

Reformers Who Passed on Living Oracles to You

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If you have your Bibles you can turn to Acts 7. We [spent] the month of October doing a series on the solas of the Reformation. We have finished all five of them, but we're going to do one more just because there was one more topic that I thought, "I just cannot let it go by." [We are going] to talk a little bit about the reformers who passed on living oracles to you.

Look at [your Bible] there. I don't know about you, but every once in a while I see people kind of throwing their Bibles around, pitching them here, dropping them on the ground. That makes me cringe. Don't do that around me. It's like the button pushing for the lecture on Bible respect. I was talking to one of our missionaries, who said that when he grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family if they ever let the Bible touch the ground, they didn't eat or drink for twenty-four hours. I like that.

You have your Bible there. Your Bible *is* the Book. It's not *a*book. It's not a good book. It's not just a significant book or one of the better books. It is the Book of God, the Book from which God Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, speaks to you, and you have one. If you don't [have one], you can get one out of the pew. [Or], if you don't have one, you [can] ask for one [and] we'll give you one.

We need to remember what a precious gift the Bible is. We need to remember why the Bible needs to be read, taught, preached, and lived out. [Do] you remember what happened after the Babylonian captivity? The Israelites had been in captivity for seventy years, and they then came back and God raised up a godly preacher named Ezra to rebuild the temple and to restore Judaism and the spiritual walks of the people of Israel. Why did God choose Ezra? [That] is a good question. What did Ezra do to fix what was broken? Did he do a survey of the Israelites who, at that time, were pretty much apostate and rebellious, and ask them what they would like to have in their synagogue worship? Did he go down to the local bookstore and read synagogue growth books and temple worship growth books in order to try and get people to come in to worship in the temple? Did he promote positive thinking? Did he seek to meet the felt needs of the rebellious Israelites so that they could feel good while worshipping God? Did he tell the Israelites, “Listen, truth is relative. We can’t really know absolutely what is right and what is wrong. We really shouldn’t take a stand on doctrine because it is divisive”? No. Ezra 7:10 says that God chose Ezra because “he set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach God’s statutes and ordinances in Israel.” That’s why God chose Ezra.

In Nehemiah 8:1, we are told that Ezra did something very simplistic, very non-impressive, in order to bring spiritual revival to the people of Israel. He didn’t use any gimmicks, techniques, lilting music, or drama. He used one source and one method. Nehemiah 8:1 says: “And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel.” After bringing the Book, [Ezra] stood on a podium made of wood in front of all the women, children, and men who could stand there and listen attentively, [and] he led the people in prayer and worship. In [Nehemiah 8:]8, we read that he “read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.” This resulted in the greatest spiritual revival that ever happened in the

history of Israel, [because of] one man explaining, reading, interpreting, [and] applying the very same Book you have in your hands.

There are always skeptics, and they always say, “Well, that was a unique situation, Jack. After all, the Israelites were coming back from the Babylonian captivity. They were glad to be back and they were kind of emotional. Of course they wanted to get back to their roots, so when Ezra read the Book, it was like looking at an old family album. They were pre-primed to believe in God and believe in the Scriptures. But you just can’t do that today. We live in pretty much a pagan world. People worship different gods. We need to study the culture, and we need to make sure that we don’t expect results like this until we first talk to people and meet them where they’re at, and do cultural studies and emphasis so that we can relate to them by degrees what God says.”

Well, 400 years before Ezra’s time, the Assyrians, who were pagan, brutal, grossly immoral, [and] completely unlike the Israelites, having no cultural similarity [and] worshipping idols. [They] were the sworn enemies of Israel, [and] were flourishing in their town of Nineveh. God wanted to evangelize them. So what did He do? Did He form a missions committee? No. Did He fly planes over [the city] and drop gospel tracts on them? No. Did He hold a crusade and invite them to come? No. He sent one reluctant, stubborn, angry, bitter, uncompassionate man, who hated the Assyrians, who wanted to see God judge the Assyrians, who tried to run away to sea, but God had to turn him around and spit him up on land again from the belly of a whale. Yes, we’re talking about Jonah. Armed with nothing but the Book that you hold in your hands, Jonah went into that city. Given a [single] phrase to preach, for days he walked through the city, pouting and griping, [saying], “In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown.” [Do] you know what happened? It led to the single greatest mass conversion of Gentiles in the history of the world. One guy, preaching one phrase from this Book, and the whole city was converted. Think about that.

There it is in your hands: a literary porthole into the mind, will, purpose, and future plan of God. And you’ve got one, in your hands. How did that

come to be? How do you rate? [Why do] you have a Bible, or two Bibles, or three Bibles? We want another one. They come out with a different leather cover that's cool, [so] we buy one. The gold stuff wears off on the edge and we get another one. A little different font, a little different paper, a little different size—we just buy them. But why? Why is it that you have an English Bible? There are a lot of people around the world today who would love to have a Bible for their community and don't have one. But you've got one, in English, that you can read. This morning, I want to remind you why that is. I think there is a problem today in the Church in that people don't respect the Scriptures like they should. I think part of it is that they don't understand why they have a Bible, what a privilege it is to have a Bible, and the incredible, incredible gift that the Scriptures are.

I want to remind you of two key individuals. The first is John Wycliffe, the second William Tyndale. These men, like Moses, were raised up to deliver their brethren from bondage. God raised up John Wycliffe in 1388, 100 years before the printing press was invented. It was 100 years after [Wycliffe died] that Martin Luther came on the scene. The times [Wycliffe] lived in were arguably the worst, darkest, most wicked times in the history of Christianity, if you could even call it Christianity. The Church was so corrupt, dark, and wicked, the priests were so immoral and oppressive, that apostate Roman Catholicism covered all of Europe. Educated at Oxford, Wycliffe was a brilliant Roman Catholic theologian. He studied hard, and one of the things he decided to study was the Bible. Imagine that. You think, "Well, isn't that what theologians do?" Not back then, they didn't. But Wycliffe did, and he came to believe an interesting doctrine. He came to believe in the sufficiency and authority of the Word of God. Imagine that.

J.C. Ryle, speaking of Wycliffe said that he believed:

The true Christian was intended by Christ to prove all things by the Word of God, all churches, all ministers, all teaching, all preaching, all doctrines, all sermons, all writings, all opinions, all practices. These are his marking orders. Prove all by the

Word of God; measure all by the measure of the Bible; compare all with the standard of the Bible; weigh all in the balances of the Bible, examine all by the light of the Bible; test all in the crucible of the Bible. That which can abide the fire of the Bible, receive, hold, believe and obey. That which cannot abide the fire of the Bible, reject, refuse, repudiate, and cast away. This is the standard which Wycliffe raised in England. This is the flag which he nailed to the mast.¹

As Wycliffe studied the Bible, he began to realize, in alarm, that the Roman Catholic Church had drifted completely away from the Scriptures. As he read, he realized that many of the doctrines that he had been taught, that he had believed, could be found nowhere in the Scriptures. He felt that if he could just translate the Bible into the common language of the people, they could read it for themselves and be delivered from these deceptions. He saw souls perishing because the truth of the gospel was hidden from them, and he wanted to give it to them.

I want you to know, th[o]se were dark times. Wycliffe didn't have anybody before him. He didn't have a group of other like-minded reformers, no printing press, no study helps, no writings of Martin Luther. All by himself, single-handedly, a man, who became convinced by his study of the Scriptures that the Scriptures were authoritative and sufficient, began to boldly and publicly criticize the pope. The Bible did not speak of popes at all, nor did [it] teach [that] the pope was the voice of God [or] the head of the Church. It was found nowhere in Scriptures. This made Wycliffe a marked man. After being removed from his post at Oxford in 1381, he moved to Lutterworth, where he began to translate the Bible from Latin into English. He also trained faithful men to go about and preach the Word of God. It was the first occurrence, for over 1,000 years, where men who were trained to preach the Word of God [as] the apostles [did] were sent forth to teach the people of England. Wycliffe was the head of it all.

¹J.C. Ryle, *Light from Old Times* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2000), 23–24.

Wycliffe was the point of the spear, the first man who successfully translated the Bible into the English language. He did this against incredible odds, seemingly against *all* odds, constantly in danger of death, with no translating helps, with nothing to go back on, nobody to write him a letter of encouragement. He copied the Bible by hand. Even if you can type 100 words a minute and you have a word processor, that is a huge task. Try it sometime [and] see if you can hack out the whole Bible in a year. But [imagine] a man who was sitting there at a desk on a hard wooden chair with paper [and] animal skins, getting a quill pen, sticking it in the ink, daubing it, writing a few letters, and doing that over and over and over again, until the Bible [was] copied. [Then he would] do it again, and again, and again.

The Roman Catholic Church argued against Wycliffe's translation of the Bible, saying:

By this translation, the Scriptures have become vulgar, and they are more available to the laity, and even to women who can read, than they are to learned scholars, who have a high intelligence. So the pearl of the gospel is scattered and trodden underfoot by swine.

That's us—[the swine]. The Roman Catholic Church tried to destroy all copies of Wycliffe's translation, but, amazingly, we have nearly 200 hand-copied Bibles from Wycliffe that survive to this day.

J.C. Ryle writes:

How [Wycliffe] escaped without a violent death, and finally died quietly in Lutterworth, is a miracle indeed. But it is evident to my mind that God protected him in a miraculous way.... It was God who raised up John of Gaunt and the Princess of Wales to favor him. It was God who sent the earthquake which broke up a London synod when it was about to condemn him.

It was God who inclined the University of Oxford to give him support. . . .

Just when his translation was being published, [which] was [considered] a crime, all the lies, deceptions, and false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church were being discovered by the people. [The Roman Catholic Church] got together in a big synod, [or] council, to condemn Wycliffe. Just before they passed sentence on him, a huge earthquake struck. They were all fearful, ran out of the building, and [the synod] was disbanded, “by accident.” Ryle goes on to say: “But above all, I see the hand of God over Wycliffe—the hand of Him who said, ‘When a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes his enemies to be at peace with him.’”²

Try as they might, the Roman Catholic Church was unable to destroy Wycliffe’s Bibles. [The Bibles] continued to circulate and be read, under the radar of the Roman Catholic Church, creating discontent [in] the people against Roman Catholic doctrines, and paving the way for the greater Reformation to come in England. Wycliffe’s translation caused the Roman [Catholic] Church so much grief that forty-three years after he had already died, they had a trial for him. They found him guilty of 260 counts of heresy, ordered all of his writings to be burned, exhumed (dug up) his remains from his grave, burnt them in a fire, and threw them in the river Swift. Wycliffe was dead, but the Word of God, which he [had] translated into English, remained.

The second great pillar of the English Bible was William Tyndale (1494–1536). Educated at Oxford and Cambridge, he was appalled at the biblical ignorance, immorality, and paganism of the Roman Catholic priests. They were so ignorant—priests, who were supposed to teach the Bible. Most priests had never even read or studied the Bible. They couldn’t tell you half the books of the Bible or half the names of the apostles. They were completely ignorant, and Tyndale, at one point, fired [up] with holy zeal, said to one of these biblically ignorant priests, “If God spare my life

²Ryle, 29–30.

for many years, I will cause a boy that drives the plough to know more of the Scripture than you do.”

Tyndale tried to get the bishop of Tunstall in London to sanction his English translation, but the bishop refused. Tunstall told Tyndale, “Not only that there was no room in my Lord of London’s palace to translate the New Testament, but also that there was no place to do it in all England.” Well, Tyndale refused to take “no” for an answer. He sought out private merchants to sponsor his new Bible translation, which he completed in two years. Tyndale’s translation was unique because, unlike Wycliffe, Tyndale had Hebrew and Greek manuscripts [from which he developed his translation]. Wycliffe didn’t have any of that, so he had to translate his version from the Latin Vulgate, which was a translation of the Hebrew and Greek, back into English. So, his was a translation of a translation, while Tyndale labored to communicate the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek texts as perfectly and exactly as he could.

The printing press was brand new [when Tyndale began his work]. It was a brand-new invention, and he wanted to use it, but the senate, influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, forbid Tyndale to print his English translation. Undaunted, Tyndale decided that he would go to a different country, so he went to Germany, to Wyrms, where 6,000 Bibles were printed. By 1526, they were selling in England, but sadly only two of those first-edition copies of Tyndale’s Bible have survived. (If you have one, it’s worth a lot of money. I just want you to know that.) The reason that only two survived is that Bishop Tunstall, when he found out that they were for sale, sent people out to buy every single copy. So fearful was he that the Word of God would get into the hands of men, and the deceptions and lies of the Roman Catholic Church would be made known, that he bought up all the copies and burned them. However, in the providence of God, Tyndale made so much money from the sale of his 6,000 copies that [it] was used to finance a better and more corrected edition.

A lot of people don’t realize this, but 90 percent of the King James Bible is Tyndale’s Bible. The King James Bible (King James people don’t

like you to talk about it this way) is Tyndale's Bible with some revisions. So accurate was it, so clear, so practical to the average [English-]speaking person, that Tyndale's Bible translation actually became the source of spoken English in England. That is, when it came out on the market, it was so well done that it affected all culture, and people began to speak like Tyndale's version, which, of course, is captured in the King James version that was published some eighty years later.

So accurate was Tyndale's version that in 1952, when the English Standard version of the Bible was printed, 75 percent of Tyndale's translation [was] still in that version, which, of course, is slightly different from the New Revised Standard version, which I know many of you use. The Roman Catholic Church did not approve of Tyndale's translation because it used biblical terms like "repent," instead of "do penance," or "elder" instead of "priest." It had Lutheran ideas in the preface and marginal notes that attacked doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, which they did not like. Tyndale, in the eyes of the Church, was public enemy number one. Eventually, a friend very deceptively, very cunningly, gained [Tyndale's] confidence, led him out to an alley, and had him arrested. [Tyndale] was thrown into prison, [and was] later tried as a heretic, tied to a stake, strangled to death, and burned to ashes on October 6, 1536. His crime: translating the Bible into English so that the common man could understand and read the Word of God. His last words were loud, clear, and brave: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Ironically, at [the] same time Tyndale was being tried as a heretic because he had opposed the Church, King Henry VIII was on the throne, and Myles Coverdale, of the Coverdale version of the Bible, which was largely Tyndale's version with a few changes, approached King Henry, and asked if he could have translations of his Bible made and put in the churches. King Henry VIII, unknowingly, and ironically, gave approval to Coverdale to print Tyndale's Bible and burned Tyndale at the stake for the same version.

This morning, I want to focus your attention on a single text: Acts 7:38. The Church [at this time] was experiencing explosive growth, [and] there were many needs. The Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked, so seven faithful men were appointed to oversee their care. One of them was Stephen, a man described as “full of the Holy Spirit” [see Acts 6:5; 7:55] But Stephen did not just serve widows. He was a preacher and an evangelist, and he went out and preached the Word, performed signs and wonders, [and] was so effective in doing evangelism that tons of Jews, and even many priests, were coming to Christ. This, of course, made the Jewish leaders jealous and angry. They tried to argue with Stephen, but the Holy Spirit was giving him wisdom and they could not refute him. So, they brought forth false witnesses and falsely accused Stephen, threw him in jail, and then brought him to trial.

In Acts 7, we have the account of Stephen defending himself before this huge council [of] judges and the religious leaders. In his sermon, Stephen surveys God’s saving plan for Israel throughout the ages. Stephen shows how from the very beginning the Jews have been guilty of persecuting, condemning, and killing those [who] were sent to deliver them. For instance, he mentions the patriarchs who [hated], wanted to kill, and [finally] sold their brother, Joseph, into slavery. [Stephen] goes on to explain that Moses was also raised up by God. Moses killed an Egyptian to try and protect his fellow brothers. Moses talked to God, was sent [to Egypt] with the ability to do miracles, and [the Jews] still rejected, despised, grumbled and complained against, and disowned Moses. Then, with power, boldness, zeal, and fearless preaching, [Stephen] swings the broadsword of truth at [his accusers]. If you look at Acts 7:51[-53], this is kind of the punch line of his sermon. I want you to notice that he is not fearful of men. He says:

You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. ”Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously an-

nounced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it. [Acts 7:51–53]

That didn't make them very happy. As a matter of fact, the sword was thrust so deep[ly] into their soul[s], it hit the mark so perfectly, that, look at [Acts 7:]54: "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him." They rushed upon him, drove him outside of the city, and stoned him to death. Among them was that extra-zealous Jew who became pretty significant after that: Saul of Tarsus.

In the midst of [Stephen's] sermon, we have this verse I want to look at this morning. Look at Acts 7:38. Luke, recording what Stephen said, writes: "This is the one," speaking of Moses, "who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you." I want to focus our attention on that last part of [Acts 7:]38 [and] to point out three doctrines that every Christian needs to know and believe so that they give the Bible its proper respect, and so they make it the priority that it needs to be in their [lives].

The first [doctrine] is this: Your Bible is inspired. Look at the latter part of [Acts 7:]38, where we read: "and he received." He, being Moses, received. Earl[ier] in the verse, [we see that] he received it from the angel. What angel? It was the angel of the Lord who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai through the burning bush. We know from studying the Scriptures that the angel of the Lord is none other than the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, before He became a man. Before He became incarnated, He appeared in the Old Testament as *the* angel of the Lord. When you look at texts of the angel of the Lord, you discover that the angel of the Lord is also called "the Lord," Yahweh. He is one who receives worship, who does the works of God, and in Exodus 3, as Moses is speaking to the burning bush, and says, "Who should I say You are?" the angel of the Lord, who is

also called “the Lord,” and speaks as the Lord, says: “I Am who I Am,” and gives the memorial name “Yahweh,” the great I am, to Moses. So it was Jesus who spoke living oracles to Moses in the wilderness on the mountain that he might give them to the people. When God gives His word to men that they might write it down, the result is an inspired text. This is the doctrine of inspiration.

But what is inspiration? John Walvoord said:

A proper statement of the meaning of inspiration is, therefore, that God so supernaturally directed the writers of Scripture that without excluding their human intelligence, their individuality, their literary style, their personal feelings, or any other human factor, His own complete and coherent message to man was recorded in perfect accuracy, the very words of Scriptures bearing the authority of divine authorship.³

The New Bible Dictionary states, concerning inspiration:

Each Biblical book is in one sense the literary creation of its author. But theologically, from the standpoint of content, the Bible regards the human writers as having contributed nothing, and Scripture as being entirely the creation of God. This conviction is rooted in the self-consciousness of the founders of biblical religion, all of whom claimed to utter—and, in the case of the prophets and apostles, to write—what were, in the most literal sense, the words of another: God Himself.⁴

So, in other words, inspiration is this idea that God communicates perfectly through men His word. Let me just give you a few texts, and we’ll let

³John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 55.

⁴I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer, and D.J. Wiseman, eds. *The New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), n.p.

God define inspiration. In 2 Samuel 23:2, David says this: “The Spirit of the font-variant: small-caps spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue.” So, when David was writing the Psalms, he was speaking the words of Jesus. The spirit of the Lord gave the content to David so that when David [wrote] the Holy Spirit [wrote], God [wrote], whatever He wanted to say. That’s why, if you read the book of Acts, sometimes it says, “Just as David spoke in the Spirit” [see Acts 1:16; 4:25], and sometimes it says, “Just as the Spirit said,” and quotes David. Well, who was it? Was it David? Yes. Was it [the Holy] Spirit? Yes. Was it the Spirit speaking through David? Yes. That is inspiration.

In Jeremiah 1:9, God told Jeremiah the prophet, “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.” He said to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 3:27, “But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’” The prophets were given the Word of God to speak to the people so that when they spoke, God spoke through them. Jesus told the apostles in Mark 13:11, “When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit would speak through them. Paul praises the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, and writes:

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

When Paul the apostle taught, preached, [and] wrote his letters, the Thessalonians understood that to be the inspired Word of God, and they received it as the Word of God, not the words of Paul. The[re are] two great texts in the New Testament on inspiration, the first being 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (many of us know this text), which says: “All Scripture,” and again, Paul has just referenced the Old Testament, so we’re talking primarily [about]

the Old Testament, [which] would include anything that falls under the category of Scriptures, “is inspired by God.” That word “inspired” really means “God-breathed,” it means “expired, or breathed out.” “All Scripture is breathed out, or God-breathed,” and is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness,” why? “so that the man,” the woman, the child, “of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Some people are always looking for another revelation from God. They’re looking for God to talk to them, to speak to them, to give them a sense, to give them a word, a “small, still inner voice” [see 1 Kings 19:12]. Listen, you have everything in this Book for life and godliness [see 2 Peter 1:3]. There is nothing else outside of that. It equips you for “every good work” [see 2 Timothy 3:17]. That’s all you need. You don’t need any more. You have everything [in this Book] to equip you for every good work.

A similar text [is] 2 Peter [1]:20–21. Right before [those verses], Peter describes how he had [an] incredible experience. He was up on the mountain, heard the voice of God, [and] saw Jesus in His kingdom glory. [Peter] says, “Man, we were there. We saw it. What an incredible experience! But, we have the ‘more sure’ word, ‘to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts [2 Peter 1:19].’” Then he says this: “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” [2 Peter 1:20–21].

Imagine how thrilling it would be if you moved back East and bought an old fixer-upper, Victorian-style house. You were up in the attic and found some old, broken furniture. You brought it down, and found in there a letter from Benjamin Franklin, or George Washington, or Abraham Lincoln. You would be excited: “Look what I found! This is from George Washington, the first president!” Man, that would be valuable. It would be an incredible find. But listen, you’ve got the Word of God. If God were, right now, to speak the roof off of this building and expose us to the sky, and if the clouds of heaven [were to] form, and Jesus [were to] appear in glory with all His

mighty angels, and He were to look down and speak to us with a voice like thunder [see Revelation 14:2], it would be no more authoritative, no more wonderful, than if we read this Book. It'd be the same thing, except here [in the Bible] we have more of it. The same authority, the same incredible Word of God is in the Bible.

Old Testament scholar R. Laird Harris writes:

America has lost its belief in and emphasis upon the Bible. There was a time when it was read and taught in our public schools. Now reading from it and teaching it are said to be illegal. It used to be preached, memorized, quoted, studied, and believed. Now this is true only in restricted circles. America must return to the Bible.⁵

Listen, if you have a problem, you're struggling with some sin, you need to know how to have a good marriage, how to make your business work, how to deal with your finances, how to whatever—anything that falls under the category [of] “life and godliness” or “any good work”—don't go to the Internet first, don't go to the secular books, [or] friends. Go to the Book. In it, God speaks to you. God's wisdom is unfathomable and it is found in that Book.

Every Sunday I agonize about what *not* to tell you. You can ask my wife: every Sunday morning, I'm sitting there with some two-hour sermon that I have to hack down into an hour. It kills me. So, [I think], “I can cut out this good thing, or that good thing,” and I just start blocking, and chopping, and cutting. Ah! It kills me. Sometimes I just want to feed you the whole cow in one bite. I've tried, but I'm not going to apologize for it, man, because this is the Word of God.

Some people come, and [say to me], “Man, you say a lot.”

[My response is]: “Well, not as much as I want to say.”

⁵R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible: An Historical and Exegetical Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 53–54.

You need to never forget it: This Book is the *inspired Word of God*.

[The] second [doctrine is]: Your Bible is living. Notice [in] the latter part of [Acts 7:]38, [the text] goes on to say: “And he,” that is, Moses, “received *living* oracles” [emphasis added]. Not only did Moses receive oracles, or divine utterances, he received *living* oracles. The Greek word used here is *zoe*, the word we get “zoo” from, [and] “zoology.” It talks about things that have life in them. In this context, it describes something that “has vital power and life in itself to affect something else,” [which] here [in this context is] our souls.

The Lord says in Isaiah 55:10–11:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Isn't that great? I love that verse. I know if I preach the gospel and no one comes to Christ, it's OK. *I* don't save people. *I* don't sanctify people. I'm only responsible to let the Word out. Like [Martin] Luther said: “The Bible is a lion. You let it out of the cage, [and] it takes care of itself.” You don't have to defend it, you don't have to argue it, you don't have to say, “Well, let me tell you why the Bible is true.” It's true! If you don't believe it, you can't judge it. It will judge you.

The Lord says in Jeremiah 23:29: “‘Is not My word like fire?’ declares the Lord, ‘and like a hammer which shatters a rock?’” In Hebrews 4:12, we read: “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” And you've got it in your hands. Just as God breathed life into

Adam and formed him out of the dust, so God breathed life into the Bible, His Word.

Imagine this: You go out to the airport, you walk out on the tarmac, [and] you go up to some plane. You feel the propeller. What if that engine was on? What if the engine was revved and that plane was lurching forward, but the chocks under the tires were keeping it from going forward? Wind was being sucked in toward the fuselage. Then would you walk up and touch the propeller? “No,” you say, “that would be foolish.” And you know what? You would be right because when the propeller is turning in a blur, and all that energy is being sucked in, you would be torn to shreds if you approached that propeller. Well, this is the difference between the uninspired works of men and the inspired, living oracles of God. The works of men are a dead propeller. The Word of God is energized by the Holy Spirit of God, and believe me, it does damage—in a good way.

Have you ever tried witnessing to somebody and [the person] said, “Listen, I, I, I, I . . .”

Of course, because you come to Calvary *Bible* Church, you keep saying, “Well, the Bible says, the Bible says, the Bible says,” and finally the person is fed up with you quoting the Bible because everybody knows that, “Oh, that’s just your interpretation. Well, that’s just what *you* believe about the Bible.” Then [the person] finally get[s] stubborn, get[s his] hackles up, and [he] say[s], “OK. I don’t want you cramming your religion down my throat. I’m going to read the Bible for myself and I’m going to prove you wrong.” Then [you] get this smile [on your face], and inside [you’re thinking], “Mwah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha,” because [you] know something they don’t: they’re going to be walking into a buzz saw. Man, they are going to be walking into that fire that consumes, the hammer that shatters rock [see Jeremiah 23:29], and the double-edged sword [see Hebrews 4:12].

[You say], “OK. You just read that. Show me I’m wrong.” Many people, in pride and selfish determination, have read the Bible to prove those religious Christian fanatics wrong only to become one of those same reli-

gious Christian Jesus fanatics themselves. Why? [It is] because [the Bible] is living, not dead.

This is why we support ministries like the Gideons. All they do is hand out little, colorful Bibles, and stick them places where people can find them. You see some guys out there, [and you think], “They’re just a bunch of bored, misfit businessmen whose businesses must not be doing well. They’re standing on the sidewalk handing [out] those little fruity-colored Bibles.” A lot of people don’t want a Bible. All of a sudden they get one in their hand, and they [think], “OK, I’ve got one. I’ll just hang on to it.” [Maybe it’s] peer pressure [or] guilt, [but] they don’t want to throw it on the ground, so they just hang on to it. Little do they know [that] they [have] the living oracles of God Almighty in their hands. Little do they know that each of those Bibles is like a grenade, and if they open it up, they pull the pin. Opening the Bible is like arming [a] nuclear device, and reading it is like detonating it. They will not escape unscathed. God’s Word will judge them, convict them, [and] either drive them to repentance or drive them away, but it will not return void. It will accomplish God’s purpose [see Isaiah 55:10–11]. It is the *living* Word of God.

We have heard the testimonies of people [who have read the Bible and come to Christ]. Some have been in church for years and years, and finally came to Christ—[they] read a Bible, or a tract, and some verse, some weird verse [struck them]. It’s weird, you know. I get up here and I’ve got this perfect verse for a gospel presentation. Man, I craft the most perfect [sermon], and I think, “Half the congregation is coming to Christ this Sunday. I mean, some people who are already saved are going to get saved again!” I preach, [and] nothing happens. Then some other time, some person is reading some verse, sitting in a Sunday school class, [or] they pick up some weird thing, [or] they see some tract, and it just takes a phrase, a piece of a verse, and God breaks them with that little fraction of His Word. They come to repentance and faith. Why? [It is] because [the Bible] is the living oracles of God.

[The] third [doctrine is]: Your Bible is divinely preserved. Notice that he, Moses, “received living oracles.” That happened around 1446 BC. [In Acts 7], Stephen is preaching a little after AD 50. So, what are we saying here? What’s going on? We’re [saying] that the Bible ha[d] been preserved some 1,500 years so that Stephen could tell the Jews in his day about Moses, who received the Word of God in his day, [a Word] that they still have. That implies that for those 1,500 years, God preserved His Word. Isn’t that what the Scriptures say God will do [in] Isaiah 40:8? “The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount [in] Matthew 5:18, [says], “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” In Mark 13:31, Matthew 24:35, and Luke 21:33, all of them record Jesus’ words: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” We know that God is going to preserve His Word because His character, integrity, [and] promise [are] on the line. Yet, you keep running into people who have never studied the Bible or studied the issue of the reliability of the Bible, who always throw [arguments] at Christians who they hope are ignorant, lazy, and untrained, [saying], “There are so many translations and transliterations. We don’t have the early manuscripts. I mean, how do you even know the Bible is true?” That shoos away most Christians, because they don’t know how to answer that.

Well, let me just tell you. Concerning the Old Testament, between 300 BC and AD 500, there were basically two different kinds of manuscripts: synagogue scrolls ([they were scrolls] because they didn’t have books until later) [and] private scrolls. [Both of] these were extremely rare, extremely expensive, hand-written copies of the Hebrew Scriptures. Usually only the synagogue and very wealthy people could afford a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures. Private scrolls were never used in the synagogue because the synagogue had such stringent requirements for copying the Old Testament Scriptures that no private scroll would meet up to [its] exacting criteria.

Let's say you were my copyists, and I was the cantor. I would take the original copy, called the "exemplar," and I would roll it out. In front of you, [you] would have parchments, animal skins, ink, quill pen, [and] dauber. I would say, "The," and you would all repeat, "The," and you would write down "The." Then I would say, "The name," and you would say, "The name," and you would write down, "Yahweh Lord." I'd say, "Said," and you'd all say, "Said," and you would write it down. Imagine how long it would take to get through the Bible like that. Would[n't] that just be painful?

Not only that, all the Hebrew letters were assigned a numerical equivalent, so every line of the Scriptures [was] then given numerical numbers, calculated, and that number was put in the margin. If one line on the whole page did not match up, the whole page would be thrown away. Then, [if it passed that test], all of those numbers for all the lines would be tallied up, and if they did not match the exemplar, [that page] would be thrown away. Huh.

Samuel Davidson tells us these are the criteria:

A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex.

A codex is a stack of skins, a whole book, or a roll.

The length of each column must not extend over less than 48 nor more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. The whole copy must be firstlined; and if three words should be written without a line, it is worthless.

You throw away the whole page. If you get to the bottom, and there are three words on the line, and that's all, you throw it away. I don't know what

they did the next time they did it. I guess [they wrote] smaller or something. But that's what they did. Get this:

The ink should be black, neither red, green, or any other color, and be prepared according to a definite recipe. An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate. No word or letter, not even a yod, [which is the smallest little symbol in Hebrew], must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him. . .

Between every consonant the space of a hair or a thread must intervene; [no letters can touch]; between every new paragraph, or section, the breadth of nine consonants; between every book, three lines. The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so. Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, wash his whole body, not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, [always daub it first], and should a king address him while writing that Name he must take no notice of him.”⁶

That's fairly fanatic. This is what happened. Around the end of the 1800s, coming out of the Puritan era into the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment and rational thinking, liberal scholars began to cast stones at the Bible, the authority of the Bible, its veracity, [and] its integrity. [They] said things like, “Listen, we don't even have any of the ancient manuscripts. The oldest ones we have are from AD 900. We don't even know if the Hebrew Bibles we have today are anything close to what Jesus had in His day. As a matter of fact, we have discovered that the Old Testament was actually put together by a whole group, a committee, of people—redactors, editors—that kind of pieced the Bible together. Over the course of time, the

⁶Herman Geisler and William Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1986), 348–349.

Bible has evolved into what it is, but it [is not] the same way [it was] back in Jesus' time."

This was a grief to Christians because pretty much all we could say was, "Huh uh," because we *didn't* have any older manuscripts that were older than AD 900. Why is that? [It is] because the Jews were so fanatical about maintaining the integrity of the text of the Bible that when any scroll began to get old, wrinkled, cracked, faded, [or] they were afraid the ink might pop off, or some letter might be misunderstood, or whatever, [that] they would take that scroll and give it a burial. None of the scrolls would survive, so we had no older copies. This just allowed the liberal theologians to cast stones at all the Bible-believing Christians, and it got worse, and worse, and worse until 1947, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are one of the greatest archeological finds that have ever occurred in the history of the world. Within those scrolls was found a complete book of Isaiah—all sixty-six chapters. If you go to Israel, [that scroll is] found in this building, which is nothing more than a huge security vault. You actually go into [what is called] the Dome of the Scroll, and they have the scroll bent around this incredible thing that looks like the end of a scroll. It's the complete set that they found, and if there is any sort of bombing [or] threat, that whole thing just submerges into a concrete vault to protect that one scroll. That's how amazing it is.

[Scholars] were eager to see how [the Dead Sea Scroll version of Isaiah] deviated. The common text that people use today is *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, which is [an] academic text, which by and large is from what is called the Masoretic text. The Masoretic text comes from a family of copiers that lived from about AD 500–900. The Masoretes copied the Old Testament for people who wanted a copy, or for synagogues. So, th[e] Masoretic text is famous, and [scholars knew] the history of this family. So, when they compared the sixty-six chapters of the book of Isaiah [found in the Dead Sea Scrolls] to the Masoretic text, it matched perfectly, though [the book from the Dead Sea Scrolls] was 1,050 years older, dating back to about 150 BC. Think about that. That was like the biggest ninner-ninner

that ever happened. But you know what? We didn't need it because God said He'd preserve His Word, and we just need to believe God.

Not only that, when you're talking about the New Testament, there are a lot of New Testament manuscripts and fragments—about 25,000 complete New Testaments or large portions of New Testaments, whole books, together [with] some additional 50,000 fragments. There are about 70,000 [or] 80,000 manuscripts and manuscript fragments—ancient manuscripts—of the New Testament. Josh McDowell compares the New Testament with the second-most reliable ancient work that we know of, which is Homer's *Iliad*. In comparing them, he says:

The second best supported ancient work, apart from the Bible, is the *Iliad* by Homer which has 15,600 lines of text and 764 lines that are in question as to their reliability. The New Testament, on the other hand, has 20,000 lines and only 40 have any significant variation. This figures to the New Testament having less than one half of one percent of textual variants! This is more amazing when you consider that the manuscripts we have of the Bible number 24,000 [not including the fragments] as compared to 643 manuscripts of the *Iliad*, which means there is six times more possibility of contradiction among the manuscripts of the Bible than those of the *Iliad*.⁷

What we have is all these ancient manuscripts and [in] one-half of one percent we have a little variance, like [whether a word] should be plural or singular. No meaning of any text, no doctrine is obscured. We have the Bible; it's preserved flawlessly, without error. We've got it. Why? Why do we have it in English? [We have the Bible] because men like John Wycliffe risked their lives so you could have a Bible. Men like William Tyndale gave their lives so that you could have a Bible. The application of all of this, I

⁷Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demand a Verdict* (Bletchley, England: Scripture Union Publishing, 1990), 43.

think, is pretty clear, isn't it? Read your Bible. Tell people about the Bible. Be glad that you know that every promise of God will come true, all the prophecies will come true, just as God said.

The main application is this: God has something to say to you, and He says it in this Book, which is living. It will change your life if you would just open the Book. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. I pray, Father, that we would never forget that You have given us Your Word, that it is a living Word, that it is preserved so that we might read it, so that we might know You and have eternal life. Father, if there [are people] here who [don't] know Christ as their Savior, who [don't] understand that they are sinner[s] and You are a holy God, I pray that right now they would cry out in their hearts to You, that You would save them as they realize that You have sent Your Son to the world to be the Savior of men, that You would grant them repentance, that they would believe and be saved, and [be] changed forevermore. For the rest of us, may we treat the Bible with respect, may we read it for the treasure that it is, and may we share it with others, praising and thanking You because You have, by Your grace, given us the living oracles of God. We thank You for that, and praise You for that in Christ's name, Amen.

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