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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

A businesswoman was on a crowded flight home when she pulled out her Bible and began to read. The man next to her saw her reading the Bible and said, “You don’t really believe the Bible, do you?”

“As a matter of fact, I do believe it—every word.”

“It’s just a bunch of fairy tales. Like that guy that got swallowed by a whale. What’s his name?”

She said, “His name was Jonah, and I believe he was swallowed by a whale and survived to tell about it.”

“Can you tell me HOW a man can be swallowed by a whale and live to tell about it?”

“I don’t know HOW, but I suppose that when I get to heaven, I can ask him.”

The man said, “Well, what if Jonah’s not in heaven?”

Without missing a beat, she said, “Then *you* can ask him!”

I agree with her. The Bible is really true.

When I was a child I learned a song in Sunday School, “The B.I.B.L.E. yes, that’s the book for me. I stand alone on the Word of God—the B.I.B.L.E.!” I still believe the Bible is the Word of God, but not because my parents and my Sunday School teachers told me. I’ve examined the evidence, and I’ve come to believe it for myself.

The Bible is the most remarkable book ever written. How many other books of 3,000 year old poetry do you read on a regular basis? But thousands read a portion of Psalms and Proverbs every day, and it speaks to them.

From the beginning of our nation, the Bible has been the basis for our morality. Every American President since George Washington has taken the oath of office with his hand on the Bible. Abraham Lincoln wrote: “I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given man.” George Washington said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.” Patrick Henry said, “The Bible is worth more than all the other books which have ever been printed.” Here’s what the Apostle Peter wrote about the Bible in II Peter 1:16-21: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

This message is the second lesson on the Seven Wonders of the Word of God. In the last lesson, I shared the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. There are also Seven Wonders of the Natural World. They are:

1. The Grand Canyon in Arizona
2. The Paricutin Volcano near Mexico City

3. The Rio de Janeiro Harbor in Brazil
4. The Northern Lights in the arctic
5. Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, Africa
6. Mt. Everest in Nepal
7. The Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Australia

Most people will never see all seven of these natural wonders, but anyone with a copy of the Bible can experience the seven wonders of the Word of God. In the last lesson, we examined (1) the Bible’s divine inspiration; it is God-breathed which makes it a living book. (2) The Bible’s unique formation; it was written by over 40 men over a period of 1,500 years. Yet it there is one unified theme in all 66 books. (3) The Bible’s widespread circulation; it is the most printed, most circulated book in history. (4) The Bible’s honest confirmation; you can find scientific, literary, and historical truth to confirm the Bible.

WONDER# 5: THE BIBLE’S ENDURING PRESERVATION

The Bible has endured through the ages unlike any other book. The Psalmist wrote: “Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.” (Psalm 119:89) The Bible has had many enemies through the centuries. Eusebius wrote that in 303 A.D., the Roman Emperor, Diocletian, issued an edict to destroy all Bibles and Christians. It is estimated only fifty copies of the Bible survived this attack. Yet, only a few years later, Diocletian’s successor, Constantine, legalized Christianity and ordered additional copies of the Bible to be made at government expense.

For centuries the Bible was only translated into Greek and Latin. During the years called the Dark Ages, the only copies of the Bibles were in churches, and few of them were actually read. The Bible became more of a shrine. In the early 14th century, scholars like John Wycliffe started translating the Bible into English. The Roman Catholic Church resisted the effort to translate the Bible into such a vulgar language, so they opposed these efforts. In 1408, Wicliffe’s hand-copied English Bible was burned.

Later, men like William Tyndale continued the effort to make the Bible available to common people. Tyndale was appalled at the lack of biblical knowledge—even among the priests. Once, at a dinner he was discussing the Bible with a priest and Tyndale said, “If God spares my life, before many years pass, I will cause that a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost.” (Quote taken from <http://www.gospelcom.net/chi/DAILYF/2003/10/daily-10-06-2003.shtml>)

After translating the New Testament into English, Tyndale was arrested as a heretic by the church and on October 6, 1536 he was strangled and then burned at the stake. Like a Bible that survives a house fire and retains a smoky odor, all of our Bibles carry the lingering odor of the sacrifice of John Wycliff and William Tyndale.

The Bible has been attacked, abused, and outlawed, yet it still lives on. It is an anvil that has worn out many hammers. Dr. Bernard Ramm wrote: A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow, the corpse never stays put.” (*Protestant Biblical*

Interpretation, p. 231)

The French Philosopher and Author Voltaire, whose real name was Francois-Marie Arouet, mocked the Bible and Christianity. He lived during tumultuous times of change and enlightenment. He predicted within a 100 years there would not be a Bible or a Christian left on the earth. He died in 1778. And ironically within 50 years, the very house Voltaire owned was being used by the Geneva Bible Society to distribute copies of the Bible in French. Today, Voltaire is gone, and God’s Word lives on. As I once said, “the vagueness of Voltaire is vapid next to the victorious verses of this Volume!”

WONDER #6: THE BIBLE’S PROPHETIC VALIDATION

“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it.” (II Peter 1:19) Other books claim divine inspiration such as the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and the Hindu Vedas. But none of these writings contain any predictions that can be verified from history.

The Bible contains over 2,000 statements of prophecy, many of which have already occurred exactly as the Bible predicted. The Bible tells us God employs prophecy: “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come.” (Isaiah 46:9-10) Prophecy is simply history in reverse. There are many different kinds of prophecies in the Bible, but consider two.

A. Historical prophecies: Israel resettled

God predicted to Abraham and his descendants that He would give them a land for their own. He kept that promise. He also prophesied if they forsook Him and His commands they would be uprooted from their land. That came true, as well. But there is plenty of evidence God promised to bring the Jews back to Israel for a final time.

In 70 A.D. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and by 163 A.D. the Jews were all driven from the land, to be scattered throughout the world. But in the early 1900s the Jews started returning to the Holy Land. And in 1948, Israel was chartered as a nation for the first time in over 2,000 years. God had predicted this when He said, “I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them.” (Amos 9:14-15) For centuries the Holy Land lay in ruins and a succession of Arab and Turkish tribes controlled the area. It was such a desert that when American Mark Twain visited there in 1867 he described it as, “a desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given wholly to weeds...hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.” (*The Innocents Abroad*, p. 361)

I’ve seen with my own eyes that Israel is now one of the most fertile countries on earth. They have literally caused the desert to bloom. God had said, “In the days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill the world with fruit.” (Isaiah 27:6) How could that

prophecy have been fulfilled before there was a worldwide export business? Today, Israeli farmers export their fruit to every continent.

B. Messianic prophecies: Details about Jesus

Over 700 years before Jesus was born in the Bethlehem, the prophets of the Old Testament had many predictions about the details of His life. Let's let the scriptures speak for themselves:

(1) The Virgin Birth

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son." (Isaiah 7:14) "How will this be?" Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34)

(2) The Place of birth

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2) "So Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David...while they were there the time came for the baby to be born." (Luke 2:4, 6)

(3) Betrayed by a friend

(There are five different details in this prophecy). "If you think it best give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter." So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter." (Zechariah 11:12-13) "When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty coins to the chief priests and elders...So Judas threw the money into the temple and left...the priests picked up the coins and said, 'It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.' So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners." (Matthew 27:3-7) Remember, these were the enemies of Christ. They weren't standing there with a Bible in their hand asking, "Okay, what do we do next to fulfill the scripture for Jesus?"

(4) Crucified

"A band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced by hands and feet." (Psalm 22:16) This was written four hundred years before crucifixion was ever utilized for execution. "When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified him." (Luke 23:33)

(5) Died with thieves

"He was assigned a grave with the wicked." (Isaiah 53:9) "Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed." (Luke 23:32)

(6) Lots cast for clothes

“They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” (Psalm 22:18) “When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. ‘Let’s not tear it,’ they said to one another. ‘Let’s decide by lot who will get it.’” (John 19:23-24)

(7) Buried in rich man’s tomb

“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.” (Isaiah 53:9) “As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph...Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock.” (Matthew 27:57-60)

Sometimes familiarity with the Bible breeds apathy. It’s probable you’ve heard those prophecies about Jesus before. Your reaction may be, “So what?” Well, let’s forget the Bible for a moment and imagine you’re traveling in Europe and as you visit an ancient cathedral in England, you lean against a wall, and you tumble into a long deserted secret room. There in front of you is an old book. As you begin to read that book, you discover it was written in the year 1304, 700 years ago, and it is a book of predictions. Imagine your response if the book predicted seven things about a certain man—see if you could figure it out. It predicted that (1) A man will born in Connecticut—when Connecticut wasn’t even a state. And that this certain man would (2) Grow up in Texas. Well, there are perhaps thousands of men who were born in the Connecticut and moved to Texas. But then the book says the man would (3) Graduate from Yale and Harvard. There still might be hundreds who qualify. Next the old book predicted this man would (4) Work in the oil and gas business—the possibilities are getting smaller. And that he would (5) Be the father of twin daughters. If you haven’t recognized the man yet, it further predicts he would (6) be elected Governor of Texas, and then (7) Be elected President of the United States. There’s only one person who has fulfilled that prediction—President George W. Bush. If someone actually discovered an old book that predicted that, and the age of the writing could be verified, it would make the front page of every newspaper in the world. It would be the lead story on Fox, CNN, ABC, CBS, and NBC. That book would be considered one of the most valuable manuscripts on earth.

We already have a book that has predicted not just 7, but over 60 details about the life of Jesus—and Jesus is the only individual in history who has fulfilled them. When I go downtown and park in a parking garage, I take my parking ticket in to have it validated. A person in the office I visit takes a stamp and presses it to the ticket. It’s a validation of my claim I was there on business. You can take the Bible in one hand and a history book in the other, and you can stamp “validated, validated, validated” over hundreds of Bible prophecies have already come true. How can you be intellectually honest with yourself if you ignore this wonder of the Word?

WONDER #7: THE BIBLE’S PERSONAL APPLICATION

All the other proofs and validations about the Bible fall short of the greatest wonder of the Bible: It can lead a person to salvation. Paul wrote to Timothy: “From infancy you have known the holy

Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.” (II Timothy 3:15) You can find truth in the Bible that can change your life.

The Bible says a lot of things. One of my favorite stories is about the country pastor who went to visit Mrs. Jones, a widow in his church. Mrs. Jones had a fine vegetable garden so the pastor liked to stop by around lunch to enjoy some of Mrs. Jones’ fresh tomatoes and squash. On this particular day, he walked up to the garden and called, “Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Jones?” But there was no reply. Her car was in the garage, so he suspected she was home. He went to her back door and knocked a few times, but still there was no reply. Trying to be clever and witty, he left his card in the door with this scripture reference: “Revelation 3:20,” which says, “I stand at the door and knock, and if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them.”

But the pastor didn’t know Mrs. Jones *was* home, but when he arrived she was just stepping out of the bathtub. She was so embarrassed she hid behind the bathroom door and didn’t answer him. Next Sunday she handed the pastor a note that simply said, “Genesis 3:10.” When the Pastor looked it up, it said, “I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself.”

You can make the Bible say a lot of things! But the main message of the Bible is that God loves you and He wants to forgive your sin so you can be a part of His family—forever. The Bible is really a love letter He has written to you.

When I first met my wife, I was a student at Samford University in Birmingham, and she was a student at Auburn University. This was long before email and cell phones—and even before cheap long distance. So every day, we wrote letters to each other. I knew exactly when the mail was delivered to the Student Union Building and I went by there every day at the same time. When I looked through the little window in my box and saw a letter, my heart would jump out of my chest and I could hardly open the box soon enough. I’d sit down right there and read her letter. I didn’t react the same way to junk mail. That’s what the Bible is: It’s a love letter God has sent to you. It applies to your life. Compared to it, every other book ever written is like junk mail.

I realize some public schools study the Bible as literature to bypass the convoluted legal restrictions placed on them by our federal judicial system. I’m in favor of studying the Bible wherever and whenever possible. However, if you try to study the Bible as if it is simply a great piece of literature, you’ll miss the point. C.S. Lewis, the esteemed Professor of Literature at Cambridge, when asked about studying the Bible as literature responded, “The Bible is not merely a sacred book but a book so remorselessly and continuously sacred that it does not invite, it excludes or repels, the merely aesthetic approach. It will not continue to give literary delight very long except for those who go to it for something quite different. I cannot help suspecting, if I may make an Irish bull, that those who read the Bible as literature do not read the Bible... The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Christ Himself.” (*The Literary Impact of the Authorized Version*, 1950, p. 142)

When I taught the Masterlife Bible study years ago, we learned a presentation called “God’s Word in Heart and Hand.” It is a simple memory tool using your hand to understand how to get a firm grasp on the Word of God. If you hold your left hand with the palm upward, your thumb

can represent HEARING the Word. If your only exposure to the Bible is to HEAR it taught, you won't be able to retain it well. It would be like trying to hold a book using only your thumb! The next step is READING the Word for yourself. That's represented by your forefinger. When you read it, you have a better grip (like holding a book between your thumb and forefinger), but it's still not strong. The middle finger stands for STUDYING the Bible. The difference between reading the Bible and studying the Bible is that when you study it, you may read the same verse several times and you seek help from Bible help materials. The ring finger is to remind you of the importance of MEMORIZING the Word. How much scripture can you quote? Only those scriptures you've committed to your memory are really in your heart. The little finger stands for MEDITATING on the Word. Only when you've heard it, read it, studied it, and memorized it can you sit down and close your eyes and ponder over its meaning to you. But that's not all. You can hold a Bible in the tips of all five fingers and it can still be snatched away. And Jesus said that Satan wants to snatch God's Word away from us. (Luke 8:12) It's only when you place it in your palm and APPLY it to your life that it becomes a part of you. When you apply it to your life, you're saying, “God is speaking to me and I'm going to OBEY Him!”

CONCLUSION

When you get a firm grasp on the Bible and start applying it to your life, you'll find Jesus on every page. In John 5:39 Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, “Search the scriptures, because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about ME.” If you read the Bible and you don't find Jesus, you'd better read it again, because He's there. Just reading the Bible won't change your life, but you can meet Jesus in the Bible and He *can* change your life!

Dr. Gaylord Kambarami is the General Secretary for the International Bible Society in Zimbabwe. Once, he was handing out New Testaments and a very skeptical man told him that if he took the Bible, he would just tear the pages out and roll them up to make cigarettes. Dr. Kambarami told him to go ahead and do that, but promise him he would read each page before he smoked it.

Years later, he met the man at a Christian convention. The scripture-smoking man had been saved and was now an evangelist himself. His testimony was simple. The man told how he had received a New Testament to make cigarettes. He said, “I smoked my way through Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but when I got to John 3:16, I couldn't smoke anymore. When I read that I got on my knees and that's when Jesus changed my life!”

The Bible is a wonderful book because it teaches us about a wonderful Savior! As Peter wrote, “You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (II Peter 1:19) If you've been suffering through a long lonely night of spiritual darkness, you can experience the hope and promise of a new dawning in your heart. Jesus Christ, the bright and Morning Star can come and give you light and direction. Will you come to Him today?

OUTLINE

Recap of last week’s message, “Seven Wonders of the Word of God, part 1”:

- Wonder #1: The Bible’s divine inspiration
- Wonder #2: The Bible’s unique formation
- Wonder #3: The Bible’s widespread circulation
- Wonder #4: The Bible’s honest confirmation

WONDER# 5: THE BIBLE’S ENDURING PRESERVATION

“Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.” *Psalm 119:89*

WONDER #6: THE BIBLE’S PROPHETIC VALIDATION

“I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come.” *Isaiah 46:9-10*

- A. Historical prophecies: Israel resettled (Amos 9:14)
- B. Messianic prophecies: Details about Jesus

1. The Virgin Birth (Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1:34)
2. The Place of birth (Micah 5:2, Luke 2:4)
3. Betrayed by a friend (Zechariah 11:12-13, Matthew 27:3-7)
4. Crucified (Psalm 22:16, Luke 23:30)
5. Died with thieves (Isaiah 53:9, Luke 23:32)
6. Lots cast for clothes (Psalm 22:18, John 19:23-24)
7. Buried in rich man’s tomb (Isaiah 53:9, Matthew 27:57-60)

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