

The Scripture

Series: These Things Never Change

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

Illus. This week – This week, we were shuffling around some things in my personal library here at the church and I wanted to get all of my Bibles together in one place. I have collected a number of Bibles through the years that I have read and studied from.

- You've heard me talk about the ESV Study Bible.
- I have an NIV Study Bible from my college days that is very important to me.
- I have a Care and Counseling Bible that has helpful articles and insights in it as it relates to dealing with mental and emotional health.
- I have the David Jeremiah Study Bible that has his sermon notes in it.
- I have a Criswell Study Bible, the Max Lucado Study Bible, the John MacArthur Study Bible, The Hebrew/Greek Key Word Study Bible.

Are you getting the point here? I have A LOT of Bibles.

And as we were moving them and making sure they were all together, there were three Bibles that caught my attention and I actually paused and had a moment in looking through them...I brought them here with me today to show you.

- This first one here is dated 1984 and in the dedication, it is presented to Jarrett Lynn Stephens by Mother and Daddy – in 1984, I was just 6 years old, and as you can imagine the thing I remember MOST about this Bible is the pictures in it.
- This second bible was given to me my senior year of high school. I was called to the ministry, and it was really the first Bible that I can remember writing in and highlighting. As you can see, it's pretty well worn out!

I was looking through it and I have notes from my home pastor's sermons from back in 1997! (speaking of taking notes – journals!) I remember I had a daily calendar and in the very front of this Bible is a torn off piece of that calendar dated, Jan. 20, 1997 – it's a quote...a prayer by Billy Graham – “May I be worthy to bear the name Christian, Lord Jesus.”

I love this Bible...it's truly one of my greatest treasures. And then, the third Bible I brought was this one:

- It was the Bible I was given on my ordination night 20 years ago this past March. I remember the evening like it was yesterday. I took a knee, with my wife standing

behind me and men that I admire and respect gathered around me, laid hands on me and prayed over me, and I just remember crying like a baby! I couldn't believe the Lord had called me into the ministry, the church I was serving in affirming this call – and I was just overwhelmed.

I share with you these stories...these moments to show you God's Word has had such a tremendous influence in my life, and it's subject we are going to tackle today as we continue in our doctrine series we are calling: *These Things Never Change*.

I believe of all the doctrines we are going to look at this may be the MOST important because all of the other doctrines...everything we know about them comes from the Bible.

And so, today let's address what we believe about the Bible and why it matters. I'm calling the title of this message today: **The Scripture**

Now, as we get going as part of the introduction, I just want to review what we've looked at the last two weeks because it's sets us up for today's message really well.

If you remember from two weeks ago, we talked about what is called *Theology Proper*, the study of God, the Father and a major point that was made during that week's message was God's desire to be known!

God's not playing hide and seek with us...and we talked about how he has revealed himself in:

- In creation – that we can look at what's around us and come to an understanding that there has to be a designer to what's been created.
- In our conscience – when God created us, he hard-wired us with a sense of the eternal. Solomon said he put “eternity in our heart”.
- He revealed himself in his written word – if we were left with just creation and conscience – and that's all we had as it relates to knowing who God was, our knowledge of and ability to know God would be limited. So, God gave us his written word to show us more fully who he is and tell us more clearly how we can have a relationship with him.

This is so very important as we get going today. Everything we know with certainty as it relates to God – who he is, what he is like, what he does, how we can have a relationship with him, what pleases him, how do live in a way that honors him – ALL of this comes from the Bible!

- The final way God revealed himself is through Jesus. And what we said in talking about God is if you want to know how he responds to sin, look at how Jesus responds to sin. If you want to know what's important to God, look at what Jesus taught and emphasized. If we want to know how God treats outsiders and sinners, look at how Jesus treated outsiders and sinners...

The ultimate way God has made himself known and shows his desire to be known is by sending Jesus, but again, where do we learn about Jesus? The Scripture! So, we can NEVER unhitch ourselves from the word of God.

W.A. Criswell - “You wouldn’t know God without the Book. You wouldn’t know Jesus Christ – not even his name – without the Book. You’d have no assurance of salvation or of heaven without the Book. Our whole life and hope lies in the promise and assurance and revelation of the Lord God written here in the Book...”

God desires to be known and has revealed himself in his word. Build on top of this what we talked about last week – the Trinity.

We said that we worship one God, in three distinct persons. And what defines personhood? It’s someone that can think, make volitional decisions, feel emotions and communicate intelligently.

Each person of the Godhead – God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit has these distinct characteristics of personhood. Note that final characteristic we mentioned: can communicate intelligently.

God speaks! This is VERY different from false gods who according to Psalm 115 have mouths but don’t speak! The one, true God speaks! He communicates!

And doesn’t it just make sense that God would communicate to those made in his image...those whom he wants to reveal himself...doesn’t it just make sense that God would speak and communicate to man in a way we would understand?

Sure it does! And so, God communicates using language! We have a God who has spoken his Word and he has (as we will talk about today) recorded his Word in language so that we could know who he is, what he wants from us and how we can walk with him – and this recorded word is the focus of the message today.

The first three questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

1. What is the chief end of man?

Answer: **Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.**

2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

Answer: **The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.**

3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

Answer: **The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.**

Now, as we get going, I want to give you three words that will help us as we look to understand the Bible – what it is and where it came from. We need to know what makes this book we hold in our hands different than any other book? Why is it so special? Are we correct in even saying it is the Word of God?

Let me give you three words that will help define and describe the Bible. The first word as we consider the doctrine of the Bible is the word: **Inspired**

God's word is inspired. Some use the term "God-breathed" and they base this out of **2 Tim. 3:16** – **"All (Notice the scope) Scripture is breathed out by God (God-inspired) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."**

2 Peter 1:20-21 – **"knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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."**

"carried along" is a nautical term. It's the picture of wind moving the sail of a ship. And what Peter is teaching here is that you have common men under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It's not dictation, but rather God using the personalities, circumstances and backgrounds of different people in order to compose what we know of as the Bible. They penned exactly what God wanted them to pen and God produced through them what we refer to as the Holy Scripture.

All that was spoken was written down and is compiled in 39 books that make up the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we have the gospels and letters of the New Testament all written down! 27 books of the New Testament we consider holy scripture. 66 books total.

Now, the Jews considered the 39 books of the Old Testament as inspired before the coming of Jesus. And Jesus doesn't take away from the words of the Old Testament, but instead says he came to fulfill them!

Matt. 5:17-18 – **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota (smallest letter in Greek alphabet), not a dot (think apostrophe or accent mark), will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."**

Jesus affirmed that he spoke the very words of God. Listen to:

John 12:49-50 – **"For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment - what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."**
Jesus said in **Matt. 24:35** – **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."**

Jesus was the word of God speaking the word of God! Listen to how Peter referred to Paul's writings:

2 Peter 3:15-16 – “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.”

God's word is inspired - Old Testament and New Testament. It's not like any other book! Like God, his word is eternal!

Psalm 119:89 – “Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens” – it's established...it's settled...it's never changing.

Isaiah 40:8 – “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

God's Word is alive! **Heb. 4:12** – “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Jeremiah 23:29 – “Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.”

Illus. The Grove – young adult gathering – I gave them this statement: “When I read the Bible, it reads me!”

There is nothing like God's word. It is divinely inspired. Entirely true!

Psalm 119:160a – “The sum of your word is truth...”

2 Sam. 7:28a – “And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true...”

John 17:17 – “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

God's word is inspired, and his word mirrors his nature and character. Meaning: it's never going to change...it's constant...as we have seen it will endure forever.

Let's turn the corner and talk next about the Scripture being: **Credible**

Now, if I was a cynic in the room...if I was a skeptic, I would be sitting there saying, “Jarrett, you just tried to prove the Bible was inspired by God by using verses from the Bible. I see the internal evidence, but what about external evidence?”

It's a good question and this issue of credibility is HUGE. If we can't trust the bible...if it's true in some areas but not in others...if it's been discredited or proved false or has errors, then we've got some real problems.

Illus. Next Step Discipleship book – Session Two is on “Can you trust the Bible?”

So, what do we have to say about the Scripture being credible? Is it trustworthy, and “Pastor, can you give me something outside the Bible that answers this question?”

Well, let's talk about this and let's begin with the uniqueness of the Bible.

- written over a period of 1500 years
- more than 40 different authors (various backgrounds, education, job)
- written in different settings and contexts (wilderness, dungeon, traveling, royal courts)
- different times/moods (joy, war, tragedy, struggle)
- three continents (Asia, Africa, Europe)
- Three different languages (Heb, Greek, Aramaic)
- Different styles (poetry, narrative, law, prophecy, letters, parables)
- Survived time: we have the earliest manuscripts of any other ancient literature
- Survived Persecution
- **COMMOM THEME** that it never swerves from: the story of redemption!

Think about the uniqueness of the Bible from a prophetic standpoint. This book is full of prophecies that have come true exactly as it predicted it would. Jesus fulfilled 300 prophecies in his own life and ministry.

What about the subject of Archeology? Did you know through archeological digs and discoveries 50+ people from the Bible have been identified and proven to be true. Location after location mentioned in the Bible has been unearthed and continues to this day (Pool of Siloam). Luke in his gospel and in the book he wrote, *Acts of the Apostles* mentions 32 countries, 54 cities and 9 islands – not one historical error in his writing.

The historical accuracy and archaeological confirmation in support of the Bible is overwhelming...do the hard work of really researching it out and you'll find the Scripture to be extremely credible.

One final apologetic in this direction and truthfully, I hesitate to even attempt to defend the Scripture, but today's the day!

I agree with **Charles Spurgeon** – “**The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself.**”

This is how I feel about God's Word. You give it a chance and humble your heart before it and just watch what the living and powerful word of God does!

It doesn't need my defending, but in light of what we are talking about – it being credible so we can have confidence in it, the greatest test of credibility is through what we call the:
Bibliographical test

Now, what we call “autographs” – the original copies of scripture are nowhere to be found...lost to history!

We do not have the autograph writings of Peter, Paul or the Stone tablets that God wrote with his own hand when he handed the law down to Moses, and it's probably a good thing because we'd make an idol out of it, I'm sure.

Don't be disheartened though, we don't we don't have the original autographs of any ancient historical literature. Like in the Bible's case we have manuscript copies of their work. And the bibliographical test that points to credibility using the manuscripts of what we have, looks at two things:

- AGE – how old is the manuscript copies do we have?
- NUMBER – how many copies of the manuscript do we have?

If we want to discover the historicity and credibility of any text – this is what we ask – how high is the manuscript authority? Do we have old manuscripts and a lot of them? If so, then we HIGH manuscript authority.

Let me show it to you like this and hold it up against the Bible.

1. Aristotle's “Poetics” – this was written around 343 B.C. We have NO original autograph. The earliest copy we have is dated 1100 A.D. So again, think AGE and NUMBER – the time gap – 1400 years...number of copies or manuscripts – 49.
2. Caesar's “Gallic Wars” – no original autograph. Written somewhere between 50-60 BC. Earliest copy we have 900 A.D. (nearly 1000 year time gap between the original and the manuscript copy) – number of copies we have – 10
3. Bible – No original autographs...but we do have over 10,000 copies (part or whole) of the Old Testament, and over 5,000 copies (part or whole) of the New Testament. The earliest copy we have – 200 A.D. (time gap – 100 years).

That is what you call a very high manuscript authority! Do you want to know what comes in second place behind the Bible?

4. Homer's Illiad – No original autograph - Written 900 B.C. earliest copy we have 400 B.C. (time gap of 500 years) – copies - 643 – that's 2nd place to the Bible in manuscript authority.

Illus. Bruce Metzger at OBU extra credit – Dr. Metzger died in 2007 at the age of 93. He was a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary and was a foremost scholar of Greek, New Testament and Old Testament.

Now, I want you to listen to the names of some of the books that he wrote. “The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration.” “The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations”. One more: “The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance.”

Here is the point. This man was really, really smart. Listen to what he said regarding the number of copies we have and the small time gap that exists between the original and a copy.

Bruce Metzger - “The quantity of New Testament material is almost embarrassing in comparison with other works of antiquity.”

Dr. Craig Blomberg is a New Testament Professor at Denver Seminary. He echoes Metzger writing referring to the New Testament text: (they) **“have been preserved in far greater number and with much more care than any other ancient documents.”**

He concludes in his book “The Historical Reliability of the New Testament” that “97-99% of the New Testament can be reconstructed beyond any reasonable doubt.”

The thought is often said is if it has that many copies and no original autographs surely there’s been mistakes! You can’t really trust what’s in our hands because it’s been changed due to mess-ups and human error.

In “Reinventing Jesus” by Dan Wallace (Lanier Lecture May 20th) writes concerning the perceived mistakes that so many people like to attribute to the Bible. Here is a quote from the book:

“By far the most significant number of variants is spelling differences. The name John, for example, may be spelled with one ‘n’ or with two. Clearly a variation of this sort in no way jeopardizes the meaning of the text. Spelling differences account for seventy-five percent of all variants...”

He goes on to say the other 25% of the textual variants has to do with synonyms such as one copy saying “he” another “Lord” or another the actual name, but there are no differences that threaten the actual meaning of the text.

I could go on and on! In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls are found in a cave near the Dead Sea – These scrolls belonged to a group of Jewish people who took scrolls that would have been used in the temple and sealed them in these jars and placed them in these caves (shepherd boy throwing rocks).

We have complete manuscripts of the O.T they were reading from at the time these people lived in 145 B.C to 68 A.D. They took the scrolls out, compared them to the earliest copies we had at the time (900 A.D – 1,000 year difference).

They took a passage like Is. 53 (1000 years older than the earliest copy we ever had) and they found only one word differed in the entire chapter, but it didn't change the meaning! In 1,000 years of copying the text ONE word out of 166 (that didn't change the meaning of the text, but was implied in the text) differs from the earliest manuscript we have!

This doesn't even count the early church fathers that lived in the generations following the early apostles...their disciples whose writings we have contain some 86,000 quotes or citations to the scriptures that we can use to cross-reference different manuscripts we have.

Third and finally: IF what we have said is true. IF the Scripture is inspired – and it is! And IF the Scripture is credible and trustworthy – and it is...THEN this means the Scripture is:

Authoritative

This means exactly what the reformer, **Martin Luther** – “**When Scripture speaks, God speaks.**”

Our lives are to fall under the authority of God and his word.

- We don't live off feelings...
- We don't live off man's wisdom or counsel...
- We don't live off the idea if it feels good, do it!

NO! As followers of Jesus, our highest authority is to him and his Word. We live our lives UNDER the authority of God! When he speaks, “Thus saith the Lord”:

- We don't debate it...
- We don't compromise...
- We don't change what he said to make it a little softer or a bit more palatable...

Instead, we submit to whatever he says! He is God, and we are not! Just think how our lives and our culture would be different if we lived UNDER God's Word.

Illus. King Charles Coronation – Some of us treat the Bible like the UK treats the King...it's all for show! We hold it high when we're supposed to...but the King – he doesn't have real authority...he's a figurehead. That's all the Bible is to some of us!

It has its proper place, but it doesn't set the rule of law in our home and heart. We're not about bow our emotions to it...our decisions to it...our relationships to it!

You want to talk why this doctrine matters? What would happen if we put our lives under the microscope of God's Word and decided that we were going to live under it! What would it do for:

- Our work ethic...
- How we treat people...
- Our personal purity...
- The way we spend our money...
- How we interact in relationships...

What we believe about this book, effects everything we do. So, in closing, let me give you some application to leave here with as it relates to the word of God.

1. Embrace it

The sooner you give your life to this word, the sooner life will start making more sense. Embrace it for what it is, the Word of God! Seniors, you're getting ready to graduate and leave, and you are going to go to schools where some professors will seek to destroy your faith...don't let them!

You hold to this word for what it is – the word of God and it will hold you through the years. I promise you.

Illus. Billy Graham – (pg. 138-139 READ)

If Satan can cause you to doubt this book...that it's God's Word, you will flip-flop...you'll waver...you'll be like the Forest Gump leaf in the wind that just blows wherever it wishes.

Settle it today...and like Billy Graham, embrace it as the Word of God by faith and commit to what I'm calling for next and that is to:

2. Consume it

Psalm 19:7-10 – “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;

⁹ the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;

the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”

Meditate on it...memorize it...give your life to it! Your walk with Jesus will only be as strong as your time in the word!

Illus. Time Alone

3. Obey it

This is where the rubber hits the road. We don't just read it...we don't just take it in...we do what it says! Again, this is an issue of authority!

So, we embrace, consume and obey.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming