

## INTRODUCTION

In the recent election, exit polls revealed the #1 concern of American voters is moral issues. But you cannot have moral standards without a basis for determining right and wrong—and the best place to find that is in the Bible. Over the next two lessons, I’ll be sharing with you about the miracle of this book we call the Bible. While most Americans claim to believe the Bible, there is an alarming lack of Bible knowledge. It’s almost comical. Here are some actual statements written by middle school students in response to a Bible test:

1. Noah’s wife was Joan of Ark.
2. Moses went to the top of Mt. Cyanide to get the 10 Commandments.
3. The seventh commandment is, “Thou shalt not admit adultery.”
4. Joshua fought the battle of Geritol.
5. The followers of Jesus were called the 12 decibels.
6. David killed Galihad, who was one of the Finkelsteins.
7. A Christian should have only one wife. This is called monotony.

Of all the books ever written, the Bible is unique. When you finish reading other books, you can lay them aside, but the Bible is a book you can study for the rest of your life and never exhaust the truth found in its pages. This is 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.”

I want to share with you what I believe to be the Seven Wonders of the Word of God. In about 430 B.C., the Greek historian Herodotus was the first to write about “Seven Wonders of the World.” Pythagoras and other philosophers believed seven was a lucky number because it was a prime number, not too large or small. Over the next 500 years, the list of Seven Wonders changed, but most historians agree the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World were:

1. The great pyramid in Giza. It’s the oldest, and the only one of the seven wonders that can still be seen.
2. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon. This botanical miracle was in modern day Iraq. The gardens were built by Nebuchadnezzar to remind his wife, Amytis of her mountain home.
3. The Statue of Zeus at Olympia. This was a 40-foot-tall statue that overlooked Athens. Zeus held a smaller statue of Nike (Victory) in his right hand.
4. Temple of Artemis in Ephesus. Built by King Croesus in 550 B.C., this magnificent

building had 127 solid marble columns around the perimeter.

5. Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. This was a magnificent tomb built for the Persian King Mausolus. His wife and daughter started building the tomb three years before he died. That’s where we get our English word *mausoleum*.

6. Statue of Helios at Rhodes. Sometimes called “the Colossus,” this 110-foot statue of the sun god Helios was built on an island just offshore Rhodes. Some say it was the inspiration for the Statue of Liberty, which is forty feet taller.

7. The Lighthouse at Alexandria. Egypt is sometimes called “the Pharos” which is the Spanish, French, and Italian word for “lighthouse.” The entire lighthouse stood 384 feet tall, which is almost as tall as the Washington Monument.

Six out of seven of these wonders of the ancient world no longer exist. But you and I hold in our hands a miracle called the Word of God. Please consider the first four of the seven wonders of the Word of God.

### **WONDER # 1: THE BIBLE’S DIVINE INSPIRATION**

Peter wrote in verse 16, “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Some claim the Bible is simply a book of myths and legends with moral lessons, much like Aesop’s fables. We all like clever stories, but Peter says that the Bible *isn’t* a collection of imaginary stories. The word “Bible” comes from the word *biblos* which means “book” or “scroll.” It’s only when you add the adjective “holy” to “bible” that you understand that this book is different than any other. “Holy” (*hagios*) means “separate, distinct, different.”

Of course, there are many books today that claim to be the Word of God. Muslims claim the Koran is the Word of God. The Book of Mormon claims to be the Word of God. The Hindus believe the Bhagavad-Gita is the source of eternal truth. Karl Marx, with his atheistic worldview, claimed his writing, *The Communist Manifesto*, was the ultimate truth.

But the Bible makes a claim no other holy writing makes. It says, “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” (II Timothy 3:16) Other writings may be inspiring, but the Bible is inspired—God-breathed. Just as God breathed life into man and he became a living soul, God has given life to this book. It’s the only living book in the world. As we shall see later, enemies of the Bible have tried to kill it for centuries, but while the enemies are dead, the Bible lives on.

The Bible says, “For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit; joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight.” (Hebrews 4:12-13)

God wrote the Bible, so we should be careful we don’t criticize the author. An art critic was visiting a museum of art, making her standard caustic comments as she evaluated the paintings. She approached one frame and commented to the Curator, “Young man, I find this image to be shallow, and crude. It is lacking in both beauty and texture. What do you call it?” The Curator said, “Ma’am, that’s a mirror.” The Bible not only gives us a picture of God, it’s like a mirror

that reveals our innermost attitudes as well.

Virgil or Homer never prefaced their writings with “hear the word of the gods.” Shakespeare or Milton never asserted their writings came straight from God. But in the Bible, you read the phrase “Thus saith the Lord” over 2,600 times. When the Bible speaks, God speaks—it is divinely inspired.

## **WONDER #2: THE BIBLE’S UNIQUE FORMATION**

Peter wrote: “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.” (II Peter 1:20-21)

God didn’t write out the Bible in His own handwriting. Instead He used people to write His words down. He breathed on them and through them to write the scriptures. But they weren’t like court reporters simply reproducing the words. Instead, we see the personality of all the different writers shine through their writings. They spoke from God as they were “carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

The thing that makes the Bible totally unique is that it was written over a period of 1,500 years by forty different people, in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Moses was a prince of Egypt writing in the wilderness. Daniel was a Prime Minister writing from a palace in Iraq. Paul was a prisoner writing from behind bars. Amos was a farmer, Peter was a fisherman, Solomon was a king, Luke was a doctor, and Matthew worked for the IRS!

There is a wide variety of literary styles in the Bible as well. There is history, poetry, law, romance, biography, parable, and allegory. There are various contexts in which these books were written. Some wrote from the depths of despair and others from the heights of joy. Some wrote when God’s people were in exile, and others wrote when God’s blessings were abundant. And yet in spite of all this, when you understand these 66 books there is an amazing unity. The storyline of every book is the same: The Creator of the universe has made a way for you to know Him personally.

Josh McDowell wrote:

Find ten people from your local area having similar backgrounds, who speak the same language, and are all from basically the same culture. Then separate them and ask them to write their opinion on only one controversial subject, such as the meaning of life. When they have finished, compare the conclusions of these ten writers. Do they agree with each other? Of course not. But the Bible did not consist of merely ten authors, but 40. It was not written in one generation, but over a period of 1,500 years; not by authors with the same education, culture or language, but with vastly different educations, many different cultures, from 3 continents and 3 different languages, and finally not just one subject but hundreds. And yet in the Bible there is unity. There is complete harmony, which can not be explained by coincidence or collusion. The unity of the Bible is a strong argument in favor of its divine inspiration. (Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics Ask About the

Christian Faith)

### **WONDER #3: THE BIBLE’S WIDESPREAD CIRCULATION**

The Bible is the most widely distributed book in the history of the world. The Bible was the first book printed on a printing press, and since that first copy in 1456, over 7 billion copies of the Bible have been printed and distributed—that’s more than one copy per person! (I’ve got at least twenty). In 2001 alone, over 555 million copies of the Bible (or books of the Bible) were distributed (United Bible Societies).

Each year, members of Gideons International give away 60 million free copies of the Bible. That means on the average, every minute that passes on your watch, the Gideons have given away 113 Bibles. Today, you’ll get to participate in an “exit poll” as you leave. You can vote on whether or not you believe God’s Word should be distributed by giving some money to the Gideons who are standing there.

According to Ethnologue, there are over 6,000 different languages spoken on earth. The Bible has been translated in more of these languages than any other book in history. Muslims will tell you the Koran can only be read and understood in Arabic. But the Bible has been translated into over 2,200 different languages! The problem with Bible translation is the majority of the 6,000 languages don’t have an alphabet, and if they did, the people couldn’t read anyway. So, with modern technology, the Bible is being translated in spoken form so every ethnic group on the planet can hear the gospel. According to Wycliffe Bible Translators, the gap between translation and the remaining ethnic groups is rapidly closing from two directions. Everyday more of the Bible is recorded into these dialects, and at the same time, more of the members of these ethnic groups are learning languages in which the Bible has already been translated.

Jesus promised before He returned, the good news would be shared with every ethnic group on the planet. Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations (*ethnesin*), and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14) I’m not sure if He meant that when every ethnic group has been reached He would immediately return, or if that would just be a prerequisite. But every time I read that verse I wonder if some missionary isn’t approaching an isolated group somewhere on the planet who has never heard. Or if some member of some isolated tribe isn’t returning home with a Gideon Bible in his hand that he has learned to read. This book is the most widely circulated book in history!

### **WONDER # 4: THE BIBLE’S HONEST CONFIRMATION**

When I was growing up, my parents took me to Sunday School and church every week. Before I left the house, I made sure I had two important items, my Bible and my offering envelope. Most of the pictures of me as a kid show me dressed up ready to go to church with my Bible in my hand. I loved hearing the Bible stories, and even before I could read, I sat in church and looked through my dad’s Bible, because it had some pictures. One of the first songs I learned in Sunday School was: “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”

But there came a time when I was older and more educated when I had to be intellectually honest with myself. Is the Bible really the book for me? Is it really the Word of God? My parents and Sunday School teachers told me it was, but I had to decide for myself. I’m happy to say after 40 years of carrying my Bible to church; I am more convinced than ever that it is the Word of God.

The Bible is a thoughtfully prepared document of truth. When Dr. Luke wrote his narrative about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus he began by writing: “Since I have carefully investigated everything from the beginning (eyewitness accounts), it seemed good to write out an orderly account for you ... so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:3-4)

Dr. Luke wrote that we can have a certainty what is contained in the Bible is trustworthy. When you honestly evaluate the Bible, you’ll discover there are at least three areas of objective proof that confirm the truth of the Bible.

### **(1) Scientific proof**

The Bible isn’t a scientific textbook, but it contains statements about science. While science tries to tell us *how* the world was created, the Bible tells us *why* we were created. There are statements in the Bible that are advanced beyond the scientific knowledge at the time they were written.

For instance, scientists in the past considered that the stars were countable. Ptolemy said there were 1,056 and Kepler wrote there were 1,005. Centuries before, the Bible declared what scientists now know to be true—that the Universe is expanding, and contains more stars than can be counted: “I will make the descendants of David as countless as the stars in the sky.” (Jeremiah 33:22) Ancient scientist taught the earth was flat, and sat on a table. But the Bible had it right long before the scientists. Job 26:7 says, “He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing.” And Isaiah 40:22 says, “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.”

For centuries medical science was unaware of the danger of contagious infection. Today, our infectious isolation precautions follow what the Bible said thousands of years ago: “As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp. (Leviticus 13:46) Dr. Phillip Schaff has written: “There is no conflict between science and the Bible. It’s just that sometimes the theories of science need time to catch up.” (History of the Christian Church)

### **(2) Literary proof**

If you apply the same literary standards to the Bible that are applied to other historical literature, you find there is no other writing that can compare with the textual integrity of the Bible. For instance, you seldom hear philosophers or historians claim Plato never lived or he never actually said some of the quotes attributed to him. Yet there are only seven existing manuscripts containing information about Plato. At the same time, there are thousands of manuscripts containing information and quotes Jesus gave, yet some scholars continue to question the reliability of the Bible.

In determining the textual integrity of any ancient document, scholars consider several factors, but two of the most important are: (1) how many supporting manuscripts are there? And what is the duration of time between the actual historical event and the oldest extant document.

For instance, one of the most famous ancient documents is Homer’s *Iliad*. There are 640 supporting manuscripts, but the oldest one was written over 2,200 years after Homer wrote his. Julius Caesar wrote a lengthy treatise of the Gallic Wars, which is still used in our military academies to teach strategy. Yet there are only 10 supporting copies (none original) and the oldest dates back to 1,000 years after the life of Caesar.

In comparison, the New Testament has over 5,500 supporting manuscripts, and the oldest extant manuscript is dated to only 70 years after the crucifixion. Which of these documents would you judge to have the most textual integrity? Dr. William F. Albright, a Fulbright Scholar at Johns Hopkins University wrote: “No other work from Greco-Roman antiquity is so well attested by manuscript tradition as the New Testament.”

You may wonder about the Old Testament. For centuries, critics of the Bible complained the text of the Old Testament wasn’t reliable. But in 1947 a shepherd boy living near the Dead Sea tossed a rock into a cave and heard a jar break. This led to the discovery of 800 ancient manuscripts which included portions of every book in the Old Testament except Esther. The Dead Sea Scrolls verified the text of the Old Testament is accurate. For instance, until the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest surviving manuscript of the book of Isaiah was dated to 900 A.D. But one of the jars contained a complete scroll of Isaiah dating back to 200 B.C. In one discovery, the textual evidence for the Old Testament jumped back over 1,000 years!

And when you compare the text of the Isaiah scroll from 200 B.C. with the one you have in your Bible today, they are 99.5% identical. Out of thousands of Hebrew characters, only seven were different, and they can be attributed to spelling differences. No other ancient book in the world has the kind of literary integrity the Bible has.

### **(3) Historical proof**

Through the years, Bible skeptics have tried to point out historical errors the Bible. For instance, although Pontius Pilate is mentioned in the New Testament, there were no historical records that a procurator named Pilate even existed. But in 1961, during the excavations at Caesarea, they dug up a stone saying Pilate dedicated the great theater to Tiberius. The Bible was right, and the skeptics were wrong.

For years, historians and even archaeologist scoffed at the Bible story of the walls falling down in Jericho. Yet in 1990, Dr. Bryant Wood determined the siege of Jericho was so sudden, the walls fell flat, and people had no time to flee. His findings support the Biblical claim the city was not plundered, but was burned. Score another one for the Bible.

Dr. Nelson Glueck wrote: “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”

## CONCLUSION

There are plenty of objective proofs that demonstrate this book is a miracle, but perhaps the best proof is the truth contained in it can change lives. In 1951 Julius Hickerson, one of our Baptist missionaries in Columbia, South America was flying home from a trip to start a seminary in Cali, Columbia. He was flying from Columbia to Venezuela when his plane went down in a remote area of the Andes Mountains. He was never found.

Two years later, a delegation of natives from the interior came to our Baptist Mission station in Barranquilla. The missionaries that these natives were Christians, but they were surprised because no mission work had been sent into the dangerous interior of Columbia. When they asked how the natives were Christians, they produced a beautiful leather bound Spanish Bible. The name of Julius Hickerson was written on the flyleaf. The natives had found the book lying open on the ground several miles from where Julius Hickerson’s plane was lost. They called it “the book from heaven.” Only one member could read Spanish, so he read it to the entire tribe, and they all became Christians. (Source: Dr. Jerry Gunnells, Spring Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama, Jan. 25, 1981, who served as chairman of the Foreign Mission Board)

This is no ordinary book! It’s the only book that can bring you out of darkness into light. Most mornings I’m up long before the sun rises. I love to walk outside and look at the sky. My favorite time of day is when it’s a clear morning and the Eastern sky is just beginning to glow. I often see the morning star, which is actually the planet Venus. Whenever I see that morning star, I often think of verse 19 in our passage: “You will do well to pay attention to it, (scripture) as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

Have you ever said, “Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight. I wish I may, I wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight?” When you wish upon a star, it really doesn’t do anything. But when you put your faith and hope in Jesus Christ, your life will be changed forever!

That’s the main reason I believe the Bible is the supernatural Word of God—people who read it and obey it have an experience like the dawning of a new day. It changes their lives. I’ve never heard a thief say, “I read a book on mathematics and it changed me into an honest man.” I’ve never heard an abusive husband say, “I read a *Sports Illustrated* article and it changed me into a loving, kind husband.” I’ve never heard a dying man say, “I read a biology book, and now I have hope in the face of death.” But there are millions who have read the truth of this book and it has changed their lives.

## OUTLINE

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### WONDER #2: THE BIBLE’S UNIQUE FORMATION

“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.” *II Peter 1:20-21*

### WONDER #3: THE BIBLE’S WIDESPREAD CIRCULATION

Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations (*ethnesin*), and then the end will come.” *Matthew 24:14*

### WONDER # 4: THE BIBLE’S HONEST CONFIRMATION

Dr. Luke wrote: “Since I have carefully investigated everything from the beginning (eyewitness accounts), it seemed good to write out an orderly account for you...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” *Luke 1:3-4*

- (1) Scientific proof
- (2) Literary proof
- (3) Historical proof

*Wonders 5-7 next week*



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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