



## Reason WHY

*The Bible Offers Honest Answers to Honest Questions*  
By Stan Key

### CHAPTER 2. CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

#### I. The Message in the Bottle.

- A. A Parable. Imagine an island far out in the ocean where the islanders had lived so long they had come to believe they were the only people in the world. The island defined the totality of human existence. One day a boy discovered a bottle washed upon on the shore. Opening it he found a message inside: “Don’t be afraid. Help is coming soon.” What could this mean?...<sup>1</sup>
- B. Just as the islanders had to “explain” the origin of those messages, so humans today must respond to the historical **fact** of the Bible. Who wrote it? Where did it come from? Is it true? Some let the Bible explain its own existence. Others look for more “naturalistic” explanations.

#### II. A God Who Speaks.

The Bible does not read like a **myth** or a legend and it is not a collection of mystical experiences. It claims to be **history**; the story of a people chosen by God (the Jews) who were to be the channel through which he revealed himself to the world. It is impossible to truly know another person unless that person speaks and discloses who he/she really is. Without such self-disclosure all our ideas about that person are mere conjecture. The same is true for God. Unless God speaks, he remains unknowable. But that is precisely what the Bible claims. God has spoken:

- A. Through **creation**. Read Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19-20.

The message that comes to us through the natural order reveals that God exists and that he is great and glorious. However, creation does not tell us:

- God’s **name**.
- God’s will for our lives.
- How to have a **relationship** with him.... How to be saved.

- B. Through **conscience**. Read Romans 2:14-16.

God can speak through an inner Voice (dreams, meditation, etc.). But because our hearts are tainted by self-interest and pride, we must be hesitant to put absolute trust in what our consciences might say. In fact, one of the surest signs of a decadent culture is when everyone does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

- C. Pre-eminently, through his Son, **Jesus Christ**. Read. John 1:14; Hebrews 1:1-3.

It is no coincidence that Jesus is called **the Word** of God. He is God’s ultimate and final self-expression. The very reason we have the written Word is to point us to the incarnate Word. *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me... (John 5:39)*. In other words, the **purpose** of Bible study is not so much to know the Bible but rather to know him! To read the Bible as a collection of proof texts to support your science, morals, or even your theology is to miss the point!

- D. Through **Scripture**. Our topic for this study.

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<sup>1</sup> This parable is the writer’s own adaptation of ideas he found in Eugene Peterson (*Eat this Book*. Eerdmans, 2006). Peterson got his ideas from the novelist Walker Percy (*The Message in the Bottle*, 1975).

### III. But Is It True?

- A. A Satanic strategy. Since the beginning, Satan has had one very simple strategy in his quest to enslave men and women and usurp the throne of God: cause people to **doubt God's Word**.

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "**Did God actually say**, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:1-5).*

Note the progression of Satan's work:

1. Doubt God's Word. *Did God actually say...?*
  2. Deny the **consequences** of sin. *You will not surely die.*
  3. Doubt God's goodness. *You will be like God...* He is keeping something back from you. He doesn't have your best interests at heart. He can't be **trusted**.
- B. Insufficient answers. Doubting God's Word takes many forms. While some will boldly assert that the Bible is not true, most doubters take a more subtle, nuanced approach.
1. The Bible is indeed inspired... but so was **Shakespeare**. The person who talks like this doesn't understand the doctrine of inspiration. He means that the Bible is **inspiring**. But Shakespeare never claimed to be a mouthpiece for God!
  2. The Bible is **man's word** about God not God's word about man. The Bible is just a record of the thoughts of godly men about God and how he works in the world (like the Bhagavad Gita, the Analects of Confucius, etc.). But this is *not* what the Bible says about itself. Over and over we read, *Thus says the Lord...*
  3. The Bible is **partially** true. Can't we just say that some (most) of the Bible is true? Do we have to believe in *plenary verbal inspiration* and *inerrancy*? The problem is this: who decides which parts are true and which parts aren't? Do we all get to **pick and choose**?
  4. The Bible **contains** the word of God. This sounds pious, but again, it implies that the reader is sovereign, not the text. The reader decides what is God's word and what isn't.
  5. The **ideas** are inspired but not the words. Again, this sounds spiritual but how does one go about separating ideas from words?
  6. What's important is that the Bible is true *for you*? This clever approach makes the reader's own **interpretation** more important than the text.

### IV. Looking at the internal evidence: What the Bible says about itself.

- A. The Bible claims to be **inspired** by God.

*All Scripture is **breathed out** by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17).*

The word “God-breathed” or “inspired by God” is the Greek *theopneustos* (God + spirit/breath). Paul is describing the process by which the words of Scripture (*all the words!*) are the result of God’s breath, his Spirit. What the Scripture says... God says.

*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were **carried along** by the Holy Spirit. (II Peter 1:20-21 NIV).*

To believe in inspiration does not require one to believe in a theory of mechanical dictation. Authors of Scripture had their own distinctive personalities, styles, vocabularies and genres. Like our incarnate Lord, the Bible is fully **human** yet fully **divine**.

B. The Bible claims to be **without error**.

- *I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the **smallest letter**, not the least **stroke of a pen**, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished (Matt. 5:18 NIV).*
- *Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture **cannot be broken**—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? (John 10:34-36).*
- *Your word is **truth**... (John 17:17).*

C. The Bible invites the reader to **examine the evidence** so he can come to his own conclusion about the truth it proclaims. Check out the facts for yourself!

- Mark 15:21. *A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by...* There was no reason for the author to mention the names of Simon’s sons unless the readers knew these men and could **verify** if the information was correct.
- I Cor. 15:6. *He appeared to more than **five hundred** of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living...* The author seems to be urging the readers to ask these men and women yourself!
- Acts 26:25-26. *I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus... I am speaking true and rational words...this has not been done **in a corner**.* Paul says that the events of Jesus’ life are public knowledge and verifiable to any who take the time to examine the evidence.

D. The Bible claims to be a complete and **finished** work.

*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone **adds** to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone **takes away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).*

E. Unity and **harmony** of the Scriptures. In contrast to other religious writings (i.e., *The Koran*), the Bible is indeed unique. Consider this: **66** different books written over a span of **1,500** years by more than **40 authors** (kings, peasants, prophets, poets, fishermen, etc.); written in different places and in three different languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic). And yet the unity and harmony of the message from Genesis to Revelation is unmistakable!

F. The witness of **fulfilled prophecy**.

<u>Event</u>	<u>Prophecy</u>	<u>Fulfillment</u>
Born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matt. 1:18, 24-25
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:1-2	Matt. 2:1
Herod kills the children	Jer. 31:15	Matt. 2:26
Preceded by a messenger	Isaiah 40:3	Matt. 3:1-2
Ministry to begin in Galilee	Isaiah 9:1	Matt. 4:12-13, 17
Ministry of miracles	Isaiah 35:5-6	Matt. 9:35
Teacher of parables	Psalms 78:2	Matt. 13:34
Enter Jerusalem on a donkey	Zech. 9:9	Luke 19:35-37
Resurrection of Jesus	Psalms 16:10	Acts 2:31
Ascension	Psalms 68:18	Acts 1:9
Betrayed by a friend	Psalms 41:9	Matt. 10:4
Sold for 30 pieces of silver	Zech. 11:12	Matt. 26:15
Price given for potter's field	Zech. 11:13	Matt. 27:7
Wounded and bruised	Isaiah 53:5	Matt. 27:26
Hands and feet pierced	Psalms 22:16	Luke 23:33
Crucified with thieves	Isaiah 53:12	Matt. 27:38
Garments parted and lots cast	Psalms 22:18	John 19:23-24
Suffers thirst	Psalms 69:21	John 19:28
Gall and vinegar offered	Psalms 69:21	Matt. 27:34
Bones not broken	Psalms 34:20	John 19:33
His side pierced	Zech. 12:10	John 19:34
Buried in a rich man's tomb	Isaiah 53:9	Matt. 27:57-60

G. The witness of **Jesus**. To follow Jesus as Lord means we accept all that he said and taught. He clearly believed that the Scriptures were completely true and authoritative (Matt. 5:17-18; John 10:35; 17:17). Can we be his disciples and not do the same?

V. **Looking at the external evidence.**

A. The witness of the sheer number of **manuscripts**.<sup>2</sup>

<u>Author</u>	<u>Book</u>	<u>Date written</u>	<u>Earliest copies</u>	<u>Time Gap</u>	<u># of copies</u>
Homer	<i>Illiad</i>	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400 yrs	643
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 BC	c. 900 AD	1,350 yrs	8
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 BC	c. 900 AD	1,300 yrs	8
Plato	400 BC	c. 900 AD	1,300 yrs	7	
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	c. 900 AD	1,000 yrs	10
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	100 AD	c. 1,100 AD	1,000 yrs	20
Pliny	<i>Natural History</i>	61-113 AD	c. 850 AD	750 yrs	7

Few people bother to question the authenticity or the accuracy of these texts. And yet many have questioned the veracity of the documents of the New Testament. Seen in contrast to other manuscript evidence, this is startling indeed.

<u>Book</u>	<u>Date written</u>	<u>Earliest copies</u>	<u>Time Gap</u>	<u># of copies</u>
New Testament	50-100 AD	c. 114 fragment	50 yrs	5,366
		c. 200 books	100 yrs	
		c. 250 most of NT	150 yrs	
		c. 325 complete NT	225 yrs	

<sup>2</sup> See Josh McDowell (p. 38).

- B. The accuracy of **transmission**. The discovery of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** in 1947 is illustrative. Prior to their discovery, the oldest manuscripts for the Old Testament were dated about 900 A.D. The Dead Sea scrolls were written about 100 B.C., almost 1,000 years earlier! Yet when compared to those upon which our Bibles are based, virtually no significant errors of transmission were noted!
- C. The original **autographs**. In technical terms, only the original copy (the “autograph”) is said to be inerrant. Occasionally minor corruptions of the text have occurred through transmission over the centuries. Most modern Bibles acknowledge these textual questions in the **footnotes**. For example: I Samuel 13:1; Mark 16:9-20; John 8:1-11; and I John 5:7-8.
- D. The witness of **archeology**. For example:
- Archeological finds in places like Ebla, Amarna, Mari, and Nuzi have confirmed many cultural aspects of the Old Testament that before were difficult to understand (covenants, customs, legal matters, etc.).
  - Luke’s nautical vocabulary and description in Acts is confirmed by archeological discoveries dating to that period.
  - In 1929 a tablet was discovered at Corinth that said “Erastus, curator of public buildings laid this pavement at his own expense.” (see Romans 16:23).

Charles Colson summarizes:

*Before the end of the 1950s, no less than 25,000 biblical sites had been substantiated by archaeological discoveries; there has been no discovery proving the Bible false. No other religious document in history has ever been found that accurate. The Book of Mormon, for example, talks about a civilization in North America in 400-600 BC. Not a single artifact of that civilization has ever been discovered (The Faith, p. 51).*

- E. The witness of **the Holy Spirit**. At a personal level, the most important witness to the truthfulness of the Bible is the inner confirmation from the Spirit. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide us in **all truth** (John 16:13-14).

*The testimony of the Holy Spirit is superior to all reason.... It is necessary therefore, that the same Spirit who spoke by the mouths of the prophets, should penetrate into our hearts, to convince us that they faithfully delivered the oracles which were divinely entrusted to them.... (John Calvin, Institutes.)*

## VI. Summary.

- A. The Bible is **necessary**. Unless God speaks, our ideas about who he is and what he wants will only be guesses. The only way to know God and his ways is if God chooses to reveal his thoughts and actions. He has! And the record of this self-disclosure is our Bible.
- B. The Bible is **true**. We can trust in the accuracy of Scripture because God can be trusted not to communicate in a manner that is false or inaccurate.
- C. The Bible is **authoritative**. Human reason, spiritual experiences, and the church can err and lead people astray. No one should put blind faith in such faulty instruments. However, the Bible can be trusted. It has priority even over the church. *Sola Scriptura!* Martin Luther said it well: *My conscience is captive to the Word of God.*
- D. The Bible is **clear**. The Bible is not too difficult to understand. God communicates in ways that even a child can comprehend.

- E. The Bible is **sufficient**. The Scriptures contain all we need to know for life and godliness. Nothing needs to be added. Nothing needs to be taken away.
- F. When I fall in love with the author, I discover that the Bible is a passionate **love letter** addressed personally to me. Story of Emile Cailliet.

#### TABLE TALK

1. Describe your own personal journey in your attitude toward the Bible.
2. Why is our doctrine of the Bible so important?
3. Discuss the parable of the message in the bottle. What did you learn?
4. Many pretend that the church established the Bible. But it would be more accurate to say that the Bible established the church! Discuss the difference in these two perspectives.
5. Look again at the internal and external evidences for the authority and truthfulness of the Bible. Which evidences do you find most convincing?
6. Describe a situation of which you are aware where the erosion of confidence in the veracity of the Bible has impacted the way people think and behave.

## Appendix A

Two creedal statements have been helpful to evangelicals in giving them the vocabulary to better articulate their belief in the Bible.

*The Lausanne Covenant (1974). Article #2. The Authority and Power of the Bible.*<sup>3</sup>

*We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also affirm the power of God's word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God. (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:21; John 10:35; Isa. 55:11; 1 Cor. 1:21; Rom. 1:16, Matt. 5:17,18; Jude 3; Eph. 1:17,18; 3:10,18).*

*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978).*<sup>4</sup> "A Short Statement."

1. *God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.*
2. *Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.*
3. *The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.*
4. *Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.*
5. *The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.*

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<sup>3</sup> For the full text of the Lausanne Covenant go to <http://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>.

<sup>4</sup> For a full text of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy go to <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.

## Wonderful Words of Life

By Philip P. Bliss

*Sing them over again to me,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Let me more of their beauty see,  
Wonderful words of life:  
Words of life and beauty,  
Teach me faith and duty:*

Beautiful words, wonderful words,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Beautiful words, wonderful words,  
Wonderful words of life.

*Christ, the blessed One, gives to all  
Wonderful words of life;  
Sinner, list to the loving call,  
Wonderful words of life;  
All so freely given,  
Wooing us to heaven:*

*Sweetly echo the gospel call,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Offer pardon and peace to all,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Jesus, only Savior,  
Sanctify forever,*



## Appendix B

### The Book that Would Understand Me

From Emile Cailliet (in *Eternity Magazine*, July 1974):

I was born in a small village of France and received an education that was naturalistic to the core. This could possibly have had a great deal to do with the fact that I did not even see a Bible before I reached the age of twenty-three.

To say that this naturalistically inspired education proved of little help through front-line experiences as a lad of twenty in World War I would amount to quite an understatement. When your own buddy—at the time speaking to you of his mother—dies standing in front of you, a bullet in his chest, what use is the sophistry of naturalism? Was there a meaning to it all? One night a bullet got me, too. An American field ambulance crew saved my life and later the use of a badly shattered arm was restored. After a nine-month stay at the hospital, I was discharged and resumed graduate work.

During my stay at the American hospital, I had married a Scotch-Irish girl whom I had met in Germany on Christmas Eve the year before the war had broken out. She was, and has always remained, a deeply evangelical person. I am ashamed to confess that she must have been hurt to the very core of her being as I made it clear that religion would be taboo in our home. Little did I realize at the time that a militant attitude often betrays an inner turmoil.

I had returned to my books, but they were no longer the same books. Neither was my motivation the same motivation. Reading in literature and philosophy, I found myself probing in depth for meaning. During long night watches in the foxholes, I had in a strange way been longing—I must say it, however queer it may sound—for a book that would understand me.

But I knew of no such book. Now I would in secret prepare one for my own private use. And so, as I went on reading for my courses I would file passages that would speak to my condition, then carefully copy them in a leatherbound pocket book I would always carry with me. The quotations, which I numbered in red ink for easier reference, would lead me as it were from fear and anguish, through a variety of intervening stages, to supreme utterances of release and jubilation.

The day came when I put the finishing touch to “the book that would understand me,” speak to my condition, and help me through life’s happenings. A beautiful, sunny day it was. I went out, sat under a tree, and opened my precious anthology. As I went on reading, however, a growing disappointment came over me. Instead of speaking to my condition, the various passages reminded me of their context, of the circumstances of my labor over their selection.

Then I knew that the whole undertaking would not work, simply because it was of my own making. It carried no strength of persuasion. In a dejected mood, I put the little book back in my pocket.

At that very moment, my wife—who, incidentally, knew nothing of the project on which I had been working—appeared at the gate of the garden, pushing the baby carriage.

It had been a hot afternoon. She had followed the main boulevard only to find it too crowded. So she had turned to a side street which she could not name because we had only recently arrived in town. The cobblestones had shaken the carriage so badly that she had pondered what to do.

Whereupon, having spotted a patch of grass beyond a small archway, she had gone in with the baby for a period of rest.

It turned out that the patch of grass led to an outside stone staircase which she had climbed without quite realizing what she was doing. At the top, she had seen a long room, door wide open. So she entered.

At the further end, a white-haired gentleman worked at a desk. He had not become aware of her presence. Looking around, she noticed the carving of a cross. Thus she suddenly realized that this office was a part of a church building—of a Huguenot church edifice hidden away as they all are, even long after the danger of persecution has passed. The venerable-looking gentleman was the pastor.

She walked to his desk and heard herself say, “Have you a Bible in French?”

He smiled and handed over to her a copy, which she eagerly took from his hand; then she walked out with a mixed feeling of both joy and guilt.

As she now stood in front of me, she meant to apologize, but I was no longer listening to her. “A Bible, you say? Where is it? Show me. I have never seen one before!”

She complied. I literally grabbed the book and rush to my study with it. I opened and “chanced” upon the Beatitudes! I read, and read, and read—now aloud with an indescribable warmth surging within. I could not find words to express my awe and wonder. And suddenly the realization dawned upon me: this was the book that would understand me!

I continued to read deeply into the night, mostly from the Gospels. And lo and behold, as I looked through them, the One of whom they spoke, the One who spoke and acted in them became alive to me.

The providential circumstances amid which the book had found me now made it clear that while it seemed absurd to speak of a book understanding a man, this could be said of the Bible because its pages were animated by the presence of the living God and the power of his mighty acts. To this God I prayed that night, and the God who answered was the same God of whom it was spoken in the book.

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But we can start with the Bible's claim of trustworthiness and then look for supporting evidence to validate it. Helping us trust the Bible are the claims of the writers themselves. The Old Testament authors declared that they spoke the very words of God (Exodus 20:1-4; Deuteronomy 8:3; Isaiah 1:2; Jeremiah 1:1-13). Certain men were designated by God as prophets, kings, or leaders and were recognized as such by the people they served.