.

It’s significant that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53, an Old Testament chapter that in whole points to the redemptive work of Jesus upon the cross.

The Bible’s purpose is to compel us to turn to its author and give our lives wholeheartedly to Him. The Bible’s purpose is to change not only our internal perception, but also our eternal destination. It was written, formed, and put together to guide us to a heavenly home rather than a fiery furnace.

When the time comes to give a defense of and reason for our faith in Jesus, we must be ready. We must be able to “work the Word.” But before that can happen, we must be students of the Word. Philip was ready to give an answer. Will you be?

7. How to Answer a Question with a Question

We’ve established that our purpose is to understand the Bible and change according to its truths. But how? How can we understand it? How do we get past all the “thees” and “thous?” How do we begin?

These are good questions. The answer is . . . ask more questions. It is beneficial to be inquisitive and play the part of a researcher or detective. The basis of all knowledge is questioning. Questions like who, what, when, where, why, and how form the foundation of all we know. To have knowledge of our subject—the Bible—we must ask the same types of questions. In How to Study Your Bible, Kay Arthur writes that the right questions “form the building blocks of precise observation and lay a solid foundation for accurate interpretation.”5 They give us a foundational knowledge and help us to understand any verse, passage, chapter, or book in the Bible. Here are a few questions to consider:

- Who wrote the book? Who said it? Who are the major characters? Who are the people mentioned? About whom is he speaking?
- Who was the original audience of the book? Is the passage written to the nation of Israel, pagan nations, Jews, or the church?
- What is the main theme of the chapter or book? What are the main events? What are the major ideas? What are the major teachings? What are these people like? What does the author talk about the most? What kind of book is it? Book types may include law, history, prophecy, gospels, letters, etc.
- What is the writing style of the author? How is a particular truth illustrated? Is the author dry and technical? Is it allegory? Is the author poetical? Does the author use lots of lists?
- When was it written? Is it in the Old Testament or New Testament? When did this event take place? When was it first spoken? Is it prophecy? If so, have these events occurred in the past or will they occur in the future?
- Where did the events unfold? Where was this said? Where did it happen? Where is it supposed to happen in the future?

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• Why must these things take place? Why was there a need for this to be written? Why was this mentioned? Why was so much or so little space devoted to this particular event or teaching? Why was this reference mentioned? What is the purpose of this passage?

Using questions like the ones above, we play the part of a surgeon. A surgeon is one with the expertise to dissect and examine certain parts of a body to properly understand the whole body. A surgeon must be inquisitive and a keen medical researcher. As a surgeon cuts away the skin to see the inside of the body, the Bible must also be rightly divided. Its inward parts—the Testaments, books, chapters, and verses—must be discovered so the unified message of this Book of books can be understood. We must look from the whole, or entirety of Scripture, at its parts, then back to the whole again. This continual and repetitive process gives us greater knowledge of the Scripture and of the lives we live.
1. Joshua’s Challenge

A stirring example of the power of the Word is the story of Joshua. In the first chapter of the biblical book bearing his name, we find this verse:

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

This verse is part of a larger series of verses originally spoken by God to Joshua at the start of his ministry. Moses died and the mantle of leadership passed down to him. It was his turn to lead the Israelite people and ensure they cross the Jordan River and possess all that was promised to them.

In the first chapter of this book, the Lord tells Joshua to be strong and of good courage four different times. He also urges Joshua to “observe to do according to all the law,” and “turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest” (7). “Arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them” (2). “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses… there shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, or forsake thee” (3, 5).

In the middle of these words, as God bestows His favor and promise on Joshua’s life, we find verse eight. In it, God is clear as He tells Joshua to do three things:

1. Don’t let the book of the law depart out of thy mouth.
2. Meditate on it day and night.
3. Do according to all that is written therein.

In this, God gave Joshua a prophetic promise. If he would do these things in accordance to the written Word, Joshua would make his own way prosperous and have good success.

Following the larger story of the book, we discover that Joshua went on from that moment and conquered thirty-one different kings. The book of Joshua records victory after victory. The only defeat suffered by the Israelites came when one person had disobeyed what God had spoken. (See Joshua 7.)

It is interesting to note how much Joshua deeply treasured the Law of Moses, which was the written Word of God in his day. After their only defeat, Joshua “built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel” to renew their dedication. (See Joshua 8:30.) Then, he and the people offered burnt sacrifices and peace
offerings upon the altar. By doing this, he showed the people that disobeying the Word of God was a really big deal. Next, he did something quite peculiar.

With all the people watching, Joshua wrote a copy of the entire Law, word for word, upon the stones of the altar. (See Joshua 8:32.) Doing this, he painted a portrait of repentance and gave those he led a vivid picture, illustrating that further victory would only come after they made an altar and returned to their obedience of the Word.

How long do you think it took to accomplish this? As the armies of Israel stood and waited for their leader to write the last word, what was passing through their minds? More importantly, what was being sketched into their hearts?

It is likely that as Joshua wrote the Law of Moses on the surface of the stones, it was being rewritten on the hearts of the people. As Joshua wrote from letter to letter, word to word, and verse to verse, he was writing a new dedication and renewed commitment to the mission and law of God.

Knowing that it takes a stone to write upon stone, could the people hear as Joshua wrote? As the people of Israel stood on that day, could they hear the rock in the hand of Joshua strike the altar as his hand lifted from sentence to sentence? Could it be that in the time it took to finish writing the entire Law, that Joshua wrote the thirty-one victories onto the pages of their future? Could it be that in this act of holy reverence before God, promises were released and set on the path that Israel would later walk?

Joshua didn’t lead his armies to the next battle after finishing this peculiar act. Afterwards, he took more time and reread what he had written:

“And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers” (Joshua 8:34-35).

As Israel left the altar they had built and walked away from defeat, Joshua wanted the Word of God to be fresh in their hearts. By retaining the written Word of God in their hearts, they brought great prosperity and success to their lives. As Joshua wrote upon the stones of the altar, does the Word have a permanent place sketched upon your heart?

2. The Anatomy of Scripture

Today, the written Word of God is commonly referred to as the Bible. In ancient times, and as it was being written, it had other designations such as the Law, the Book of the Covenant, Sacred Writings, Sacred Books, and Scriptures. All of these terms designated the same thing at different points in its history.

The Bible has two parts, known as “testaments.” These are the Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament records the history of the Hebrew people, later known as Israelites. It contains the revelations of God and His will communicated to the Hebrews before the time of Christ. The Old Testament has thirty-nine units of Scripture called books. These books were written during a span of about one thousand years (roughly between 1400–400 BC). Originally, the Old Testament books were written mostly in ancient Hebrew and briefly in Aramaic.

The span of time between the last Old Testament book written and the first New Testament book written is approximately 400 years. This length of time is called the intertestamental period. In short, it consists of what occurred between the two Testaments.
The second part of the Bible is called the New Testament and most modern translations begin with the book of Matthew. Matthew, along with the other New Testament books, continues and completes the story of the Old Testament. Its focus is the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. After Jesus died, was buried, and resurrected, He poured out His spirit on the day of Pentecost and empowered a group of disciples who laid the foundation of the modern-day church. The New Testament has twenty-seven books written over a span of about fifty years (roughly AD 45-95). It was originally written in ancient Greek.

Together, the Old and New Testaments have sixty-six books. The entire span of time in which these sixty-six books were written consists of about 1,500 years.

Holy Bible – Nearly 40 individual writers on 3 different continents in 3 different languages wrote 3,566,480 letters, 810,697 words, 31,175 verses, 1,189 chapters, and 66 books over 1,500 years to produce one book, harmonious and unique in its continuity.7

3. From Ancient Times to Modern Day

When talking with skeptics about the validity, truth, and trustworthiness of the Bible, the following three questions are likely to arise:

1. Can we really trust what we read in the Bible to be identical to its original manuscripts?
2. Copies of copies normally have flaws, so how can we really know that the Bible, which has been copied through time, hasn’t been corrupted?
3. Isn’t it likely that with the sheer number of scribes and copyists that have handled the Bible throughout history, some have inserted their own agendas and ideas into the text?

All of these questions are completely legitimate and must be answered to cast out the doubt held by many. The answers to these three questions will determine whether or not the Bible is really trustworthy, whether or not it is a valid source of history, and whether or not it is able to stand as a book of divine truth. As we shall see, these questions each have a solid answer, raising the standard of the Bible far above all other sacred texts. In the words of Hank Hanegraaff, author and president of the Christian Research Institute, “Old Testament scribal luminaries ranging from Ezra to the Masoretes set an unimaginable standard of excellence in their copyist practices – a standard that should provide us with complete confidence in the Old Testament canon.”8 When looking to the New Testament, critics argue that the thousands of variants in manuscripts strip the Bible of its legitimacy. But, as scholar Ron Rhodes points out:

Of these 150,000 variants, 99% hold virtually no significance whatsoever. Many simply involve a missing letter in a word; some involve reversing the order of two words (such as “Christ Jesus” instead of “Jesus Christ”; some may involve the absence of one or more insignificant words. Really, when all the facts are put on the table, only about 50 of the variants have any real significance—and even then, no doctrine of the Christian faith or any moral commandment is affected by them.9

Looking into history, we find that ancient scribes and copyists held their task in the highest regard. Prior to beginning their work, they washed themselves and put on clean clothes. Jews had such an

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7 These numbers are according to the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. It should also be noted that the numbers of letters, words, and verses depend on which edition of the KJV is used.
exalted view of the Old Testament that they perceived the missing of a mere tittle (a microscopic appendage at the end of a Hebrew letter) to be an affront to the holiness of their creator.\textsuperscript{10}

To explain this point further, consider the exhaustive process by which Scripture was copied by Jewish scribes. In their day there were no computers or typewriters. Everything that was written, and in our case copied, was written by hand, sentence by sentence, word by word, letter by letter.

To prevent errors, Jews developed a series of rules to govern their work. Before them would be two scrolls. One would have a copy of the Scriptures written on them by an earlier scribe and the other would be blank. Writer Larry Stone points out:

- No word or even a letter could be written from memory. A scribe must have another scroll open before him and pronounce every word and letter out loud before copying it.
- Before writing the name of God, a scribe must reverently wipe his pen and say, “I am writing the name of God for the holiness of His name.”
- Every letter had to have some space around it. If one letter touched another or if a letter was defective because of incorrect writing, a hole, a tear, or a smudge so that it could not be easily read, the scroll was invalidated.
- Each column must have no fewer than forty-eight nor more than sixty lines and must be exactly like the manuscript being copied.\textsuperscript{11}

After manuscripts were completed, a particular kind of an editorial scribe referred to as a sopher (meaning “counter”) counted every word and every letter.\textsuperscript{12} These editors “would also make sure that the middle word on each page of the copy was the same as the middle words on the manuscript being copied.”\textsuperscript{13} In some cases, if mistakes were found that could not be fixed, a manuscript was burned. In other cases, for more severe errors, manuscripts were buried in the ground. But even before this laborious process was started, scribes tested their reed pens to ensure that each was writing well.

Later in time, a group of scribes referred to as Masoretes received the task of copying the Scriptures for future generations. Their efforts were just as meticulous and intensive. In the words of Bible scholar Dr. Kenneth Barker:

The Masoretes developed a system to ensure that every copy was as nearly perfect as humanly possible. They counted the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurred in each book. They noted and recorded the middle letter of the entire Old Testament. They recorded the middle letter on each page and the number of letters and words in each column. They examined every copy of the Old Testament and withdrew from circulation all copies in which any error was discovered.\textsuperscript{14}

By this arduous system, modern readers can rest assured that the Bible has not lost its originality and that it can be trusted as it was thousands of years ago.

4. What are the Dead Sea Scrolls?

In modern times, not only do we have the gift of hindsight, but we are also not far removed from one

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] Hank Hanegraaf, Has God Spoken, 11.
\item[12] John McClintock and James Strong, Cyclopaedia of biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical literature, 465.
\end{footnotes}
of the most significant manuscript finds of the twentieth century. In 1948, a Bedouin shepherd boy found ancient scrolls and manuscript fragments housed in a series of caves a few miles southeast of Jerusalem near the Dead Sea. These ancient scrolls are referred to as the Dead Sea Scrolls. They are significant for many reasons.

Firstly, the Dead Sea Scrolls include a complete copy of the book of Isaiah, another fragment of Isaiah, and fragments of almost every Old Testament book.

Secondly, before 1947 the oldest known biblical manuscripts dated back to the Masoretes of medieval times. With the find of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars had texts 1,000 years older than that. The scrolls and fragments had survived for nearly 2,000 years in the sand.

Thirdly, they were written at the time of Jesus and tell us about the religious and political atmosphere of the time. But most importantly, the Dead Sea Scrolls (apart from insignificant spelling changes and other small differences) match the Hebrew text that is the basis of today’s Old Testament. They predated the Masoretic text by more than 1,000 years, yet they had no significant difference in substance!\(^\text{15}\) This shows modern Bible readers that what they read remains pure and has been amazingly preserved from generation to generation.

If God would orchestrate the right men at the right time and through His divine inspiration birth the Scriptures, wouldn’t He also orchestrate history and exercise His sovereignty to preserve those Scriptures? Clearly, the answer is yes.

In short, the Dead Sea Scrolls established what countless people all over the world already knew—that the Bible is just as true now as it was when it was first written. It is a valid and unchanging source of the heart and mind of God, and it is trustworthy!

\(^{15}\) The Masoretes were early medieval Jewish scribes who are mostly known for adding vowel points into the ancient Hebrew text, which was originally composed of only consonants. It’s interesting to note that the Hebrew people held the name of God to be so sacred that they refused to say it aloud, and instead used the substitute, “Adonai,” meaning Lord. From Hebrew transliterated to English, the name of God is written as “YHWH.” Into these letters the Masoretes inserted the vowel points of Adonai and produced the common word for God, “Jehovah.”
1. The Canon of Scripture

The word *canon* comes from the root word “reed,” which may denote a cane or rod. The term is borrowed from the Greek kanon which indicates a rule or a standard of measurement.

In ancient times, a reed was used as a measuring stick or a standard of evaluation. In religious circles, a canon represents an index or list of distinguished or accepted books. As it pertains to the Bible, the Canon represents the officially accepted list of books within the Bible that have shown to be divinely inspired of God and thus carry the authority of God. The sixty-six books of the Bible are those that “met the standard” and, therefore, were worthy of inclusion. Understanding the Canon of Scripture is necessary because it helps us to discover why the sixty-six books of the Bible are included and why others are not.

Since the beginning of history, people have been writing things down. In the early days of civilization, writing was limited to royal records and decrees. Over time, however, religious figures began to pen their sacred texts and eventually merchants and the advent of international commerce led to the development of written forms of language. In most instances, the writings of people represented their cultural identity. As nations, language distinctions, and religions developed, so did written records and literature. In Ecclesiastes 12:12, King Solomon described his day by declaring, “Of making many books there is no end.”

Just as other cultures developed their own sacred texts and forms of religion, God commanded Israel to write down His words so that they could be preserved for future generations.

- “And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua” (Exodus 17:14).
- “When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me...it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites” (Deuteronomy 17:1, 18).
- “Thus speaketh the Lord God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book” (Jeremiah 30:2).

Also see Exodus 34:27; Deuteronomy 27:8; Nehemiah 9:38; Isaiah 8:1; and Habakkuk 2:2.

It was very important to God that His people remember His words and pass them on to their children. At certain times, He would deliver a testimony through a prophet or spiritual leader and command Israel to cling to it. 

*For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the*
generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. (Psalm 78:5-7).

While on the isle of Patmos, God told the Apostle John, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches” (Revelation 1:11). At all times, God desires that His people are a people of the Book.

Many biblical writers made it clear that what they spoke and wrote did not come from their own wisdom or understanding. They were merely vessels through which the ink was passed. As the Spirit of God moved upon them, they put pen to paper and recorded the commandments and declarations of God. (See II Peter 1:21.)

As the various writers of Scripture penned their words, they did so with full knowledge that their words originated with God and thus should be treated as sacred. They were warned not to tarnish the written laws of God, and carried out their task with extreme diligence.

“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

“What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32).

“Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:6).

By the first century, the identity and religion of the Hebrew people had been centralized in Jerusalem around their worship at the Temple. This changed in ad 70 when the Roman emperor Titus, in an effort to defeat a Jewish rebellion, besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. The destruction of the beloved Temple caused a dispersion of Jews and Jewish culture throughout the Mediterranean world. It was during this time that church leaders collected their ancient scriptures into a single unit. Later, at the Council of Jamnia (circa ad 90) church officials ratified and officially recognized the books that the Jews had accepted five centuries before.

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament were widely circulated by the end of the second century, but it wasn’t until the fourth century that the Canon of the New Testament was closed. To counteract the influence of false doctrines and debates over the canonicity of certain books, and to withstand political pressures, Christian leaders at the Council of Carthage (ad 397) decreed that only “canonical” books should be read in churches. It was at the earlier Council of Hippo (ad 393) that the twenty-seven New Testament books were recognized as a unit of divinely inspired books and thus added to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. Here we see the providence of God. As Erwin Lutzer notes, “These councils neither added nor subtracted books, but simply approved the list of 27, which had already been recognized by the early church. Given the geographical distances, the limitations of communication, and the diverse backgrounds of the churches, such agreement is remarkable.”16

Interestingly, during the span of time that the sixty-six books of the Bible were written (roughly 1,500 years) there was an array of religious texts in circulation. But not all religious texts were considered to be the holy, inspired Word of God. The question then arises as to how the books of the Bible were chosen and why others were not.

To answer these questions, it must be noted that when one of the books of the Bible was written, God’s people in that generation recognized it as inspired of God primarily on the basis of who wrote it and what it said. As scholar R. T. Beckwith conveys, “What qualifies a book for a place in the Canon of Scripture is not just that it is ancient, informative and helpful, and has long been read and valued by God’s people, but that it has God’s authority for what it says.”17

When a text was considered or analyzed, it had to adhere to a certain standard to be viewed as divine and contain the authority of God. The key to canonicity is divine inspiration and thus canonization is the recognition of the divinely authenticated word.18 The “rod of measurement” that formed the Canon of Scripture as we know it was developed by a series of questions. Questions that were asked of a text or holy book included:

- Was it written by a Holy man of God (whom the people recognized as an apostle, prophet, or spokesman for God) with a ministry confirmed by miracles, signs, and wonders?
- Did it achieve widespread acceptance by the people of God?
- Did the book contain elements of prophecy that were fulfilled after the fact?
- Did it stand the test of time?

Religious texts that didn’t measure up to this standard were not placed in the Canon, but instead were held equal to commentary or works of fiction.

2. The Apocrypha

As we have discovered, during the time that the biblical books came into formation, other books and religious writings came into circulation as well. Today, some Bibles have a series of extra books contained between the Old and New Testaments called the Apocrypha. (Many Catholic Bibles contain these extra apocryphal books.) They were written during the intertestamental period and first century. To understand how these books came into being, and why certain Bibles contain them, we look back into history.

The word Apocrypha means “hidden.” Those who liked these books believed that their writers were given secret hidden knowledge. Unknown men who did not claim to be divinely inspired wrote them. Much of these books are works of fiction, legends, and are quite mystical fables. Some of the Apocryphal books even have historical errors. (See the Apocryphal book of Judith.)

In 1546 a very significant movement was sparked within Europe. History calls it the Protestant Reformation. In the Reformation, many Christians stood up and opposed the corruption of the very dominant Roman Catholic Church. It was during this time that the Catholic Church declared the Apocryphal books as Holy Scripture at the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Roman Catholic Church leaders did this to defend many of their unbiblical beliefs at the time and to justify some of their otherwise unbiblical actions.

One writer points out, “No New Testament writer ever quoted from any of these books as Holy Scripture or gave them the slightest authority as inspired books, even though they often quoted from the Old Testament as Scripture.”19 Jesus and His disciples in the New Testament ignored these books and do not mention their existence.

3. The Stones Cry Out

18 Beckwith, Origin of the Bible, 77.
One of the most helpful practices of Bible study is the study of context. The adage “every text has a context” rings true. To study the context of a Scripture is to investigate why, how, and when it was written. Understanding context is also understanding who wrote the Scripture and to whom it was originally written. Each Scripture has a story behind it and understanding this story will increase one’s ability to grasp the full meaning of the text.

Bible critics will deny the validity of a text and proclaim that the Bible is a collection of fictional tales not corroborated by actual historical evidence. What these critics fail to understand is that the Bible itself is a historical record in and of itself. As the nations and peoples of the Bible rose and fell, they left behind evidence that not only provides modern readers with a context for study but also a greater foundation for faith.

As we look to the historical evidence left behind by the people of the Bible, we discover that the stones cry out. Throughout Scripture, the symbolism of speaking stones reminds us that God has left behind a witness to His works. Referring to the spiritual blindness of the Babylonians, the prophet Habakkuk wrote, “For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it” (Habakkuk 2:11).

When Jewish leaders sought to silence those praising the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, “He answered and said to them, ‘I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out’” (Luke 19:40). If God’s people withhold His praise, then the stones will declare His glory. In one sense, this miraculous feat is already achieved. As we look into the ground and study archaeology, we discover that the stones do indeed declare the wonderful works of God.

4. The Purpose of Archaeology

The first known appearance in English of the word archaeology was in 1607, where it was used to refer to the knowledge of ancient Israel from literary sources such as the Bible. From the very beginning, the idea of archaeology was linked to the Scriptures. Over time, however, as the science of archaeology developed and included lands other than those having a biblical significance, biblical archaeology came to be viewed as a separate discipline within the larger field.

Today, we have scores of inscriptions, glyphs, and writing samples preserved since ancient times. As the Bible was being played out in real time, cultures expressed various forms of their identity through writing on papyrus, parchments, scrolls, or clay products. The climate of a particular area determined if these records were preserved over the ages. In many instances, it is potsherds (broken pieces of pottery) or other stone items that are discovered by archaeologists. It is only in hot and dry climates under exceptional conditions that papyrus, parchments, or other paper materials are preserved.

When speaking of the significance of archaeology, Professor Amihai Mazar, states,

*I think the most important thing that we should understand is that archaeology is our only source of information that comes directly from the biblical period itself. Archaeology can give us information right away from the period when things happen… a whole picture of daily life from this period as well as inscriptions… which are the only written evidence that we have from the Biblical period, except the Bible itself.*

5. A Dig That Made a Difference

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22 Ibid., 26.
23 From interview of Amihai Mazar by Randall Price, recorded in The Stones Cry Out (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997) 35.
The following archaeological discovery is evidence of the great wealth of artifacts left behind by biblical peoples. Artifacts such as these cause us to look to the Scriptures with a sense of awe.

The Hittites
As a people, the Hittites are mentioned in the Bible forty-seven different times. They are listed among the nations inhabiting ancient Canaan when Abraham entered the land. (See Genesis 15:20.) They are also mentioned as purchasers of chariots from King Solomon. (See I Kings 10:29.)

What’s interesting, however, is that despite their presence in the biblical text, there was a time when many scholars doubted they ever existed. For decades it was said that the Old Testament writers invented the Hittite tribe since their existence could not be independently confirmed. The matter was further confounded by the fact that just over one hundred years ago, no historical evidence of such a people had ever been found. To critics, the Hittites were just one reason why the biblical account was untrustworthy.

However, in 1876 everything changed. On a dig that year, British scholar A.H. Sayce discovered an undeciphered script carved on rocks in Turkey. An identical script was also found in Syria. Sayce determined that this script was a historical record of the Hittites, preserved through the ages.

Later, around 1911, German professor Hugo Winckler was dispatched to a dig at the ruins of an ancient city in Turkey called Bogaz-koy. From this site, locals were selling tablets in area markets. As a cuneiform expert, Winckler studied these tablets. After further excavation, five temples, a fortified citadel, sculptures, and more than 10,000 clay tablets were discovered. After the tablets were deciphered, Winckler announced to the world that the ancient Hittites had been found.

Today, the existence of the Hittite empire is extensively documented. This is just one example in which the Bible has been shown to be accurate in its portrayal of ancient nations. Archaeological surprises continue to reveal people and places known in the Bible but unknown in any other source.

In the case of the Hittites, we see that archaeology has tremendous value because it continually provides assurance of the biblical story, discredits skepticism, and demonstrates the Bible’s distinctiveness. When considering the wealth of archaeological discoveries, we must admit that history has been a friend of the Bible, not its foe.

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24 Lutzer, 7 Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible, 75.
1. When the Word Strikes Deep

The Old Testament book of II Kings discusses the history of the nation of Israel as led by various kings. In it, as well as in the other historical books of the Old Testament, there are many cycles. We see that the Israelites go through a season where they neglect God and turn to foreign idols. God then sends His judgment, the Israelites repent, and once again there is peace among God’s people. Time passes and the Israelites turn back to the religions of pagan nations. The cycle begins again.

In II Kings 22 we find two kings, Manassah and his son Amon, who both did evil in the Lord’s sight and brought the Israelites through a cycle of sin. In the year that Amon died, the throne was given to his son Josiah who was eight years old. Though the two kings that preceded him were evil, he was different. Rather than following the example of his father or grandfather, Josiah walked after the way of the great King David, his ancestor. (See II Kings 22:2.)

Studying Josiah’s story, we find that something significant took place in the eighteenth year of his reign. As king, it was his job to restore the Temple that his father and grandfather had neglected. Seeing the house of God in dire need of repair, he sent scribes and priests to organize a clean-up crew. As carpenters, builders, and masons repaired and rebuilt the Temple, Hilkiah, the high priest, stumbled upon an old scroll. The scroll he found was the Book of the Law (the Word of God) given to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai:

“And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it” (II Kings 22:8).

As a scribe, Shaphan would have known the significance of this unique scroll. He would have recognized that these old writings were holy writings given to the people by God. He would have recognized it as being the Word of God. Understanding the importance of this temple find, he brought it to King Josiah:

“And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king” (II Kings 22:10).

As Josiah heard the Word of God, he was greatly troubled. It upset him. It convicted him. He realized as he heard the Word how much he and his kingdom had neglected the things of God.

“And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes” (II Kings 22:11).

Josiah “rent his clothes,” which means that he tore his clothes in despair. It was an act of anguish. He had the horrible realization that his people, under the prior kings, had strayed so far from God. The written Word of God, when he heard it read aloud, moved him. Like a knife through his heart, the sin of his people troubled and grieved him.
This shows what happens when we rightly divide and “cut through” the Word. It reveals the sin in our hearts and, if studied properly, it will lead us to a better way of living.

In Acts 2:37, after hearing Peter preach on the day of Pentecost, the people were “pricked in their hearts” and compelled to change. Like a sword, the preached Word cut into their hearts and revealed who they were on the inside.

Many are familiar with Hebrews 4:12, which states, “For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” This teaches that the Word exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. This is exactly what happened in the heart of Josiah. Like a two-edged sword, it cut into his heart.

The Law had such an effect on King Josiah that he read it in its entirety to all of the people. From that day forward, as long as Josiah was king, the Israelites lived by the Word. Even though the Scriptures were neglected by the prior kings, they found their proper place during the reign of Josiah—in the hearts of all the people. God withheld His wrath because Josiah led the people to repentance.

Turning to God, Josiah broke the cycle of sin in his lineage. In this, we find that Josiah’s success was a direct result of his obedience and devotion to the Word of God. The level of Josiah’s spiritual prosperity was determined by the level of his repentance and the level of his devotion to the written Word. Because he allowed the Word to affect him as it did and because he turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, it was recorded that there was never a king before or after like him. (See II Kings 23:25.)

2. Divine Inspiration

Writing to his young protégé Timothy, who at the time was pastor of the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul records two Scriptures that establish the authority of the Bible:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Timothy 3:16–17).

These two Scriptures help us to understand the nature of the Bible, but may also bring some confusion. To understand how something written by men can carry such divine power, we look to verse 16. In it we find the word “inspiration.” Because Scripture is inspired of God, it is divine and true.

The original Greek translation of the word inspiration is a compound word, theopneustos (Strong’s #2315). It is derived from two Greek compound word parts:

1. theos – meaning “God”
2. pneo – meaning “to breathe or to blow” (the p is silent)

Patched together, the word literally means “God breathed.” Stating that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, II Timothy 3:16 helps us to understand the divine origin of Scripture. Though it was written by the hands of man, it was divinely breathed into existence by God.

3. The Dual Nature of Scripture

We must acknowledge that even though the Bible is God’s divine Word, it is partly a human work as well. In the course of history, God used ordinary and fallible people to give us His infallible written
Word. This is extraordinary because these writers lived hundreds of years apart. They wrote in different places, times, and moods; on three separate continents (Asia, Africa, Europe); and in three separate languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek); but they wrote with exceptional harmony.

While the human writers employed words that reflected their language, culture, personality, education, experiences, circumstances, and style, God guided the process so that each word would accurately convey His message. The political, social, philosophical, and even religious conditions of the times all came to bear on what was expressed on paper, yet without distorting or detracting from what God wanted written for us.

God did not dictate the Scripture mechanically, but guided and superintended the writers within the framework of their own personalities and backgrounds. Some were kings, prophets, and poets, and others were fishermen, military leaders, and tax collectors. They were different people, but all inspired, or breathed upon, by the same God. The vocabulary is the writers’, but the message is God’s. This is helpful to understand when studying the books of the Bible. Some are incredibly descriptive and symbolic (Revelation), some are poetical (Psalm), others are very historical (I-II Kings), some use a lot of lists (Numbers), and others are greatly detailed (Luke). Each book has its own unique writing style, expressed in who they were and what they did with their life. God did not ignore their personality, outlook, or the cultural conditioning that made them unique individuals. Rather, He used who they were to accomplish His divine purpose.

4. The Decree of Cyrus

“The sacred Scriptures come from the fullness of the Spirit; so that there is nothing in the Prophets, or the Law, or the Gospel, or the Epistles, which descends not from divine majesty.” –Origen the Greek scholar

We’ve established that the Bible is a God-breathed book. Being divinely inspired, it exists as a book of prophecy foretelling future events with amazing accuracy. An example of this is a prophecy given by the prophet Isaiah concerning a Persian king named Cyrus. When the prophecy was given by Isaiah, it was nearly one hundred years before Jerusalem would be destroyed by Babylonian forces. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar would destroy Jerusalem and take the Israelites back to Babylon as captives. Their captivity would last for seventy years. After their seventy years of captivity, they would be released and allowed to return to rebuild their homeland.

The prophecy of Isaiah is spectacular because it describes the time after the captivity of Israel when the people would be set free. Isaiah, under the inspiration of God, saw an age far into the future, hundreds of years after his death. Not only did Isaiah predict that Babylon would conquer Jerusalem, but he went on to say that the Persians, in turn, would conquer Babylon.

Isaiah delivers his prophecy not in general terms, but by divulging details about future events. He even goes as far as to name the Persian king who would rule the Persian Empire and let the Jews return to Jerusalem. That Persian king was Cyrus.

Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—
To subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings,
To open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut
I will go before you and make the crooked places straight;

28 Paul E. Little, Know What You Believe (Cook Communications, 1999), 14.
29 David K. Bernard, God’s Infallible Word, 40.
I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron.  
I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places,  
That you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel  
(Isaiah 45:1-3).

Today, it is agreed among scholars that the founder of the Persian Empire, Cyrus, ruled over Persia from 559-530 BC and that during his reign he conquered Babylon in 539 BC. We also understand that Isaiah lived between 700-680 BC. With these dates and a little math, we discover that Isaiah named Cyrus and foretold a decision he would make nearly 100 years before he was born and 150 years before he became king.

In the first year of his reign after defeating Babylon (538 BC), Cyrus issued a decree that allowed the captive Jews to return to Jerusalem.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia... the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel... which is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-3).

As these words were leaving the mouth of Cyrus, a prophecy given over 150 years before by an old Hebrew prophet was fulfilled.

Interestingly, scholars now have access to a clay cylinder covered in cuneiform writing known as the Cyrus Cylinder. The cylinder records the Persian king's edicts in language similar to those in the biblical account. The cylinder states a certain aspect of the foreign policy of Persia under the rule of Cyrus. It illustrates the custom of allowing foreign people to resettle in their own land and the freedom they were granted to follow their religious practices. Cyrus, in keeping with the Persian policy reflected in the Cyrus Cylinder, respected the gods of foreign captives and returned all the Temple vessels when he allowed the Jews to return to the homeland and rebuild the Temple.30 (See Ezra 1:7-11.) The Cyrus Cylinder is only one example in which archaeology has confirmed the fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

5. More Digs That Made a Difference

In lesson three, we discussed the discovery of Hittite artifacts and their significance to biblical archeology. We will continue our study of key archeological digs and analyze two more discoveries that give testimony to biblical events.

The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

In 1845, one of the most exciting discoveries ever made in biblical archaeology was unearthed. The find was of a large, black stone extracted from a pit dug at the ancient Assyrian city of Calah. Archaeologist Randall Price describes the features of this stone:

“The stone was a four-sided polished block of black limestone six feet high. On each side of the obelisk were carved relief sculptures depicting various scenes of tribute brought to the Assyrian court. In addition, above and below the panels on all sides were almost 200 lines of cuneiform text.”31

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30 Price, The Stones Cry Out, 252.  
31 Ibid., 77.
Once translated, the text was found to chronicle thirty-one different military campaigns of Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. The surprise came when a particular set of lines above a mural were translated:

“Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. Silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets... staves for the hand of the king and javelins... Shalmaneser received from him.”

The uniqueness of this caption is the name of Jehu, the king listed who paid tribute to Shalmaneser. According to the Bible, Jehu was an army commander who was “appointed of the Lord” to serve as King of Israel. (See II Kings 9-10 and II Chronicles 22:7-9.) He was instructed by God to oppose the house of the wicked King Ahab and eradicate the idolatrous worship of Baal from the land of Canaan.

The significance of this find is that for the first time on any archaeological artifact, a portrait of one of the kings of Israel was found. The black obelisk displayed the earliest ancient depiction of a biblical figure, and it was contained in an extrabiblical source.

The Bible tells us that towards the end of his reign, Jehu lapsed in maintaining the law and began to follow polytheistic traditions of religion. In time, the Lord withdrew His protection from the Israelites and foreign enemies began to invade. Though not described in the biblical text, it is inferred that at this time Jehu was made to pay tribute to Shalmaneser. This conclusion fits within the broader context of II Kings, which does describe other Israelite kings paying tribute to Assyria.

“King Shalmaneser of Assyria attacked King Hoshea, so Hoshea was forced to pay heavy tribute to Assyria” (II Kings 17:3, NLT).

The Pilate Stone
Pontius Pilate is known to be the Roman officer who supervised the beating and crucifixion of Jesus. He also had the distinction of being the one of the only people that Jesus talked to during His trials. It was Pilate who placed the inscription above Jesus on the cross, “Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.” (See John 19:19.) Though in Jerusalem for the death of Jesus, the official residence of Pilate was the Mediterranean port city of Caesarea.

Interestingly, until the twentieth century, the actual existence of Pilate was doubted by Bible critics. Their doubt arose due to the lack of historical evidence that gave credit to his life or rank as a Roman official. However, 1961 at an excavation at Caesarea’s Roman theater, a stone plaque was found bearing Pilate’s name. As Randall Price notes, “The two-foot slab was found re-used as a building block in a fourth-century remodeling project, but it was an authentic first-century monument, apparently written to commemorate Pilate’s construction of a temple for the worship of Tiberius Caesar, the Roman emperor during Pilate’s term over Judea.”

Now known as the Pilate Inscription, the stone contained four lines of Latin

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32 Ibid., 77.
writing his title as “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea,” a title similar to his designation in the gospels. (See Luke 3:1.) The inscription is significant because it was the first archaeological find to mention Pilate and testify to the accuracy of New Testament accounts.

6. A Call to Action

Archaeology can simply be defined as the study, investigation, and critical evaluation of the material past left behind by ancient cultures. As we look to the various cultures that find their place within the biblical story, we see an overwhelming amount of debris which can illuminate our reading of the Scriptures. From graverobbers who plundered the tombs of antiquity to scientists and scholars, archaeology has served an indelible purpose in giving faith a reasonable context in which to develop. As we seek to know the Bible, we must understand that its spiritual message was first delivered in a historical context. As Gonzalo Camargo has famously noted, “No longer do we see two different worlds, one the world of ‘sacred history’ and the other of ‘profane history.’ All of history is one history, and it is God’s history, for God is the God of all history.”

Across Israel and the Near East there are thousands of ancient sites left unexcavated. As nations conquered nations and cities were built upon the ruins of cites, layers upon layers of artifacts found their place buried among dirt and stones. A mound of this nature is referred to as a tel. A tel is an artificial hill created by the repeated destruction and rebuilding of ancient cities and villages on the same site. Many of these tels are left undiscovered due to ongoing political turmoil and conflict. One of the largest of these sites is Tel Hazor which, even though repeatedly excavated by different groups, remains largely undiscovered.

On February 8, 2017, The Jerusalem Post published an article celebrating the discovery of the twelfth Dead Sea Scrolls cave. Until recently, it was believed that only eleven caves contained remnants of these ancient scrolls. According to Dr. Oren Gutfeld the findings include the jars in which the scrolls and their coverings were hidden, a leather strap for binding the scroll, a cloth that wrapped the scrolls, tendons and pieces of skin connecting fragments, and more. Gutfeld believes the important discovery of another scroll cave attests to the fact that a lot of work remains to be done in the Judean desert and finds of huge importance are still waiting to be discovered.

As archaeologists dig deeper and deeper into the dirt, evidence of the Bible’s reliability continues to mount. Though the Bible does not need the testament of history to change a heart, history does in fact complement the Bible’s purpose of providing a clear path to faith. As Erwin Lutzer declares, “Perhaps the reason for the Bible’s longevity lies not in the men who wrote it, but the God who inspired it.”

As evidence of the Bible’s reliability continues to mount, so should our faith in the God of the Bible.

If these four lessons have stirred your heart or challenged your thinking, then you must hear this call to action. Let the testament of history lift your eyes and cause you to seek the God of the Bible. Just as a tel has layers upon layers of artifacts, Scripture has layers upon layers of truth waiting to be discovered. All you need to do is open the pages of the Bible and do some digging of your own.

A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and the committal read. No other book has been so chopped, sliced, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. But somehow the corpse never stays put. -Bernard Ramm, theologian and apologist.

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35 Price, The Stones Cry Out, 46.
37 Eisenbud, “Hebrew University Archeologists Find 12th Dead Sea Scrolls Cave.”
38 Lutzer, 7 Reasons Why You Can Trust The Bible, 81.
The gracious availability of the written Word did not come easy. It was birthed through immense struggle, persecution, and sacrifice. In spite of this, there are many in the world today who neglect the Bible. This life-establishing Word, forever strong, preserved since the ancient days, sits on shelves, dashboards, and decorates coffee tables.

In an interview with Assist News Service, Ron Rhodes, President of Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries, quotes a recent poll which indicates that 35% of born-again Christians do not read the Bible at all. Among those who say they read the Bible, the vast majority only read it during the one hour they attend church each Sunday.

Today, basic Christian truths are virtually unknown to a majority in this nation. Our research indicates that if current trends of biblical illiteracy continue, by 2040 the Bible will be a “thing of the past” for most people who claim to be Christ-followers.

In his first epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul urges young Timothy to strive to become a “workman” of the Word, so that he can rightly divide its truths: Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15).

When Studying the Bible: ____________________________________________.
When Studying the Bible: ____________________________________________.
When Studying the Bible: ____________________________________________.

STOP AND DISCUSS

• How do you think we can best show honor to the life and work of William Tyndale?
• Can you relate at all to the Ethiopian eunuch? Have you ever been confused with what you have read in the Bible? If so, how did you respond?
• If the purpose of Bible study is to bring about spiritual change, how do you suppose we allow the Bible to change us? In what practical ways do you think the Bible should influence our decisions or behavior?
• What part do questions play in our study of the Bible? How have questions influenced your study of the Bible?
What three things does God clearly tell Joshua at the start of his ministry? (See Joshua 1:8.)

1. _______________________________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________________________

Based on what you have learned in this lesson, how would you respond to the following questions if asked by Bible critics?

1. Can we really trust what we read in the Bible to be identical to its original manuscripts?
2. Copies of copies normally have flaws, so how can we really know that the Bible, which has been copied through time, hasn’t been corrupted?
3. Isn’t it likely that with the sheer number of scribes and copyists that have handled the Bible throughout history, some have inserted their own agendas and ideas into the text?

STOP AND DISCUSS

• Why did Joshua write upon the stones of the altar after their defeat?
• The span of time between the last Old Testament book written and the first New Testament book written is approximately 400 years. This length of time is called the intertestamental period. Why do you think the Bible is silent on the events that occurred during this time?
• If you were an Old Testament scribe, what do you think a normal “day at work” would look like?
• What are the Dead Sea Scrolls and why are they significant?
As it refers to the history of the Bible, what does the term “canon” indicate?

______________________________________________________________________________

Why is it important to understand the significance of the Bible canon?

______________________________________________________________________________

What is the Apocrypha and why do some Bibles contain these extra books?

______________________________________________________________________________

As it pertains to Bible Archaeology, what does it mean to say that “the stones cry out”?

______________________________________________________________________________

STOP AND DISCUSS

• Do you agree with what this lesson described as the purpose of archaeology? Why or why not?
• How did the Protestant Reformation impact Bible study or Bible reading?
• As you consider that manner in which the books of the Bible were canonized, do you think we can have the utmost faith that the Bible we read is in the form that God intended?
• The discovery of the Hittites is an example of archaeology providing a historical witness to biblical events. How can we use discoveries like this to strengthen our defense of the infallibility of Scripture?
This lesson lists two archaeological digs that made a difference. Which of these discoveries do you think was the most significant? Why do you feel this way?

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_______________________________________________________________________________

What does it mean to say that the Bible is divinely inspired?

_______________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

Who was the king that Isaiah named nearly 100 years before he was born?

_______________________________________________________________________________

How should the story of Josiah influence our approach to the Bible?

_______________________________________________________________________________

STOP AND DISCUSS

- Ezra 1:1-3 portrays the decree given by Cyrus which allowed the Israelites to return home to rebuild Jerusalem. How was this decree significant to Bible prophecy?

- Why did King Josiah tear his clothes? What lesson can we learn by his response? How should we emulate his actions and apply his experience to our own lives?

- Do you agree with the conclusion that Josiah’s success was a direct result of his obedience and devotion to the Word of God? Why or why not?

- Following the example of Josiah, how would a person break the cycle of sin in their lineage?