

# TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

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## THE WONDERS OF THE BIBLE (PT. 1)

### HEBREWS 4:12

**T**HE TERM “BIBLE” COMES FROM THE GREEK *biblos* meaning “a book,” but we should note at the outset of this study that the Bible is infinitely more than just a book. You can go to a bookstore, for example, and find *The Shooter’s Bible* if you are a gun enthusiast, *The Archer’s Bible* if you are an archery aficionado, or *The PC Bible* if you are a “computer nerd.” In these cases, “bible” is used to convey the idea that this book is the definitive book on that subject. Likewise, but even deeper, God’s Bible is *THE definitive work* of all works. It encompasses all subjects (either in word or principle) and is the *sole* authority for faith and practice. It is also the *sufficient* authority. While some view the Bible as *authoritative*, they do not view it as *sufficient*, which is the real crux of the matter.

While the term “Bible” is certainly a valid way to refer to God’s Word, in light of what we observed above, the term has lost much of its power and uniqueness. After all, how can you really compare *The Holy Bible* with *The PC Bible*?

With that in mind, we would submit that we should refer to God’s Word in ways that show its uniqueness. One such way to refer to God’s Word appears in 2 Timothy 3:16–17: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” “Scripture” is the Greek *graphē*, which forms the root of many English words, such as “photography” and “graphics.” The word speaks of drawing, writing, or painting. Eventually the word came to be used exclusively in the New Testament as referring to the “Holy Scriptures,” that is, “sacred writings,” a term which, of course, referred back to the Old Testament writings. This term appears some 51 times in the New Testament.

At this point, some object. They say, “But wait, many groups call their writings ‘Scripture.’ Many groups have their own sacred writings. Christianity is just another religion that has its own collection of writings.” This objection is well-taken and is the reason for this study.

The most impressive and significant term for the Bible, however, is the term **Word of God**. This is the term used in another crucial text. Our main text (Heb. 4:12), in fact, is one of the most critical texts of Scripture that is itself *about* Scripture: **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 term refers to *the complete body of revealed truth*. This wonderful term immediately differentiates *God’s Word* from every *other* word. We find in this extraordinary verse, in fact, seven principles concerning the nature of Scripture and the place it should have in the believer’s life.

*First*, Scripture is of **God**. The word “inspiration” we noted earlier is the Greek *theopneustos*, which means *the forceful and conscious exhaling of God into the Scripture writers*. The Bible didn’t come by the pithy sayings of ancient sages, or from the ramblings of philosophical thinkers; it came by the forceful exhaling of God. With His omnipotent energy, God consciously “blew” His very words into the writers of Scripture, while still allowing for the writer’s personality and style. *That* is the miracle of inspiration. It’s inspiration, therefore, that makes Scripture accurate, authoritative, and admonitory. Why? *Because it’s what God has said*. In fact, the Bible declares hundreds of times that God Himself is speaking, using such phrases as: “saith the Lord” (854) “the Lord said” (219), “Jesus said” (65), “Jesus saith” (43), and “God said” (46).

Further, we see the words “my word” some 15 times in Scripture. In Isaiah 66:2, for example, God declares through the prophet: “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” Who is God looking for? *God is looking for a heart that takes His Word seriously, that trembles at His Word*. Sadly, many Christians are not trembling at God’s Word because they’re too busy laughing at the jokes being told from the pulpit. Many preachers are not trembling because they’re too busy looking for clever sermon titles and preparing little talks that boost the listener’s self-esteem.

But God is looking for people who will take His Word seriously, those who believe without doubt that it says what it means and means what it says.

*Second*, Scripture is **quick** (i.e. living). Here is one of those profound truths of Scripture that should awe and captivate us—Scripture is not dead literature; rather it is alive, a living entity. The word “quick” in our Authorized Version is an Old English word that translates *zōō*, from which (along with *zōē*) is derived such English words such as “zoology” and “protozoa.” The idea is to have life or existence in contrast to death

and nonexistence. In the thinking of the ancient Greeks, life was not a *thing* but *vitality*. For that reason, *zaō* and *zoē* can't be used in the plural. In other words, we don't possess several "lives" like we could possess several books or shoes; rather life is a singular, vital, and active reality. That is what Scripture is. It's not like any other book. It's *alive*, *active*, and *absolute*.

*Third*, Scripture is **powerful**. This is the Greek *energēs*, from which is derived English words such as "energy" and "energize." It, and other words in this group (*energeia* and *energeō*), picture work that effects something, that accomplishes something. Additionally, the predominant idea is that it's God who is the One at work accomplishing His ends. Here, then, we see God's Word working and accomplishing something.

How pivotal that principle is! Sadly, many in the Church today simply do not recognize that God accomplishes His purposes primarily through His Word. Many Christian leaders are trying to accomplish "God's work" through their own self-designed programs, so-called "ministries," and other means. But none of those have any power whatsoever. Though sincere, loving, and zealous, such modern trends in reality reflect a very low view of Scripture (whether intended or not). They clearly imply that God's Word by itself is not powerful enough to accomplish His work. But God's Word declares that His Word alone has power and accomplishes His work. Romans 1:16, for example, unambiguously states that *the Gospel itself* is the power of God unto salvation. There are many other similar declarations of Scripture, such as not only our main text but also the following as well: Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18–24; 2:1–5; and 2 Timothy 4:1–4?

*Fourth*, Scripture is sharp. **Sharper** translates the Greek *tomōteros*, a compound comprised of *tomos* (not in the NT), "sharp," and *temnō* (not in the NT), "to cut or divide." The picture here is the sharp, very fine edge of a sword. While a physical sword can become dull, however, God's Word is forever sharp and is sharper than any other cutting weapon.

*Fifth*, Scripture is **piercing**. Not only does a sword cut and slice, but it also stabs and pierces. The Greek behind **piercing** (*diikneomai*) literally means "to pass through." Just as a hot knife will easily pass through butter with no more than its own weight behind it, the Word of God alone, with no help from us, will pierce any pretense, prevarication, or perversion. This again leads to another principle.

*Sixth*, Scripture is divisive and offensive. Simply because it is an *offensive* weapon, the Sword does, indeed, *offend*. **Dividing** is the Greek noun *merismos*, which comes from the verb *merizō*, "to divide into parts," and therefore refers to the act of separating or distributing; in other words, to be brutally graphic, it pictures chopping something into pieces. Tragically, many today don't think there should be either *strong* preaching, because it might *offend* some people, or *authoritative* preaching, because it might *ostracize* others. Yes, we are always to speak the Truth in love (Eph. 4:15), but love must never compromise the Truth.

*Seventh* and finally, Scripture is discerning. The Greek behind **discerner** here is *kritikos*. It appears only here in the New Testament and from Plato's day onward referred to "a competent, experienced judge." It comes from the root *krinō*,

to scrutinize and sift. That is, indeed, a perfect description of the Word of God. It's The Discerner, The Sifter, The Judge of men's thoughts and even their "intents," that is, intentions, ideas, notions, and purposes (Greek, *ennoia*).

In a day when discernment is virtually non-existent, this verse needs more emphasis than ever before in the history of the Church. I do not make that statement lightly or say it just for dramatic effect. In the days of the Reformation, for example, there were no gray areas. You either stood on the Roman Catholic side or were under the wrath of that system because you were a reformer. Today, however, we have gray areas everywhere, all shades of gray. There is subtle error everywhere, and sifting through it all has never been more crucial. To our own peril, instead of wielding the sword *against* the enemy, we are *embracing* him.

And so it is, that in literally hundreds of instances the Bible declares, or at the very least assumes, itself to be **the Word of God**.<sup>1</sup> This is what is commonly called "internal evidence," that is, what the Bible says about Itself. The Bible does not attempt to *prove* it is of God, rather it just *declares* itself to be. Almighty God does not need to explain Himself or prove Himself to the likes of men. He simply declares the Truth, for which men are then responsible.

But this internal evidence is not the subject of this study. This study is about "external evidence." To illustrate, a defendant in a trial might offer all kinds of internal evidence, such as his good character, being an upstanding citizen, and where he was when the crime occurred. But if the external evidence, such as multiple witnesses, fingerprints, and forensics say something different, who are we going to believe? Likewise, there is an enormous amount of evidence *outside* of God's Word that demonstrates that it is, indeed, of Divine origin, totally unique, timeless, and authoritative. Let's look at 11 historical and irrefutable facts that defy human explanation. I like to call these "The Wonders of the Bible."

## I. Unique Authorship

No other work can claim the authorship that the Word of God claims. Its unique authorship demonstrates itself in at least four ways.

*First, written over a 1,600 year time span.* As every author knows, he or she writes something only once; everything after that is painful editing. We tweak here, make an adjustment there, move something to a different place, or just delete something else altogether (just as I did in this article). And then an editor gets hold of it and changes more. But here we see 1,600 years. Another way of saying this is that it was written over a period of 60 generations. Think of it! How could a collection of writings survive that kind of time span? How could it come down through the ages unchanged, unscathed, and unscarred?

*Second, written by some 40 authors from every walk of life.* Here is another amazing and totally incomprehensible fact from a human perspective. I have read many books that were compilations of articles or essays by various authors, but rarely is there total agreement among the writers in a book of only 300 or so pages. But here we see a massive book by some 40 authors. The world says that men from different environments and backgrounds invariably look at things differently, having different values and viewpoints.

Not so the Bible. Ponder this for a moment: Moses was a political leader, Joshua a military man, Nehemiah a cupbearer (servant), David a shepherd, armor-bearer, and king, Daniel a prime-minister, Matthew a tax collector (one of the lowest life-forms of that day in the people's eyes), Luke was a physician, Peter a fisherman, and Paul a rabbi. How could some 40 authors possibly write on the same subjects, much less be in total agreement on those subjects? Nothing can account for that miracle except verbal inspiration. Only the power of God could make such a group compatible and unified (and we'll come back to unity in a moment).

*Third, written in different locations.* Not only were these men socially diverse, but their physical locations during their writing was equally diverse. Moses wrote in the middle of a wilderness, while many of the prophets wrote in the busyness of the city. John wrote in the solitude of his exile on the island of Patmos, while Joshua wrote in the midst of battle. David wrote from the serenity of the countryside while tending sheep and from the security of his throne, while Paul wrote during the hardships of travel and during the uncertainty of prison. Add to that the fact that the Bible was written on three continents, and then try to deny its Divine authorship.

*Fourth, written in different languages.* We will return to this again a little later, but one of the greatest problems people face in this world is the language barrier. And the reason for this, of course, is actually sin. It was because of man's rebellion that language became a divider instead of a unifier.

Having taught at the Haiti Bible Institute, I have faced this first-hand. Some words and concepts don't translate well from one language to another. More than once I would use an English word or idiom and my poor translator would stop, look at me, and say, "What?" I would then apologize for being a stupid American and choose another word. Worse, a word in one language sometimes does not even have an equivalent in another language. Have you also ever noticed that even English is sometimes its own barrier from one English speaking country to another? How about even from the northern and southern United States? My wife and I used to travel all over America, and such differences were often hilarious.

Well, the three languages of the Bible (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) are vastly different, but God made them work together in some truly amazing ways. For example, having written two daily devotional books on Greek and Hebrew words, it is fascinating for me to observe how concepts from the Hebrew translated into the Greek. In fact, every major doctrine of the New Testament is present in seed form in the Old, even though the two languages could not be more different. This leads us right to the second wonder of God's Word.

## II. Complete Unity

In spite of the facts that the Bible was written by some 40 authors over 1,600 years, in different locations, and in different languages, *it is still totally unified*. Contrary to the accusations of skeptics and critics, there are no contradictions in God's Word. There is a total unity of doctrine.

Throughout its many pages, for example, the Bible presents only one view of God. Now, let's make this practical for

a moment. Do you think that we could take 40 writers today, even Christian ones, and expect them all to have the same concept of God? But that is precisely what we see in Scripture. Likewise, it presents only one view of sin and depravity, one method of salvation, and one program for the ages. As you read through those pages, never do you find one prophecy contradicting another prophecy or one statement on a controversial subject opposing another statement. What could possibly explain such unity apart from Divine control? Louis Sperry Chafer, that well-known theologian and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote this profound statement: "To account for such an amazing book with its continuity of development on natural means would demand a greater miracle than inspiration itself."<sup>2</sup>

## III. Written In Superior Languages

Some portions of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic. As one scholar tells us: "This language, which shows influence in both vocabulary and form in the New Testament, was the local language of the land of Palestine and much of Syria when Jesus and the apostles lived and ministered. It was no doubt the language that Jesus used in day-to-day conversation."<sup>3</sup> Why use Aramaic? Because it would serve to link the Old and New Testaments through the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles who spoke it in everyday conversation.

The vast majority of the Old Testament, however, was written in Hebrew. Hebrew is a vivid, pictorial language. It's amazing, in fact, how many English words are used to translate various Hebrew words. By using it God could dramatically and pictorially record His mighty acts. Coupled with this, Hebrew is also a personal language. Because of the pictures it paints, it therefore speaks to the whole man, the intellect, emotion, and will.

We then come to the New Testament. God chose to use the Greek language to record His final messages to men. Why was this? For one thing, Greek is the most precise of all the earthly languages. It has tenses, voices, and moods that English does not have. It is for that very reason that as an expositor I always go to the languages first. Without an understanding of what the text actually says, it is impossible to get to the Truth. God wanted to use such precision to present theological truth clearly, truth which was often only pictured in the Hebrew. Additionally, Greek was at that time almost universal, being spoken by nearly everyone in the world at that time.

The most fascinating thing about all this to me is how Greek came to be the universal language of the day. Recall that Aramaic was the common language, but why did that change? *Because of the conquest of Alexander the Great*. He marched from modern day Greece, through Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), down through Syria into Egypt, back across through Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and to the borders of India. By the time of his death in 323 BC, the Greek language and culture permeated the known world. This empire soon fell to the Romans, but Greek culture still dominated.

The significance of all this is obvious. *What an example of the sovereignty and providence of God!* He wanted the precision of the Greek language to convey His message. To bring

about His purpose, then, He worked through one who didn't even know Him. It's also interesting that the Greek of the New Testament is not the Classical Greek of Plato's day, rather it is the Koine (or common) Greek. The simplified Koine actually cleaned up some of the problems of the Classical and became the better of the two.

So God wanted precision. That should remind us just how much we lack precision in our day. We actually prefer ambiguity and uncertainty. How foolish! Oh, how we need precision! We need to be precise on doctrine and practice.

#### IV. Unmatched In Sale And Circulation

The Bible remains *the* best seller every year. Well over two billion Bibles and portions of the Bible have been published, and that doesn't even count the electronic publishing of our day. Nothing even comes close to this. The Bible also remains the most translated of all books in the history of civilization. Usually, any book that has been translated into half a dozen languages is considered to be most impressive. But according to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "by 1966 the whole Bible had appeared in 240 languages and dialects" with "one or more whole books of the Bible in 739 additional ones." As of 2005, at least one book of the Bible has been translated into 2,400 of the 6,900 languages and is the most widely distributed book in the world. Again, nothing comes even remotely close to that. Who could accomplish that besides God? While we might attribute some of that simply to a publisher's desire to sell books (and that is actually a problem in some respects), we still do not discount God's sovereignty in taking His Word around the world.

#### V. Central Theme

In light of the Bible's unique authorship and complete unity, it also displays one central theme, *The Lord Jesus Christ*. We see Him throughout the pages, for He is the "Word who became flesh" (Jn. 1:14). Some time ago we published the booklet *We Preach Christ: The Bible Story* (also TOT #82). It traces the Lord Jesus from Genesis to Revelation by telling the Bible story in a seven act drama: the creation, the curse, the comfort, the calamity, the contract, the coming, and the consummation. But for now, let's close part 1 of our study by tracing our Lord through His book (this is also included in the booklet):

In *Genesis* He is the Beginning and the Creator of all things. In *Exodus* He is the Deliverer and the Redeemer. In *Leviticus* He is the Priest, the Sacrifice, the Blood, and the Offering. In *Numbers* He is the Chastizer and the Purifier. In *Deuteronomy* He is the Law.

In *Joshua* He is the Conqueror, in *Judges* the King, and in *Ruth* the Kinsman-Redeemer. In *1 and 2 Samuel* He is the Anointed King, in *1 and 2 Kings* He is the reigning King, in *1 Chronicles* He is the Genealogy, and in *2 Chronicles* He is the Reviver. In *Ezra* He is the Temple, in *Nehemiah* the Walls, and in *Esther* the Deliverer.

In *Job* He is the Suffering Servant, in *Psalms* the Praise of God, in *Proverbs* Our Wisdom, in *Ecclesiastes* the Teacher, and in *The Song of Solomon* He is pictured in the Beloved Bridegroom.

In *Isaiah* He is the Coming Messiah, in *Jeremiah* and *Lam-*

*entations* He is the Compassionate Judge, in *Ezekiel* He is Watchman, and in *Daniel* He is the Returning Messiah.

In *Hosea* He is the Loving Redeemer, in *Joel* the Merciful Jehovah, in *Amos* the Judge of Sin, and in *Obadiah* the Condemning Judge. In *Jonah* He is the Sent One, in *Micah* the Prince of Peace, in *Nahum* the Counselor, and in *Habakkuk* the Just One. In *Zephaniah* He is the Protector, in *Haggai*, the Temple, in *Zechariah* the Shepherd, and in *Malachi* He is the Messenger.

In *Matthew* He is the King, in *Mark* a Servant, in *Luke* a Man, and in *John* He is God. In *Acts* He is the Risen Savior in Power, in *Romans* He is the Gospel, in *1 Corinthians* He is the Right Conduct, and in *2 Corinthians* He is *The Authority*.

In *Galatians* He is the Only Salvation, in *Ephesians* the Church, in *Philippians* the Only Joy, in *Colossians* the Eternal Glory, and in *1 and 2 Thessalonians* He is the Returning Christ.

In *2 Timothy* He is the Good Minister, in *2 Timothy* the Faithful Minister, and in *Titus* the True Minister.

In *Philemon* He is the Law of Love, in *Hebrews* the Priest, and in *James* the Works of Righteousness.

In *1 Peter* He is the Glory of Suffering, in *2 Peter* the Basis for Growing in Grace, in *1 John* the Basis of Fellowship, and in *2 and 3 John* He is the Truth. In *Jude* He is the Faith We Contend For, and in *Revelation* He is the Reigning King.

In addition to all that, He is the Light of Creation, the Ark of the Flood, Aaron's Rod, David's Sling, The Lamb Without Blemish, and the Cloud and the Pillar of Fire in the Wilderness. He is also Jacob's Ladder, Manna From Heaven, the Bronze Serpent, the Cities of Refuge, and the Book of Life. In the Tabernacle, He is the Ark of the Covenant, the Shewbread, the Lampstand, the Laver, the Veil, the Brazen Altar, and the Altar of Incense. And finally, men such as Adam, Abel, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Sampson, David, and Jonah were all types of Christ.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ truly is the central theme of the Bible. And without that theme, in fact, we have no Bible.

We will conclude these "wonders" in our next issue by considering six other evidences that are even more unique and striking. In the meantime, let us rejoice in the Word God has given us.

Dr. J. D. Watson

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Deut. 6:6-9, 17-18; Josh. 1:8; 8:32-35; 2 Sam. 22:31; Ps. 1:2; 12:6; 19:7-11; 93:5; 119:9, 11, 18, 89-93, 97-100, 104-105, 130; Prov. 30:5-6; Is. 55:10-11; Jer. 15:16; 23:29; Dan. 10:21; Matt. 5:17-19; 22:29; Mk. 13:31; Lk. 16:17; Jn. 2:22; 5:24; 10:35; Acts 17:11; Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor 2:13; Col. 3:16; 1 Thes. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:23-25; 2 Pet. 3:15-16; Rev. 1:2; 22:18.

<sup>2</sup> *Major Bible Themes*, Rev. Ed. (Zondervan, 1974), 13.

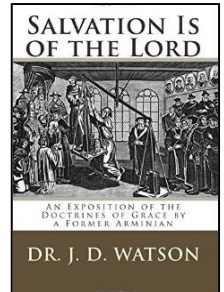
<sup>3</sup> Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 218.

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