

The background is a complex stained glass design. At the center is a crown with a golden band and a purple jewel. The crown is surrounded by green leaves and yellow flowers. The entire central scene is set within a circular frame of silver and gold. This circle is further enclosed by a larger, multi-lobed frame of gold and blue. The outermost background is a textured, shimmering gold.

The Word of the Lord

Jerry D. Ousley

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By Jerry D. Ousley

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With all of man's awesome accomplishments, especially in communications, we are still inadequately equipped to present a proper introduction to this message from God Almighty that we call "The Bible." It has become many things to man: To some, a book that is the basis of law, or a book that stands for truth and purity. To others it is a work of cunning fables, or unattainable values which have become archaic.

We will not approach this study trying to prove that the Bible is true. There can be many arguments given but the truth remains that all scientific fact supports the Biblical accounts as being true. There are endless theories that conflict with the Bible, but they have yet to be proven. There are many good sources that confront these types of arguments and if you need that kind of study at this point I would refer you to them. Proof after proof could be submitted but when it comes down to the bottom line faith and personal experience becomes the final proof.

Although many do not want to recognize the Bible as the inspired message from God, despite their rejection, denial and skepticism the Bible itself puts much emphasis on the Word. In the King James Version the phrase "The Word of the Lord" is found 255 times and "The Word of God" is found 45 times. "God said," is found 46 times, and "It is written" 80 times. Therefore, by the references to both the spoken and written Word of God seems to be important.

To those who hold it dear it points the path to Heaven which is lined with trees burdened of fruit, and the eyes never tire of its beauty no matter how often they have trod its pages.

Its number one purpose remains: That God loves man and wants to be loved by him. This is the theme behind the

many legalities and examples of the Old Testament, and the revelation of the New Testament. It is the Book of books.

IT IS A BOOK OF MIRACLES

2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that the Bible was given by the inspiration of God; literally "breathed of God." Compare this to Genesis 2:7 "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Both the Greek word found in 2 Timothy and the Hebrew word in Genesis mean "inspired of God." And literally, in Genesis, it means a blast of inspiration from God. The Bible and man both came into being because of God's own inspiration and breathing. Hence, the Bible is the Word of God and is for man because they both came into existence by the breathing of God. Note that the word "inspiration" is closely related to "respiration." God's breath is the "Breath of Life" and when He spoke, His Word became life. 2 Peter 1:21 translated literally says of the authors: "They 'spoke from God' as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit . . . "

Sixty-six books penned by about forty different authors, grown into one unit with such harmony is a miracle. This was accomplished between 1500 BC and 97 AD, a period of 1,597 years. It contains one major theme displayed in each book, that being: "The salvation of God offered to sinful man, through His Son, Jesus Christ."

HOW THE BIBLE WAS TRANSCRIBED IS A MIRACLE

Lively Oracles

There was no written record before Moses. Many think that he wrote from legend and so use this as an excuse that some of the seemingly strange stories in Genesis are stretched and fabled. (Note: these so-called "strange stories," when we do some research, really aren't so strange). However, if we believe what the Bible tells us then we must believe that the Genesis account was revealed by inspiration to Moses. It was received from God while Moses was on Mt. Sinai: "This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us . . ." (Acts 7:38). The word "oracles" simply means "the words, or utterances of God."

The Original Manuscripts

At first there was the original manuscripts. None are known to remain today, but there were probably four original documents:

- 1. From the Southern Kingdom (Judah), probably around 850 BC was "J". It was a national epic, so called because it used "Jehovah" when naming God.**
- 2. From the Northern Kingdom (Israel), came "E" probably around 750 BC, so called because it used "Elohim" when naming God.**

3. Around 621 BC came a manuscript called "D." It was a Deuternomic Code found in the Temple at Jerusalem.

4. Between 500 400 BC came "P." It was so called because it was the priestly code.

It is thought that these manuscripts were combined by Ezra around 400 BC.

The Prophets began about 750 BC with Amos supposed to be the first. They were recognized as Scripture around 200 BC.

The Writings (Poetic Books) were recognized as Scripture around 90 AD.

Copy, Copy, Copy!

It took thousands of scribal copies to bring to the Bible to the modern printing era. These men literally took an oath to keep the original manuscripts intact by making very careful copies of them. Their job was literally to sit day after day and hand write copies of the Scriptures. The most ancient copies were:

1. Codex Siniaticus From the 4th century (discovered in the Convent of St. Cathrine on what is thought to be Mt. Sinai in the mid 1800's AD). It was held by the British and contained all of the New Testament.

2. Codex Vaticanus Probably from the 4th century (discovered in Egypt). The Pope in Rome holds it. It contains all the Gospels, and all the Epistles except Philemon, Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy, Hebrews, and Revelation.

3. Codex Alexandrius From the 5th century (probably made at Alexandria). It contains all the New Testament but Hebrews, 1

and 2 Peter, and James. This manuscript has been the core of Protestant literature.

4. Ephraim Manuscript From the 5th century.

5. Manuscript of Beza From the 6th century.

6. Petrograd Codex of the Prophets 916 AD.

7. Petrograd Codex Contains the entire Bible (1009 AD).

Ancient Versions

A version is an interpretation of the original language. There were ancient versions much like there are many English versions today in our own culture. Here are most of them:

1. Targum A Hebrew collection. There were several versions but the Aramaic version seems to be the most important.

2. Latin Versions Itala, European Versions, and the African Version (probably the oldest), The Roman Psalter (by Jerome, Latin Psalms, 1566 AD), and the Gallican Psalter (also by Jerome, 1566 AD).

3. Latin Vulgate The Bible in Latin, around the 2nd Century, also by Jerome. It was proclaimed the "Authentic Bible" of the Roman Catholic Church by the 4th session of the Council of Trent in 1546 Ad.

4. Septuagint The Old Testament only. It was the Hebrew Scriptures in Greek (around 285 BC, translated by 70 Jewish scholars).

5. Samaritan Penteteuch The Hebrew text in Samaritan characters.

6. Peshito, or Syriac Translated into the Common language of Syria (around the 1st or 2nd century).

7. Other Ancient Copies The Scriptures were kept by the "Sopherim" (authorized revisers) until the 6th Century, then by the "Massorites" (could safeguard the Scripture only).

Early English Versions

1. Wycliffe (1320 1384) Based on the Latin Vulgate.

2. Tyndale (1525 1530) Based some on the Latin Vulgate, but much on the Ancient Copies.

3. Coverdale (1535) Based on the work of Tyndale and the Latin Vulgate.

4. Matthew's Bible (1537) Based on the work of Tyndale.

5. The Great Bible (1539) Based on the works of Tyndale, Coverdale, and Matthew's Bible.

6. The Geneva Bible (1560) Revised from the Great Bible.

7. The Bishop's Bible (1568) Based on the Great Bible and the Geneva Bible.

8. The Douay Bible (1582) Catholic Version, based on the Latin Vulgate.

9. The King James Version (Authorized Version 1611) Produced by 47 scholars under King Jame's authority. It was based on the work of the Bishop's Bible as well as Greek texts.

Later Versions

- 1. The Revised Version (1881 1884) Based on the most ancient copies available.**
- 2. The American Standard Version (1900 1901) Based on the findings of the Revised Version.**
- 3. Many other New and Updated Versions.**

God's Word is very important to us. Despite the handicap of scribes making endless copies, its teachings have not been harmed or misinterpreted.

The centuries over which the Bible has survived is nothing short of a miracle. Even though God gave us His written Word, from those to whom the message has been sent it has experienced apathy, disuse and misuse, worm, rot, and the threat of destruction. Its enemies have tried to destroy it from very early times. For example, the Roman Emperor Diocletian, in 303 AD commanded it to be destroying. It wasn't. Over the years, many have tried to "take it out." But because it is inspired (God-breathed), it has hidden itself in the very hearts of those who embrace it and it will never be destroyed. The inscription on the monument to the Huguenots says it well: ". . . Hammer away ye hostile hands; your hammer breaks, God's anvil stands . . . "

The Bible has essentially been accepted worldwide. It has influenced countless lives with its truths. This too is a miracle. It is a "Book" for every man because it is the only book that really understands every man. This is totally because God knows every man and inspired the Bible to meet that need. Therefore it becomes every man's book and is the only "Book" that understands every man.

The Extent of the Word

The Word is given to help man. Many believe that is given to bring condemnation to man, but God meant for it to bring the best to man. It will bring conviction because we are guilty, but when we face that truth with honesty and sincerity, it becomes a tool for ultimate self-improvement.

The Word is not meant for private, or individual interpretation but is given by God to show man the right way. We aren't to twist the Scriptures to suit our own beliefs: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:20-21).

When we begin speaking about "rightly dividing the Word of Truth" it becomes a very sensitive subject. There are so many interpretations of the Scripture it becomes difficult to know which is correct. But if we really want to know the truth we must be willing to become students and not experts. We all become very defensive when what we believe is challenged. However, to know the truth we must first be willing to put our own beliefs and teachings aside and really take a look into the Word. We must be willing to change our beliefs if they prove to be wrong. I know that, over the years, I have personally had to change many of the things I believed because the Bible proved that belief wrong. All too often we try to twist the Scripture to fit what we believe. But to really find out the truth, we must be willing to twist to fit the Scripture. Therefore, we become students for life.

We must come to realize that the Bible is not man's word, but God's Word. It is effective, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the

word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Bible is not man's search for God but God's search for lost man. The Word extends to our very spirit. Man teaches only a tangible knowledge but the Spirit of God teaches us through our own spirit concerning spiritual things.

The Bible is given for man's benefit to answer those most compelling questions of life, namely "where we came from, where we are going (or can go), and how to live in the meantime.

THE BIBLE IS A MANUAL FOR LIFE

Look at the very name we give it. In Greek it is called "LaBiblia (The Bible) which means "The Books." Iranaeous called it "The Divine Writings" and it has been referred to as "The Book of the Race." Clemans Alexandrinas called it "God Inspired Scriptures" and in Latin "Bibliotheca Divina" means "The Divine Library." So the very name we give it tells us that it is an inspired collection of Books from God.

The Bible is a "Book" that goes along with its product: MAN. It writes about our Maker, our destiny, our present life, and actual and ideal interpretations of human life. It reveals man to himself and tells of man's joys, sorrows, triumphs, defeats, aspirations, possibilities and man's relationship to God.

It Is A Book For Everybody

First of all we should treat the Bible as a regular book to be read completely, purposefully and intelligently, always remembering its one theme: God's salvation by Jesus Christ. Any part of it can be read with this theme in mind. It is also a complete library of sixty-six books, or volumes containing literature, history, poetry, personal letters, and prophecy.

It also has other characteristics like a book. For instance, its authors have different styles. It has standard chapter divisions (done by Stephen Langton in 1228). It also has standard verse divisions (done by Robert Stephenus in 1560).

However, while treating the Bible as a regular book, we must always realize that it is a very unique Book. It is the only written communication God has with man. It can be completely trusted because God wrote it (through man).

The Bible's freshness and knowledge cannot be exhausted. A good novel can be read two or three times and you will see things you may have missed the first time. But when reading the Bible under the inspiration of God, each and every time becomes a unique experience. I have read the Bible through many times but each time I read it again, I learn something new.

We must read the Bible with the right attitudes. Read it with reverence. After all, it is God's Word. Read it with dependence because you can depend and rely on it. Read the Bible with desire. When reading it this way it becomes spiritual food to our deprived and starving souls. Read the Word with exactness. Have a desire to know what it is really saying and not just to justify our own beliefs. Finally, read it with receptiveness being willing and ready to receive what God will reveal to us.

THE NEED FOR THE BIBLE

The revelation of the Bible is a thing deeply desired by man. Look at our groping search in the dark for deep, inner satisfaction. Man has a spiritual side to him and even the quest of the atheist to disprove God becomes a religion to him. All religions are efforts to look for a higher power. We know that nature points to a creating God. The Bible directs man the right way by revealing the one true God, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

We also need the Bible because it is the desire of every Christian to know more about his Lord. The revelation of the Bible is to be expected. We have a revelation in nature, which can be grasped by reason. But because of sin, nature and reason can't give light and relief. Our loving Lord would not leave us in the dark; thus He gives us our revelation in the Word. However, interpretation relies on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is reasonable that God would give us a written revelation. Writing is the best method for preserving truth. Memory and tradition are not trustworthy, so by giving us the Bible God acted with great wisdom. It becomes reasonable that God would give written inspirations that couldn't have been discovered by human reason.

Men have accused the Bible of being cunning fables written to deceive others. However, if we look at the logic of this thinking, it becomes unreasonable that wicked men would devise a book that was always condemning them. On the other hand, honest sincere men would not impose their own works on the world and say "they were from God."

God's Word then becomes an inspired revelation that brings illumination to the recipient. In definition, revelation is a Divine communication to man from God, oral or written. Inspiration means "given by God." The writers had God's Divine authority backing up their words. Illumination takes place when one is given understanding of truth already revealed.

As is the case with most all knowledge, the final proof of Scriptures abides in its application to our lives.

COMMANDMENTS CONCERNING THE SCRIPTURE

The Bible gives certain commands concerning itself. While many of these are in the Old Testament and concern the Jewish nation, still, if they are applied to our lives today we will be richer for it.

First, the Word of God was to be used as inscriptions. It was to be written on the posts and gates of their homes, and they were to erect a monument "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." (Deuteronomy 6:5-9). This passage was suggesting basically that the Israelites were to "eat, sleep, talk and walk" the Word of God. This was so that God's Word was ever before them. (Read also Deuteronomy 11:20; Deuteronomy 27:2-3; Joshua 8:31-32; and Habakkuk 2:2). Just think of how much less we would be tempted if we continually had the Word of God before us. This was indeed the purpose of God towards the Jewish nation. He knew that if they didn't keep His Word before them, it wouldn't be long before they'd stray away from Him and be serving false gods. There is no difference today. We must keep God's Word before us to stand strong in Him.

The Scripture was to be read by the leaders of Israel. Studying it promises prolonged life. "Neither shall he multiply

wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And 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: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel." (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). This Scripture is in reference to the king of Israel. What better way to really study the Word than by writing it down? The king was to hand write his own personal copy of the Law and then spend time reading it. I'm not sure if any king of Israel did this. There is no record of it ever being done. But think of how much different her history could have been if her kings had obeyed the command of God? (Read also Deuteronomy 31:9; Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 30:2; 36:2, 4, 17-18, 27-28, 32; 45:1; 51:60; Galatians 6:11; Hebrews 13:22; and Revelation 1:11, 19). If all leaders of all countries of the world would take the time to read the Scriptures and apply them to their lives we would eliminate war and conflict. Of course, until the Lord returns, that will not happen, but think how wonderful it will be when the Lord does return and every nation (during the Millennial Reign) will seek God first.

The Word of God is not to be changed or altered. We are to keep the commandments of God and observe them, otherwise we be reprov'd and found a liar. If we add to the Word Its plagues may be added to us. If we take away from It our names may be removed from the "Book of Life," from the New Jerusalem, and from the things written in the Scriptures. "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) "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." (Proverbs 30:5-6). "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Revelation 22:18-19). These words are grave and severe. Even though some of these verses may be referring to that particular book, it applies to all of the Word of God. However, many people have mistakenly tried to apply these passages to modern translations of the Scripture. In reality we need to look at the context of these verses. Our modern translations are interpreted from the original language so as long as the translation is true to the original language, then these passages have not been violated. While I really enjoy the language and poetry of the King James Version I do not contend that it is the only English translation that is true. If this were the case then we should go back to the very first English translation. This, of course, is a ridiculous assumption. However, there are some translations out today that do take away from the meaning of the Word and we must be cautious of these.

The Scriptures were to be publicly read. "And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy

gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it." (Deuteronomy 31:10-13). "Then the LORD said unto me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them." (Jeremiah 11:6, see also Jeremiah 36:6-8). (Read also: Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27). When Israel turned from God's Word they went into idolatry. The public reading of God's Word was absolutely necessary in the Old Testament days because usually only the Temple and possibly the king had copies of the written Word. The only time the people heard was when it was publicly read. Now, we still need to listen to the Word but in our day the written Word has become very advanced. But no matter how many copies we may own they do us no good unless we read them. We must hear them either with our ears or the ears of our hearts. Just to hear the words spoken doesn't profit us unless we understand what we are hearing. That is what Jesus was referring to when He used the phrase: "He who has ears to hear . . ." (Matthew 13:9). We must let it be absorbed in us.

The Scriptures are to be taught (Read Deuteronomy 6:7-8). We can learn much by reading, especially under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. However, God has instructed us to be taught. He chooses to reveal things about His Word to others who then can share those things with us. We all can be taught and can teach, we listen to God and be obedient to Him.

The Scriptures are to be studied "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39). "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). "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15). "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." (Psalm 119:18). (See also: Nehemiah 8:13; and Psalm 119:12). Studying the Scriptures is different than just reading them. When we study we dwell on them, seek their meaning by looking at the meaning of words and running reference (looking for other passages that contain these same words and looking for the entire teaching on a subject). By doing this we learn what the Bible teaches on the entire subject. This is important for God reveals things progressively. Why? He knows how much man can handle at one time. Think of the chaos that we would suffer if we had to learn it all at one time. Isn't God merciful to us?

The Scriptures are to be declared: "With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth." (Psalm 119:13). (Read also 1 John 1:3; Psalm 119:46, 172; Isaiah 21:10; Jeremiah 42:4; Acts 20:27; and 1 Corinthians 2:1; 15:1-2). Declaring the Scriptures includes speaking of them to each other in conversation, in teaching, in sermons, and in life applications. Just our day to day conversation declares the Scripture. You see, we are always testifying. The words of our mouths tell good or bad.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Scriptures are Divinely inspired (as we have already established) and are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction: "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, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17). That means that every part of the Scripture is good for us, even those long list of hard-to-pronounce names. God has a purpose for all of it. We cannot absorb it all at once, but believe me, it is there for our good. When we need it the most, as we search through it, studying as we go we learn the teachings of the Bible. Sometimes it points out things in our lives that need to be changed and repented of. It reprovues us and corrects us. It teaches us about the righteousness of God. It is just plain old good for us. The Scriptures are not, however, for private interpretation: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Scripture is not for us to pick and poke at trying to fit it to our standards. We are to conform to it not it to us. We must read it in context of what it is saying, and apply it literally unless it plainly lets us know that the meaning is not literal (and it'll tell you when that time comes). (Read also: 2 Kings 21:10; Nehemiah 9:13-14; Romans 1:2; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:10-12; and 1 John 5:9).

The Scriptures are illuminating: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105). If we are conscious of God's Word it becomes a guide to us as we

go through life, not only in the spiritual realm but also in everything we do. That's exciting! (Read also: 2 Peter 1:19; Proverbs 12:6; John 15:3; and Romans 7:12).

The Scriptures are pure: "Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it." (Psalm 119:140). It's hard to find purity in this world in our day. Pure means that it is untarnished and 100% good. I can't think of anything at this time that fits these qualifications. But God's Word is an absolute purity in this tarnished world. It is the only representation of God aside from His Holy Spirit in this world today. Not even the Church is this pure, at least at this time. It is a breath of fresh air in a harsh, hard, and cold world. "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him." (Proverbs 30:5). "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." (Psalm 12:6). "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." (John 15:3). (Read also: Romans 7:12).

The Scriptures are perfect and true: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether." (Psalm 19:7-9). "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17). (Read also: 2 Samuel 22:31; Psalm 119:96, 128, 138, 142, 151, 160; Proverbs 22:20-21; Ecclesiastes 12:10; Isaiah 25:1; John 21:24; and Revelation 19:9; 21:5; 22:6). They convert the soul, make the simple wise, endure forever, and are absolutely true and righteous in every way. They can bring sanctification (made clean through the process of the Word). Can you think of any other book in history that offers so much? I get a lot of email these days as I'm sure you do also. I have learned that every

bit of news that comes this way isn't necessarily true. But today we get false or tainted news and information as well in newspapers, magazines and television as well. You can't trust everything you hear or read. However, despite the attempts of some to disprove the Bible, you can always trust its words to be pure and true. What a guarantee!

The Scriptures are efficient. They shall not return to God void. They shall accomplish what God pleased them to do and shall prosper to do what He sent them to do. They are like fire and a hammer that breaks rocks to pieces. They are quick and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword. They are discerners of thoughts and the intents of the heart (Read Isaiah 55:10-11; Jeremiah 23:29; Hebrews 4:12; Deuteronomy 32:2; and Psalm 138:2). All I can say about this is, "WOW!" The Scripture is efficient for any circumstance or situation.

The Scriptures are permanent and will be fulfilled. They shall stand forever. Not even a punctuation mark shall pass from the Law until Heaven and Earth pass away; GOD'S WORD WILL BE FULFILLED! "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." (Isaiah 40:8). "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:17-18). Numbers 35:29; (Read also: Deuteronomy 31:21; Psalm 119:144, 152; Luke 16:16-17; 21:33; 24:44; John 10:35; and 1 Peter 1:25). Regardless of how much some may call them "old fashioned," archaic, and out of date, they will stand, and will be fulfilled. It's interesting to note what the Old Testament requirement was to identify a true prophet. It was very simple: If the prophecy came to pass then that prophet must be real. To date, a good portion of prophecy in the Bible has been literally fulfilled. For me, that is proof enough!

The Scripture is a standard (as in a battle flag) for truth and if we don't speak the Word as truth there is no light in us. We are not to keep to our traditions but to heed the Scriptures because if we hold to tradition we make the Scriptures ineffective. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." (Colossians 2:8). Tradition is a hard thing to overcome. Even today, it is extremely difficult to convince people to stop interpreting God's Word according to what they have been taught over the years. Denominations have been started because men would not let go of their traditional teaching regarding the Scripture. It is important to see God's Word with an open mind so that He can teach us the truth. (Read also: Isaiah 8:20; Mark 7:7-9, 13; Matthew 15:1-3; John 5:46-47; and Acts 18:28).

The Scripture is for all no matter of age. It is to us forever that we may obey. "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." (1 John 2:13-14). (Read also Deuteronomy 29:29; 30:11-14). We try to put an age on when a person can come to know the Lord. But that age is when the Holy Spirit chooses to bring conviction to our hearts. If we understand that we are sinners and in need of a Savior, no matter the age, then it is time to come to God.

The Scriptures to the natural man are hard to understand.

"But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken." (Isaiah 28:13). "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is

salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:15-16). Without the Holy Spirit in our lives, much of the Bible is very difficult to understand for it requires faith. Before we come to know Christ as our personal Savior, we operate by what our natural mind can understand. Much of the Bible goes beyond natural thinking and so becomes almost silly to the natural mind. But we must accept it by faith, just knowing that God would not lie to us but that it is THE WORD OF TRUTH. Enough has been fulfilled to prove that we can rely on it. However, it still requires us to take a step into the seemingly nothingness of faith. When we take that step God will make sure something is there for our spiritual foot to land on.

THE ADVANTAGES OF THE SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures will make us wise. The Bible tells us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Psalm 111:10). The word "fear" in this case means respect and honor. It doesn't mean to be terrified of Him. It just plain makes sense that to have honor, respect, and obedience to the Maker would be a wise thing to do. Absorbing God's Word into our hearts, and allowing that Word to become a part of us is a wise thing to do. As a matter of fact, if I understand this passage correctly, we can't have true wisdom without a respect for God. (Read also: Psalm 119:98-100, 104, 130; Matthew 13:51-52; Psalm 19:9-11; Proverbs 1:2-4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and Ephesians 3:4).

The Scriptures satisfy desire. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103). Have you ever had that after-dark craving hit you? You just don't know exactly what you want but you sure want something. And so we wind up eating one thing after another in attempt to satisfy that craving. That's just what this verse is talking about. We all crave the Word of God but we just don't know what it is that we are wanting. When the Word begins to sink into our lives and we absorb it, it satisfies a desire that is within every man, woman, boy, and girl because it brings us to the Creator of our very beings. It's like an adopted child who needs to find his natural birth parent. Even though abandoned by them, that craving just can't be satisfied until the search is over. We have a desire, whether we recognize it or not, to be one with our true Heavenly Father. "I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments." (Psalm 119:131). "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1 Peter 2:2). (Read also: Psalm 19:10; 119:127; Job 23:12; and Psalm 119:20, 47-48, 72, 82, 167).

The Scriptures inspire hope: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). We must have hope. Hope is what keeps us going. If we have no hope of a better time, a better day, then we begin to die. The Word of God gives us great hope that we will be with God. It is true and it is awesome! (Read also: Psalm 119:81, 147; Romans 15:4; and Proverbs 22:19).

The Scriptures impart joy: "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." (1 John 1:4). To be really happy we must have joy. But no "joy" is like the joy that comes from God and it is given to us because of the salvation of Christ. When fully realized it brings great joy to us. (Read also: Psalm 19:8; 119:111, 162; and Psalm 119:14, 16, 24, 143).

The Scriptures console and comfort "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me." (Psalm 119:92-93). When we find ourselves depressed and beaten, we can go to the Word of God and most assuredly find comfort and consolation. In the Word is something for everybody! (Read also: Psalm 119:50, and Acts 15:30-31).

The Scriptures save and cleanse. They will keep us from the "Destroyer's" path and will give life. There is something for everyone who believes and they will instill faith in us. They will make us wise unto salvation. "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:31). "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17). "And that from a child thou

hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:15). There is nothing more refreshing to the soul of man than the Word of God! (Read also: Psalm 17:4; 119:9; Romans 1:16; and James 1:21).

By the Scriptures all nations are to be blessed. This is accomplished through salvation by grace in Jesus Christ, the Seed of Abraham! "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." (Galatians 3:8). (Read also: Deuteronomy 4:8; Romans 3:1-2; Deuteronomy 4:6; Psalm 147:19-20; and Joshua 1:8).

To be deprived of the Scriptures is a curse. Without a vision people perish and famine runs rampant. "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." (Proverbs 29:18). (Read also: Amos 8:11-13; 2 Chronicles 15:3; Lamentations 2:9; and Ezekiel 7:26). Notice all the nations of the Earth which have been thrown into poverty. They are nations who do not worship God. By contrast, the nations that are prosperous are by and large considered Christian Nations. When we reject Christ, we too will begin to sink into poverty and need.

This would be a good time to read the entire 119th Psalm. It is full of information about what the Word of God will bring us and do for us. Fall in love with the Word of God. Let it be your constant companion. You will not regret it.

THE CANNON OF SCRIPTURE

First of all let's take a look at how the Scripture classifies itself. We studied this briefly earlier, but here is a closer look at it. "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." (Luke 24:44). The Jews divided the Old Testament Scriptures as: (1) The Law (the five books of Moses Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), (2) The Prophets (included in the Prophets were the books of history). The Prophets were divided up as The Former Prophets (including the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel as 1 book-, 1 and 2 Kings as 1 book), and the Latter Prophets (these were sub-divided as the Major Prophets, including the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and the 12 or Minor Prophets, including the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obediah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). (3) The Writings (also referred to as the Psalms). The Writings were sub-divided as the Five Rolls, or Megilloth (including the books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. These books were read at Jewish Holidays including Passover, Pentecost, the 9th of Ab destruction of Jerusalem Feast of Tabernacles, and Purim), and the Others (including the books of (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah as one book and 1 and 2 Chronicles as one book).

The Jewish Bible was considered as two sets of writings. The first included Genesis to 2 Kings, and covered the period from creations to the release of Jehoiachin from Babylon. The second included 1 Chronicles to Nehemiah, and covered the period from Adam to the second visit of Nehemiah to Jerusalem. Thus, the Hebrew Scriptures ended with 2 Kings,

explaining Matthew 23:35 "The blood of Abel to the blood of Zachariah, son of Barachiah."

The Bible could also be divided by dispensations. A dispensation is a time when God dealt with man in a specific way. The seven dispensations are: (1) Innocence - This covered the period from creation to the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. During this time God dealt with the only two people alive, Adam and Eve. Because they had not sinned they were innocent. After their disobedient act in eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, their innocence was gone; (2) Conscience - Covering the time from man's fall until the Great Flood in the days of Noah. In this period God dealt with all of mankind. God allowed man to govern himself by his own conscience. As we know by experience today, many people will react favorably from conscience and be fair to others. But there are always some who will ignore their conscience and govern others with their own selfish interests in mind; (3) Human Government - Constituting the time from the Great Flood until the time of Abraham. During this time God still dealt with all of mankind. Men were allowed to set up laws and nations. But once again, human government is only as good as the humans doing the governing; (4) Promise - Covering the period from Abraham until the law was given to Moses. During this period God dealt mainly with the family of Abraham. They lived on the promises given them by God. These promises required them to believe, or have faith in God; (5) The Law - From the time of Moses until the birth of the Church. In this period God dealt mainly with the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham. After leading them out from slavery in the land of Egypt, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments as well as many other laws to govern the Nation of Israel. They were promised a time of great prosperity during which there would be no one that was poor. Of course this required complete obedience to this given law. That time never came for Israel

because their history was plagued with times of breaking this law. This period ended for Christians after the resurrection of Christ; (6) Grace - This period covers from the birth of the Church until the second appearance of Christ (yet to come). We are now in the dispensation of grace. However, only those who come to Christ are in this period. The Jews rejecting Christ are still governed by the Law of Moses, while the rest of the world is still under Human Government; (7) The Millennial Reign and The Kingdom of God This dispensation is yet to come after Christ's second appearance and will last throughout eternity.

It is interesting to note that these Dispensations were not times when God just tried a "new thing" to see if it would work. God purposely set up these dispensations to show man that he could not be worthy of God without God's help. After man fell from innocence, he failed at letting his conscience rule him. Man failed by trying to govern himself and in waiting for God's promises. Man also failed miserably in trying to live by the law of God. Only salvation by grace provided by the Jesus Christ can make man worthy again of the Almighty God.

We can also divide the Bible according to races. This is not races as the world thinks of the term, however. The Bible really only deals with three races of people, namely the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church. The Jew is, of course, the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham. The Gentile is anyone who isn't a Jew, and the Church is made up of anyone, Jew or Gentile, who comes to Christ under grace. As believers we should take careful note of this. We are not to be bigoted against any people, regardless of nationality or skin color. The Church, because mortal men are in her, tends to make separations. But we are truly one in Christ. When we separate ourselves we are absolutely going against our Lord and Master. The separation as to times specified for these "races" are: Genesis 1:1 11:9 (the Jew and the Gentile); Genesis

11:10 John 21:25 (the Jew); Acts 1:1 Revelation 15 (primarily the Church); Revelation 15 19:21 (the Jew, the Gentile, and the Apostate Church).

We will finish up this segment of the study by talking about the physical divisions of the Bible. The two main divisions are called "Testaments" or "wills." These are indeed "wills" for they tell us the will of God for man. The two Testaments are: The Old Testament, containing 39 books (these are the ancient writings of the Jews as revealed by God), and the New Testament, the writings of the Apostles after Christ.

At this point I would like to share some findings concerning the Apocrypha is a collection of books written during the same period as the other books of the Old Testament. They have been added and accepted as Divine writings by the Roman Catholic Church in 1546 (the same time the Pope's word was declared equal with the Scripture). However, the Protestant Church, by and large, as rejected these books from the Old Testament. While these books may supply some historical records, they are not inspired as the Word of God, and we can be sure about this for these reasons:

- (1) It is acknowledged that they never had a place in the Hebrew canon. In other words, they are not included in the Jewish collections. None of the Apocrypha is quoted in the New Testament.**
- (2) The books of the Apocrypha are not found in any listings of the Scriptures made during the first four centuries.**
- (3) Divine inspirations is not claimed by any of the books of the Apocrypha.**
- (4) None speak with a message from God.**
- (5) They contain many historical, geographical, and chronological errors.**
- (6) They are contradictive to themselves, the Bible, and secular history.**
- (7) They teach doctrines and uphold practices contrary to the Bible like lying, suicide, assassination, magical incantations,**

and prayers for the dead. Therefore, for these reasons the Apocrypha is not considered as part of the Old Testament.

The original language of the Old Testament is Hebrew except for the following passages which are in Aramaic: Ezra 4:8 6:18; Ezra 7:12-26; Daniel 2:4b 7:28; and Jeremiah 10:11.

The message of the Old Testament shows us that man cannot be holy by his own merit. He needs a Savior, and by the time He appeared, it was very apparent that Israel was in deep trouble without Him. They longed for Him during the days of Christ, even though they completely mis-recognized Christ for Who He really was.

The New Testament contains 27 books, written by Christians after the resurrection of Christ as revealed by God.

The original language of the New Testament is Greek. Because of its many quotes from the Old Testament, it most definitely becomes a confirmation of the Old. It does not claim to replace the Old but merely to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17 - "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." The words of Jesus).

