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A High View of Scripture:

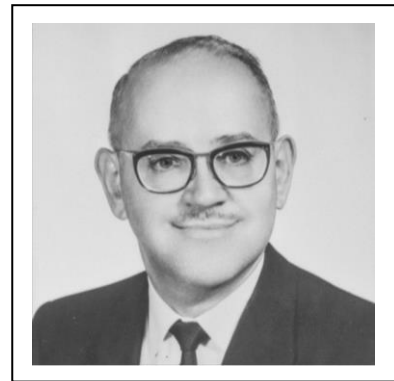
Why We Know the Bible is the Word of God¹

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(1952-1975)

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Charles Lee Feinberg—who studied to become a Jewish rabbi prior to becoming a believer in Jesus—was the dean of Talbot Theological Seminary when John MacArthur began his studies there in 1961. One of the reasons MacArthur came to Talbot was to learn under Feinberg, who, next to MacArthur’s father, became one of the men who influenced MacArthur most.² MacArthur said of Feinberg: “He read the Bible through four times every year. Needless to say, he was exceptional and intense. We were all rightfully in awe of him, and I loved him at the same time. He was a real model for me.”³ Feinberg would come to be MacArthur’s mentor. When MacArthur graduated Talbot in 1964, he received the Charles Feinberg Award, “Given in Honour of the Outstanding Graduate.”⁴ MacArthur recounted that, along with his father, Feinberg instilled within him the fundamental principle of “the absolute authority of Scripture.”⁵



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Feinberg demonstrates in this article that the bedrock of the pastor-theologian is Scripture. The pastor-theologian must view and teach the Bible not as man’s word, but as God’s Word. God has revealed this foundational truth within Scripture itself—in the unity of its construction, the continuity of its existence, the scope of its subject matter, and

¹ This article has been edited and adapted from two sermons preached by Dr. Charles Feinberg and later published as Charles Lee Feinberg, “Is the Bible God’s Word or Man’s? Or, Why We Know the Bible Is the Word of God,” *Biola Publications* 32 (1960), 2–15. It can be accessed at:

<https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/biola-pubs/32>. Used by permission of Biola University.

² Iain H. Murray, *John MacArthur: Servant of the Word and Flock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2011), 57.

³ Murray, *John MacArthur*, 18.

⁴ Murray, 21.

⁵ Murray, 32.

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the influence of its power. In order to be true and faithful to the ministry of the Word of God, the pastor-theologian must hold to a high view of Scripture.

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Psalm 119:160⁶

The sum of thy Word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances *endureth* forever.

John 17:17

Sanctify them in the truth: thy Word is truth.

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INTRODUCTION

It is of purpose that we have chosen the sub-title “Why We Know the Bible Is the Word of God,” for we are not primarily concerned for the moment in what I think or you think, what I believe or he believes, what you surmise or conjecture or suppose or what they do. We are speaking here of certainties, and of such a certainty as is assured to the unified and united Church of the Living Christ. It is a matter of deep gratitude to the discerning believer that he finds the Christian faith one of certainties, not one of assumptions or guesses. Nowhere is this truer than with respect to the Bible itself. Fully forty times do we meet the word “know” in the First Epistle of John in one form or other and a large percentage is “we know.” Certainty and assurance are written boldly across the face of our faith. But while this is true of our faith and is the heritage of us all, many have not laid hold of it in the measure that is their privilege. A modern writer has put it well when he says: “The need of the hour for twentieth century Christians is to come out of the mists and shadows of uncertainty and unbelief, into a faith in the Bible which is an absolutely dominating conviction of its authority and verity as the living Word of the Living God.” From among the many reasons that form the basis of our united and common knowledge that the Bible is God’s Word, we choose four.

THE UNITY OF ITS CONSTRUCTION

Believers are confident that the message in the Scriptures is God’s because of the unity that pervades the structure of the Bible. The Bible is one book, but it is also sixty-six books, written not by one writer but by about forty different authors. These men were not of the same rank or station or culture or position or condition in life. Among the writers, David

⁶ The Biblical text is original to the article—American Standard Version.

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and Solomon were kings; Isaiah was a statesman and prophet; Peter, James, and John were so-called "ignorant" fishermen; Zechariah and Jeremiah were priests as well as prophets as is clear from their genealogies; Amos was a herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees; Luke was a highly intelligent, cultured, and beloved physician; Matthew was a tax collector; and Paul was a colossal scholar, versed and steeped in all the wisdom of the Hebrew Old Testament, the accumulated traditions of the Rabbis, the current modes of Greek thought, and an avowed pensioner on the grace of God. These men obviously did not write in one year, or in one generation, or even all in one century. They wrote under God over a period of about 1500 years, from Moses to John, the Apostle. A similar period in European history would take us from St. Augustine with his "De Civitate Dei" (*Concerning the City of God*) to Tennyson's "In Memoriam." Nor did the human writers of the Scripture write in one locality or place. We have portions of the Word from the wilderness of Sinai, parts from Syria, books from Arabia, Greece, Italy, and Palestine.

But the greatest variety and diversity appear in the subjects discussed. If it is history that we want, there is not any that can equal that of the historical books of the Old Testament or that found in the Gospels and Acts. From the presses of our country and other lands, there come yearly an unnumbered multitude of new works of historical bearing. Why? Have the facts of history changed? There you have it! They must admit that they do not have all the facts; therefore, of necessity, their conclusions, based on partial information, cannot be final. How can they divine what mental processes were at work in the great minds and leaders of the centuries? Nor do mere men fathom the real philosophy of history, that is, the motive and purpose of it all. But listen to the succinct summation of it in the Word of God. Paul says in Romans 11:36: "For of Him [that is, of God, as Source, Origin, Fountainhead, First Cause], and through Him [as Medium, Channel, Sustainer, Governor], and unto Him [as End, Goal, Consummation], are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

Is it poetry that we want? All who know the Book of Psalms are in accord that therein one finds such depth of feeling, such heights of thought, such grandeur of expression as have been found nowhere else in any literature of the world. Poetry of the first order is this. And what shall we say of the Song of Solomon? To say it is superb beyond all comparison is merely to utter a platitude.

Some men occupy themselves with the field of religion, a subject much lauded and much ridiculed. "Religion" is from the Latin "religio" ("re"-back and "ligio"-bind), meaning, to bind or tie back. Where in all the religions of the world can one find such a tying back of the sinful, polluted, degraded heart of man to the transparently holy, loving, and merciful

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heart of God, such as we find in the Scriptures? “Pure religion and undefiled” do we find in the Bible, and it is without peer or comparison (Jas 1:27).

For the sake of brevity, we shall dwell on other subjects in the Bible less fully. Is it drama that interests you? Read that soul-searching drama found in the Book of Job, where the minds of erudite men grapple with the age-long problem of the sufferings of the righteous. A professor at Columbia University acclaimed it as the best discussion of the question in existence.

Philosophy?

Note the wise and sententious maxims of the Book of Proverbs. We are personally acquainted with a man who made it his duty to provide every high school graduate of his fairly large city with a copy of this book on graduation. Into its thirty-one chapters have been compacted wisdom for every relationship of life, and an outlook that commends itself as approved of God.

Psychology?

Read with insight the play of minds and feelings in the beautifully simple story of Joseph or take time to meditate on the steps whereby our blessed Lord Jesus led the Samaritan woman to faith in Himself (John 4). Volumes on psychology can add nothing here.

Medicine?

Quarantine was enjoined by Moses upon the children of Israel in case of certain diseases. The laws of Moses concerning regulations for leprosy, whether in a person, or a garment, or a house, are still the marvel of medical science.

Political Science?

This is the subject of government. Refresh your memory on the manner in which Moses under God's hand led a disunited band through the wilderness, how they were finally settled in the land, how and under what circumstances they were granted peace and order, and how God ruled them through forty-two kings in all. The Books of Kings in themselves form an incomparable treatise on what acceptable government is and what it is not.

Geography?

No place ever mentioned in the Bible has ever been proved erroneous. Dr. Melvin Grove Kyle, an internationally famous archaeologist and our teacher in the subject said on more

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than one occasion that no discovery of excavation in the last one hundred years has in any way invalidated one single statement in the Bible. It was because at least one general in the English Army during World War I believed the Bible and read the account in 1 Samuel 14 that he won a victory at Michmash. He found the account true to the geography of the land.

Physiology?

Take but one verse, Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life.” Bind a cord about your thumb so that no blood courses through it, and it will begin to decay immediately. Why? “The life of the flesh is in the blood.” Yet it was only in the 17th century that medical science discovered the truth that the blood circulates in the human body. Yet Moses knew it many centuries earlier. But how? Moses knew it by revelation and by that alone.

Law?

Every reputable law school in the world studies the Mosaic code of laws (Exodus 20ff). Every important code of laws since Moses’ time, from Justinian’s Code to the Code of Napoleon—all these codes are indebted in greater or lesser measure to the laws of Moses.

Biography?

The best known and most beloved biographies in the world are those of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, Paul, Peter, John, and Christ. Need we remind you that the book that tells of these lives is the Bible?

Astronomy?

Although the Bible is not primarily a book of science, wherever it touches science, it is absolutely accurate. If one were to turn to the statements of the ancient Greeks and Romans concerning matters of the heavenly bodies, he would find such that are both ridiculous and absurd. But come to the Bible and you will see that no word has been found untrustworthy despite the advances of modern science. Has modern astronomy disproved Job’s statement (Job 26:7): “He stretcheth out the north over empty space, and hangeth the earth upon nothing”? And what shall we say more? For time would fail us to speak of the manner in which the Bible speaks authoritatively of botany, zoology, ethics, biology, ethnology, philology, and geology.

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Perhaps you have been wondering at the recital of these various subjects and it may be that you have begun to think the Bible a mere conglomeration of many discordant elements. There is the point! Despite all these many subjects, so faithfully presented and discussed, there is but one central theme throughout the entire Book — the redemption of sinful man by a holy and righteous God through the willing sacrifice of God's Son on the Cross of Calvary for all men. Such is the unending wonder of the unity of the construction of the Bible. Such unity and harmony demand the supervision of a wise God. Attempt to achieve such harmony today on but one subject—say, medicine—or in one specialized field of that subject—say, the study of the human heart in its function and diseases. You will soon find the impossible task that it is. To what shall we compare it? It is as though one man entered a cathedral and struck a note on the great organ and then left. Thirty-nine other men at different periods did the same. If we were to gather these notes together, we are supposing there was a means of preservation, and find they made up the great work, Handel's "Messiah," should we say it just happened that way? No! We should be justified in believing that some great mind had supervised it. Who then could oversee the writing of sixty-six books by about forty different authors of different ranks over a period of about fifteen hundred years on such a multiplicity of subjects? No one but God! The Bible is God's Word, we know, because of the unity of its construction.

THE CONTINUITY OF ITS EXISTENCE

It is the consensus of conservative and reverent Christian opinion that the Bible is God's Word because of its continued existence. True, the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Virgil, Ovid, and Browning are still with us. But who has ever sought to destroy them? Some books may survive without persecution; the Book has lived on in spite of persecution. Because it is from God, Satan has ever opposed it.

Century after century men burned it. Attempt after attempt was made to blot it out. Heathen philosophers like Celsus and Porphyry shot their most fiery darts at it. Julian, the Apostate, nephew and successor of Constantine the Great, tried more than once to disprove the truths of the Bible, especially the prophecies, but utterly failed. Having ascertained that the Bible taught that Jerusalem would not be rebuilt until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled (Luke 21:24), he sent out a crew of men to rebuild Jerusalem, so determined was his opposition to the Word of God. A fire broke out of the ruins, the men were destroyed, and the venture was stopped.

Diocletian, the Roman Emperor, instituted in 303 A.D. the worst attack on the Bible ever known. Almost every Bible was destroyed; multitudes of Christians perished; a column of triumph was erected with the Latin words: "The name of the Christian has been extinguished." Yet in 325 A.D., less than a quarter of a century later, Constantine declared

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the Bible the supreme authority in all the deliberations of the First General Council, at Nicaea, which affirmed in opposition to Arius, that Christ was not the created Son of God, but the very God, the uncreated Son of the Father.

Think of the opposition to the Bible on the part of the ruling Church throughout the Middle Ages. Those who adhered to it and loved it were hounded and persecuted. It was withheld from the common people as it is in some parts of the world yet. Luther, the great German Reformer, was fully grown before he had seen a Bible. His colleague, Carlstadt, at the University of Wittenberg, had his degree of Doctor of Theology without having read it.

In the nineteenth century the attacks came from three entirely different quarters, but they had a common root. We refer to the German rationalism of men like Baur, Strauss, Eichhorn, Graf, Wellhausen, who denied the supernatural, the miraculous, and explained the whole history of Israel on an evolutionary basis. We think of the liberal thinkers of England like Bolingbroke, as well as the deists, who ruled God out of His created universe. We are reminded, finally, of French infidels like Voltaire who said that in one hundred years the Bible would not be found except as an antiquarian curiosity. Most interesting it is, then, to us to know (with his pronouncement in mind) that the British and Foreign Bible Society has a Bible depot on the very spot Voltaire made that statement, a station that sends out the Scriptures by the thousands annually.

The attack on the Scriptures most in favor today with the enemies of the Word is the so-called scientific. Many confidently assert that although the Bible has survived all past attacks, it is hardly a match for science. Since "science" means "knowledge" and God is the source of all true knowledge, how could science and the Bible, the revelation of the mind of God, be in disagreement? A manifesto was drawn up and signed by 617 scientific men, many of them being the most eminent in the world. This document, now in the world-famous Bodleian Library of Oxford, England, deplors "The unadvised manner in which some are placing science in opposition to Holy Writ," and predicts that "the time will come when the two records will be seen to agree in every particular."⁷ Sir Isaac Newton, a Christian and close student of both science and the Scriptures, bore similar testimony long before. Let us note only one example of the harmony between science and the Bible. According to Herbert Spencer, the English philosopher and scientist, the five essential concepts of science are time, space, matter, force, and motion. These all are found in the first verses of the Bible: "In the beginning" —time; "heavens" —space; "earth" —matter; "the Spirit of God" —force; "moved" —motion.

⁷ W. H. Brock and R. M. Macleod, "The Scientists' Declaration: Reflexions on Science and Belief in the Wake of 'Essays and Reviews,' 1864-5," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 9, no. 1 (1976): 41.

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Today, the Bible, despite all opposition—human, demonic, or Satanic—is being sold by tens of millions yearly in almost every language of the globe. Our Lord had said: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall not pass away” (Matt 24:35). The psalmist declared: “Forever, O Jehovah, Thy Word is settled in heaven” (Ps 119:89). Peter, centuries later, wrote concerning believers: “Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the Word of God, which liveth and abideth” (1 Pet 1:23). Isaiah unequivocally bore the same record: “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the Word of our God shall stand forever” (Isa 40:8).

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An eloquent American bishop once said: “Think of it, the same word, brilliant with eternal youth, skin without scar, organ without disease, voice without weakness, step without failure, eye without dimness, the untouched, unharmed, scatheless Word of God.”

THE SCOPE OF ITS SUBJECT MATTER

We know that the Bible is the Word of God because of the remarkable range of its subject matter. Reflect for the moment on what the Scriptures reveal of a Supreme Being. If the philosophies of men are studied, it will be seen that however close they may come to the truth, yet they always fall short of it. The Bible reveals the only Supreme Being who is the true and the living God. The reality of His Being is revealed, not argued. The Bible speaks of Him as readily and as authoritatively as it does of other themes. Even the atheist is dependent upon the Bible for the knowledge of the kind of God in whom he does not believe. When men write of what is beyond them, they employ mitigating terms, “it seems to me,” “it appears that,” “it is safe to assume,” “perhaps,” “maybe,” and a host of others to cover over lack of certainty. Read the Bible and note the definiteness and assurance and certainty in every book and line.

The same blessed Book that discloses the Person and Being of the triune God reveals the origin, preservation, and purpose of all the created universe. It brings before us man, his creation at the hand of God, his position in God’s creation, his disobedience and sin, his refuge in salvation, and his intended destination. The Word of God speaks as freely of eternity and the unseen as it does of time and the seen. Its program stretches from eternity past to eternity future with all its untold blessedness for the redeemed.

The Bible is the only book that foretells the future as accurately as though it were history. So wondrously has this been done that unbelieving critics of the Word have for long contended that all of what is called prophecy was and is in reality history after the event took place. What a testimony this is to the way our God has given prewritten history! Let us take two examples only: our Lord Jesus Christ and the nation Israel. God in His Word foretold in Genesis 3:15 of the seed of the woman that would bruise the serpent's head;

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in Genesis 49:10 of Shiloh from the tribe of Judah to whom the gathering of the peoples should be; in Numbers 24:17 of the Star out of Jacob which the Magi saw centuries later; in Deuteronomy 18:15 of the prophet like unto Moses; in Isaiah 7:14 and 9:5 of the virgin born Immanuel and the Son given with all His blessed titles; in Isaiah 53:5 and 8 of the suffering Servant of Jehovah bearing the sins of the world. Are not all these predictions completely fulfilled in that One whom Matthew designates at the very outset as “the Son of David, the Son of Abraham?” What sweep and scope to these prophecies!

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We need not be surprised then when we read in the same blessed Book of a people who God said would become a great nation (Gen 12:1–3); who would be guilty of apostasy and disobedience (Deut 28); who would be scattered throughout the whole world yet not without identity (Amos 9:9); who would finally be regathered to their land, resettled in it, and redeemed therein (Isa 27:12, 13; Ezek 36; Zech 12:10; Rom 11:26). Are not all these things to the very last, minute detail true of the nation Israel? And concerning the regathering with its blessed results, are we not beginning to see the very inauguration of them?

Is there another such book in existence that has such scope as this one, that can speak as authoritatively as this one, that can foresee and foretell so trustworthily as this one? Nay, verily, there is none!

THE INFLUENCE OF ITS POWER

But even if the unbelieving were to deny all the foregoing truths presented to show why the united testimony of the believing Church holds and ever has held the Bible to be God’s Word, yet they could not contravene our last proof. The Scriptures are without doubt God’s Word because of the influence of their power and the power of their influence. What do we mean? Just this: no book has its power to change men from sinners to saints, from bestiality to blessedness; from vice to virtue, from greed to godliness, from the pit to His presence, from hell to heaven. Paul at the end of his ministry reminds his son Timothy that it is the Scriptures alone which are able to make “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Many books can make wise unto mathematics, the social sciences, the natural sciences, and the philosophies; but only one Book has ever been able to make wise unto salvation— the Bible! Our Lord in speaking to His disciples in the upper room discourse said: “Already ye are clean because of the Word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). How many books have we ever read that could make us clean because of them? Some may be enlightening, informative, even uplifting, but can they or do they cleanse the reader? No, only the Bible has such influence, such power. It transforms drunkards, revilers, thieves, liars, harlots, fornicators, and murderers into children and sons of the living God (Eph 2:1–10).

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Darwin, the evolutionist, visited Tierra del Fuego in 1833 and found a people who he thought were incapable of being civilized. He wrote: "The Fuegians are in a more miserable state of barbarism than I ever expected to have seen any human being."⁸ On his second visit, thirty-six years later, he found those whom he had regarded as below domestic animals transformed by the power of the Word of God into Christians, and in his astonishment wrote: "I certainly should have predicted that not all the missionaries in the world could have done what has been done. It is wonderful and it shames me, as I have always prophesied a failure. It is a grand success."⁹ He then wrote a letter to the London Missionary Society: "I shall feel proud if your committee shall think fit to elect me as an honorary member of your society."¹⁰ **10** In the letter he enclosed about \$125 for Gospel missions. Darwin saw that the Word of God could do what neither science nor any other agency could accomplish. It has transforming power.

Spurgeon, the great English preacher, at one time told the story of a poor woman who was confronted by a modern agnostic, who asked her: "What are you reading?" She said: "I am reading the Word of God." "The Word of God? Who told you that?" "He told me so Himself," she said. "Told you so? Why, how can you prove that?" Looking skyward, the poor woman said: "Can you prove to me that there is a sun up in the sky?" "Why of course; the best proof is that it warms me, and I can see its light!" "That's it!" was her joyous reply. "The best proof that this Book is the Word of God is that it warms and lights my soul."

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, then, we know the Bible is God's Word because of the unity of its construction, because of the continuity of its existence, because of the scope of its subject matter, and because of the influence of its power. In the words of Canon Hague: "Therefore, think not of it as a good book, or even as a better book, but lift it in heart and mind and faith and love far, far above all, and ever regard it, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the Word of God; nay, more, as the living Word of the Living God; supernatural in origin; eternal in duration; inexpressible in value; infinite in scope; divine

⁸ See A. C. Dixon, "Scripture Inspiration and Authority: The Bible a Revelation, not an Evolution," in *Theology at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century: Essays on the Present Status of Christianity and Its Doctrines*, ed. J. Vyrnwy Morgan (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1900), 113; Charles Darwin to J. S. Henslow, April 11, 1833, Darwin Correspondence Project, <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-204.xml>.

⁹ See Dixon, "Scripture Inspiration and Authority," 113; and Francis Darwin, ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1887), 3:128.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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in authorship; human in penmanship; regenerative in power; infallible in authority; universal in interest; personal in application and as St. Paul declares, 'inspired' in totality

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