

Is the Bible the Word of God or the Word of Man?

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Sermon Series: none

Topic: Bible

2 Peter 1:16-21 (ESV)

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

This morning we are stepping out of our series in Matthew in order to take a step back and think about the Bible. We want to ask, "Is the Bible the word of God or of man?"

We, at this church, spend a lot of our time together focused on the Bible. David Chamberlain (who yesterday celebrated his 79th birthday) hosts a one hour class at 9am focused solely on listening to the reading of Scripture. Every 9am class curriculum is based on the Bible. The "I" in LIFE stands for Instruction, thus every LIFE group probably focuses at least 50% of their time on studying the Bible. And we dedicate about 40 minutes of our corporate worship time to a sermon which is focused on a portion of Scripture.

That's a lot of time. **Why do we spend so much time focusing our attention on the Bible?**

Sometimes we can tend to take for granted the things that we spend lots of time with. For example, we tend to take for granted the people with whom we spend most of our time. We

can easily take our spouses for granted or our closest friends. We may take our Bibles for granted also.

Imagine Life Without a Bible

Stop for a moment and consider this question. What would your life be like without a Bible? Would it be any different at all? Or would it be significantly different? What if you could not pick up a book called *The Holy Bible*? What if you had no Bible app on your phone to read, study, or search Scripture? What if there was no “Public Reading of Scripture” app? What would you do? *Would your life be better or worse?*

State of the Bible Research

The **American Bible Society** conducts an annual State of the Bible survey in January. It is a fascinating read and is available in a free ebook [here](https://sotb.research.bible/).



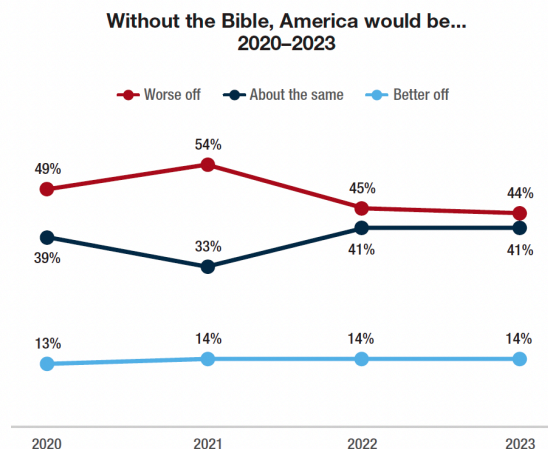
This very question, Would America be better or worse without the Bible, is included in this research. A slight majority of Americans report that they believe the country would be worse off without the Bible.

Not Everyone Has a Bible

Having the Bible in our language is an incredible privilege that not everyone has.

The research revealed that 72% of Americans think that the Bible is available in all the world's languages.¹ That's not true.

- According to Wycliffe Bible Translators Fifty-seven percent of the world languages do not have access to a complete translation of the Bible (including OT and NT).²
- That means that 1.5 billion people do not have access to a full Bible in their language.³
- There are about 7,000 global languages and 30% of those have no translation of any portion of the Bible.⁴



¹ Source: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/bible-not-available-in-57-of-world-languages-most-americans-believe-the-bible-is-available-in-every-language.html> accessed 2 June 2023.

² Ibid.

³ Source: <https://www.wycliffe.org/> accessed 2 June 2023.

⁴ Ibid.

- On the positive side, that means that 3,589 languages encompassing 7.14 billion people do have access to some portion of the Bible in their own language.
- On the negative side is that means that 1,680 languages encompassing 128 million people have zero access to any Scripture in their own language.

Imagine not having any access to the Bible? Maybe we should not take the Bible for granted.

What Is the Bible?

But what is the Bible? There really are only two options. It is either the word of God or the word of man. Is it the “cunning contrivance of men” or “the wise and wonderful counsel” of a good and gracious?”⁵ There are implications to both options. If it’s the word of God, then it is must be completely true, totally trustworthy, and ultimately authoritative over our lives. If it is the word of man, then it is not completely true, not totally trustworthy, and not ultimately authoritative over our lives.

Four Reasons to Believe the Bible is the Word of God

In this passage before us, which Anderson just read, Peter gives us four reasons to conclude that Holy Scripture is the word of God and not the word of man.

1) Not a Myth (v.16)

The first reason to believe the Bible is the word of God and not man is found in v.16. Peter begins by claiming the *Scripture is true and not a clever lie*.

2 Peter 1:16 (ESV) For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Peter claims to be telling the truth and not lying. Peter knows that there will always be false teachers who do lie about the truth, but Peter claims not to be among them. Peter has false teachers on his mind because he specifically address them in the first verse of the next chapter (2:1). There have been false teachers in the past and there will be false teachers in the future. Thus, Peter testifies to his readers that when he declared to them that Jesus is the *Christ*, he affirms that is was speaking the truth and *not a myth*. Peter believes Jesus to be the *Christ* and he teaches us to believe that he is Christ. The Greek word *Christos* (Χριστός) means, “the anointed one”⁶ chosen by God to be the Messiah.

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2436.

⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 542.

The word '**power**' is most likely shorthand to refer to Jesus' resurrection, since we often find this word used in the NT in describing the resurrection.⁷ The word '**coming**' (*parousia*) refers to the second coming of Jesus, not his first. We know this because this word appears 18 times in relation to Jesus in the NT and every time it refers to his future second coming and never to his past first coming. In short, when Peter talks about making know to them the "*power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" Peter is using shorthand for the whole gospel of Jesus, meaning that he told them about the death, resurrection, and future return of God's Messiah.

Peter affirms this is *not* a "**cleverly devised myth.**" It is amazing to speak of the resurrection of someone from the dead, but Peter is testifying to truthfulness of the gospel message while denying that it is nothing more than a clever myth.

If we think about this it makes total sense. Are we to really believe that eleven uneducated, distraught disciples, who were devastated by the death of their master whom they mistakenly assumed was God's messiah, were suddenly so diabolically clever enough in their moment of deepest despair to conspired together to create **and be willing to die** for the most devious myth ever to have swept the globe?

On the day after his death were they sitting around a campfire cooking up a myth that they would all die for? **Imagine with me what that campfire conversion might have been like?**

Crazy skit

People will occasionally die for what they mistakenly believe to be the truth, but I don't believe anyone would willingly die for what they know to be an intentional lie. Eleven of the twelve apostles died for the sake of the gospel of their Lord Jesus Christ.

1. James the elder was beheaded in A.D. 44⁸ (Acts 12:2).
2. Philip was imprisoned for preaching the gospel in Heliopolis, scourged, and then crucified in A.D. 52.⁹
3. Matthew was impaled to death in Ethiopia in A.D. 60.
4. James the younger (son of Alphaeus) was crucified in Egypt.
5. Matthias was first stoned until almost dead and then beheaded in Jerusalem.
6. Andrew, brother of Peter, after preaching the glory of the cross, was crucified, affixed to it with ropes rather than nails so that he would suffer more. After two days on the cross he died.

⁷ 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:43; Col. 3:12; Eph. 1:19-20.

⁸ John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000).

⁹ Ibid.

7. Peter was imprisoned for nine months by Nero who then ordered him scourged and crucified. Peter requested that he be crucified with his head downward claiming that he was unworthy to die in the same manner as his Savior.¹⁰
8. Jude (a.k.a. Thaddaeus) preached in the city of Odessa in Turkey and was there crucified.
9. Bartholomew went to India and preached the gospel for a long season (& may have translated Matthew's gospel for them) but eventually he was beaten, crucified, then before dying was taken down and beheaded.
10. Thomas also went to India to preach but was there run through with a spear.
11. Simon the Zealot preached in Africa and then Britain where he was eventually crucified.
12. John was the only apostle who died of natural causes.

These men were neither intelligent enough to cook up a successful global conspiracy nor crazy enough to die for a cleverly devised myth. I don't believe these men gave their lives for a lie. They did not die for the word of man. But they did die for the Word of God, who is Jesus.

Thus, the first reason to believe that the Bible is the word of God and not the word of man is because all of Jesus' disciples went to their grave denying they were lying and claiming to be telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

2) Eyewitness Testimony (v.16-18)

The second reason to believe the Bible is the word of God is because it is based upon **eyewitness testimony**. Peter, along with the other biblical authors, all claim to have been there and seen everything that happened.

2 Peter 1:16-18 (ESV) ¹⁶ ...we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

The event of which Peter is speaking is what we refer to as the Transfiguration of Jesus. We read about this in Matthew (17:1-8), Mark (9:2-8), and Luke (9:28-36). This took place immediately before Jesus went to Jerusalem for his final Passover. The **majesty** of which Peter speaks is described in the gospel accounts. He saw the glory of God shine upon Jesus. His clothes became radiant and intensely white¹¹, his face shone like the sun¹², and Moses and Elijah visited him and spoke to him. Peter heard the voice of God the Father as he spoke aloud from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to him" (Mt.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Mark 9:3.

¹² Matthew 17:2.

17:5). When Peter heard God's voice, he "fell on his face and was terrified" (Mt. 17:6). (This is exactly what happened at Mt. Sinai when God spoke the Ten Commandments to the whole nation of Israel.) While on that mountain, Peter was given a little foretaste of the heavenly kingdom. He saw the beautiful brightness of its glory and he heard the very voice of God proclaiming his pleasure in his Son. Peter experienced something that he never forgot.

Who is the We?

But Peter was not alone on that mountain. Peter writes, "...**we** did not follow clever myths... but **we** were eyewitnesses of his majesty." Yes, Peter is here testifying as to what he personally heard and saw, but he was not alone. Who is the "we?" When Jesus went up on the mountain, he took with him **Peter, James, and John** (Mt. 17:1). There were three people who went up on that mountain with Jesus. These four earthly people were then met by two heavenly people, Moses and Elijah. In the end, there were six people on that mountain who could testify to the truth of what took place.

The Day He Heard God Speak

There were more people than only Peter there that day, on that most incredible of all days, the day that Peter personally, heard with his own ears, the audible voice of the living God. Could there be a more incredible day than that? Imagine, if you and three friends went up on a mountain and while you were there, you saw two dudes whom you knew to have been dead for thousand years, talking to your best friend and then suddenly a voice cracks the sky like the loudest thunder you've ever heard, but then it's not thunder, for you can understand what the thunder is saying, and it's saying that your best friend is actually the Son of God, with whom God is well pleased. Would that not be the most incredible day of your life? Would that not be the most majestic voice you've ever heard?

Thus, the second reason to believe that the Bible—where we find this, and many other, amazing stories—is the word of God and not the word of man is because these stories are told by those who were actually there. These amazing stories are told by **eyewitnesses**. These stories are not secondhand hearsay, but rather the firsthand, eyewitness accounts.

Prophetic Confirmation (v.19)

The third reason to believe the Bible is the word of God and not the word of mere men is because of its **prophetic confirmation**. The Bible is "*the prophetic word more fully confirmed.*" We see this in verse 19.

2 Peter 1:19-20 (ESV) And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation.

The “*prophetic word*” refers to the entire OT.¹³ Literally Peter writes, “*And we have more firm the prophetic word...*”¹⁴ What exactly does Peter mean?

1. He might mean that hearing God’s voice more fully confirmed the OT prophetic word about Jesus being the messiah.
2. Or he might mean that the OT prophetic word more firmly confirms Jesus as Messiah than does the hearing of heavenly voices.

I think it is the latter. I think Peter is arguing that greater confidence in Jesus being God’s only messiah comes from reading and studying the Bible (i.e. the firm OT prophetic word) than from hearing a heavenly voice, even the voice of God himself.

Why? First, because of what he writes in the next sentence. In v.20 Peter states that the truthfulness of Scripture comes “*not from one’s own interpretation.*” In other words, private experience does not determine whether or not the Scripture is actually true. When you’re in a bible study, asking What does this passage mean to you, is asking the wrong question. The right question is what does this passage mean? You can ask what a passage is saying to you, but the meaning of Scripture is determined by the Author, not the reader.

Peter’s personal experience on that mountain does not determine the truth of whether or not Jesus is the messiah. Neither does Peter’s own interpretation of what happened on that mountain determine the truth about who Jesus is. You can have much greater confidence in the fact that Jesus is the messiah by reading your Bible than you can by praying for some private experience or a spiritual whisper in your ear.

Other Reasons Why the Prophetic Word is More Sure Than Personal Experience

Second, *unspiritual people cannot rightly understand significant spiritual events.* On another occasion, Jesus prayed to God the Father and he answered by speaking out loud from heaven and the unbelieving crowd that stood there with him and heard God speak, “*said that it thundered*” (Jn. 12:28-29). Furthermore, Paul notes that *having the help of the Holy Spirit is necessary* to rightly “interpret spiritual truth” (1 Cor. 2:12). He says the “natural person does not accept our understand” the things of God because he does not have the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14). You can’t rightly understand biblical truth without the help of the Holy Spirit of God.

Third, *the devil can convincingly “whisper in your ear” too.* Satan always mimics God. That’s all he does. He is the greatest deceiver of all. He’s a lying spiritual copycat. God spoke to Adam and Eve and then Satan came behind him saying, “Did God *really*

¹³ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 108.

¹⁴ Robert Young, *Young’s Literal Translation* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), 2 Pe 1:19.

say..." God is all light and in him there is not darkness at all, but then Paul teaches us that Satan comes to us "disguising himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). And if you read the end of the book, Satan is allowed to exert great power to do all kinds of false signs and wonders (Rev. 13:12-15; 19:20; Thes. 2:9). Don't go seeking abstract spiritual experiences, because evil spiritual beings are seeking to deceive you.

You and I cannot verify Peter's hearing of a heavenly voice, but we can verify the truthfulness of the prophetic word!

It Is Wise to Study the Bible

Thus, Peter tells us to keep our noses in our Bibles. He argues that "...you will do well to pay attention to" the Bible "as a lamp shining in a dark place." Paying attention to the Bible is like allowing a lamp to illuminate what is dark. David says in Psalm 19 that God's word, "enlightens the eyes" and "makes the simple wise" (19:7-8). However, I think Peter has in mind,

Psalms 119:105 (ESV) Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

The third reason to believe the Bible is true is because its prophetic confirmation. God's word gives wisdom and insight and its truthfulness does not come from the private experience or the interpretation of certain individuals.

Scriptural Inspiration (v.20-21)

The fourth reason Peter gives for believing the Bible is true is because the ultimate author of Scripture is God the Holy Spirit, not mere men.

2 Peter 1:21 (ESV) For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The "will of man" is not the deepest reason to trust the Bible. The Bible is not true because men willed it into being, but rather because the Holy Spirit **moved** men to speak and write and then **carried** them along as they did it. The ultimate author of Scripture is God the Holy Spirit, not man.

How can we know this? Because no mere man is able to fulfill prophecy. The fulfillment of the word of God can only be effected by the power of God. God's word is true and trustworthy because the Holy Spirit of God was present in starting it and in finishing it. Only God has the power to say that a certain thing will be and then cause it to actually turn out exactly the way he said it would turn out.

For example, how can we know God's word is true and that we can have firm confidence that Jesus actually is God's only messiah?

- Because in God's word said messiah would be a descendant of Abraham (Gn 12:3) and Jesus is a descendant of Abraham (Mt 1:1).
- Because God's word said messiah would come from the tribe of Judah (Gn 49:10) and Jesus was a descendant of Judah (Mt 1:3; Heb 7:14; Rev 5:5).
- Because God said messiah would be a descendant of David (2 Sam 7:12-13) and Jesus was a descendant of David (Mt. 19:28).
- Because God's word said messiah would be like a sacrificial Passover lamb who would die for his people (Ex 12:1-11; Isa 53:7) and Jesus sacrificed himself during the Passover (Jn 1:26-36; 1 Cor 5:7-8).
- Because God's word through Moses predicted that not one of messiah's bones would be broken (Ex 12:46) and not one of Jesus' bones were broken (Jn 19:36).
- Because God said through Moses that messiah would bear the curse for his people (Dt. 21:23) and Jesus bore the curse of sin on the cross (Gal 3:13).
- Because God said through Micah that messiah would be born in Bethlehem and Jesus was born in Bethlehem.
- Because God said through Malachi (3:1) that messiah would be preceded by a forerunner and Jesus was preceded by John the Baptist (Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2).
- Because God said through the psalmist (Ps 78:2) that messiah would teach through parables and Jesus taught in parables (Mt 13:34-35).
- Because God said through Isaiah that messiah would be born of a virgin (Is 7:14) and Jesus' mother Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived in her womb (Mt 1:22-23).
- Because God said through Isaiah (Is 29:18-19) that messiah would heal the sick, open eyes of blind, and ears of deaf and Jesus did all these things.
- Because God said through David that messiah would be betrayed by a close friend (Ps 41:9; 55:12-14) and Jesus was betrayed by his close friend Judas (Mt 26:14-16).
- Because God said in the Psalms (Ps 2:7) that messiah would be opposed by Gentiles and Jesus was crucified by the Romans (Acts 4:27-28).
- Because God said through Isaiah that Messiah would be scourged and spat upon (Is 50:6) and Jesus was scourged and spat upon (Mt 26:67).
- Because God said through David that Messiah would be forsaken by God (Ps 22:1) and Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me" (Mt 27:46).
- Because God said through Isaiah that messiah would be mocked and insulted (Is 53) and Jesus at his crucifixion was mocked and insulted (Mt 27:39-43).
- Because God said through Isaiah that messiah would be beaten and scourged (Is 53) and Jesus was beaten and scourged.

- Because God said in the Psalms that messiah's hands and feet would be pierced (Ps 22:16) and Jesus' hands and feet were pierced (Mt 27:31)
- Because God also said in the Psalms that messiah's clothes would be gambled for (Ps 22:18) and the soldiers who crucified Jesus cast lots for his outer garment (Mt 27:35).
- Because God said through Isaiah (53:12) that messiah would be crucified with transgressors and Jesus was crucified with two thieves (Mk 15:27-28).
- Because God said through Isaiah (53:9) that Messiah would be "buried with the rich" and Jesus was buried in a rich man's tomb (Mt 27:57-60).
- Because God said in the Psalms that Messiah would rise from the dead (Ps 16:8-10; 49:15; 86:13) and Jesus was resurrected from the dead (Acts 2:27).

And I could go on, but perhaps you get the point. Only God can accurately say in advance what he is going to do and then do exactly what he previously said. No prophecy of Scripture was ever written by the will of men, but rather it was written by men, through the will of God, who were helped to write by the Holy Spirit. Thus, believe the Bible is true because ultimately it was authored by God, not men.

Conclusion

The Bible is the word of God because those who wrote it denied they were writing their own words and claimed to be writing the true word of God.

The Bible is the word of God because it was written by those who truly witnessed the historical events about which they wrote.

The Bible is the word of God because its prophetic truth can be demonstrated through the unfolding events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Bible is the word of God because the men who wrote it were not left to themselves in the writing, but rather were helped along by the Holy Spirit.

For all of these reasons, won't you believe that the Bible is the true word of God? Won't you thank God for this wonderfully true book, that teaches us that Jesus is our crucified and resurrected Lord and Savior? Let's together worship the name of JESUS.