

ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE



DISCOVER THE MYSTERY
TAKE THE JOURNEY

ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE



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P.D. Bramsen
With illustrations by
D.C. Bramsen

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by P. D. Bramsen

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“As cold water to
a weary soul,
So is good news
from a far country.”

The Prophet Solomon
(Proverbs 25:25)



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“For the good works you’ve done, you deserve to go to paradise, but for the message you preach, you deserve to go to hell!” said the village elder to my friend.

My friend and his wife had spent ten years of their lives in this man’s village on the edge of the Sahara. They had established an irrigation project and a medical clinic. They had also explained the message of the prophets to any who cared to listen.

According to the village elder, what had my friend done to “deserve to go to paradise”? He had done “good works.”

And what had he done to “deserve to go to hell”? He had taught “the message” of the prophets according to the Bible.

Was the village elder right in his assessment of my friend’s works and message? Was he half right? Was he entirely wrong?

If you are not sure what to think, then this book is for you.

WHERE

I was born in America, but this book was born in Africa.

The site: Sahel¹ region of Senegal, West Africa.

The setting: The predawn call to prayer is ended. Pink and orange wisps of morning’s first light silhouette a sandy, thorn-tree-studded horizon. The temperature is deliciously cool, but that will soon change. I sit on the porch of our village house with my laptop. A piece of clear plastic taped over the keyboard shields it from the Sahara dust suspended in the air. Except for the occasional bray of a donkey and crow of a rooster, the village is silent. The only sound I now hear is the tapping of fingers on the keyboard as thoughts become words and words become text.

WHY

I write because the One who has blessed me with life, joy, peace, and purpose has given me something to write about.

I write from a heart of respect and love for my Muslim friends, especially those in Senegal, where my wife and I have brought up our three children and spent most of our adult lives.

I write because in recent years I have received more than a thousand e-mails from Muslims around the globe. Their thought-provoking comments and questions must not be ignored.

I write out of empathy for those weary of religious leaders who offer little more than circular clichés such as, “The Bible is true because it says so!” or, “The Qur’an is true because no one can write a book like it!”

I write because I am struck by the human heart’s inclination to believe anything but the consistent message of the one true God.

WHAT

ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE offers the chance of a lifetime: to take an unhurried journey through the world’s best seller and to discover the message of the prophets who wrote it. Those who take part in this pilgrimage will be given the opportunity to overcome countless obstacles (Part I), penetrate mysterious realms (Part II), and break out into a glorious kingdom of magnificent panoramas and satisfying truth (Part III).

WHOM

This journey is designed primarily for monotheists—those who believe in one God. Nonetheless, polytheists and pantheists, humanists and atheists² are equally welcome. The adventure is for anyone who estimates his or her eternity worth a dozen hours. That is about how long it takes to read this book aloud.

Whatever your background, whatever you believe or don’t believe, *you* are invited to join this journey through the Holy Book so many claim to honor, yet so few choose to ponder.

Three thousand years ago, a prophet offered this prayer to the Creator and Owner of the universe: “*Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.*” (Psalm 119:18)

Though we may not *like* all we see, let us not fail to *see*.

Your fellow pilgrim,
P. D. Bramsen

PART I JOURNEY PREPARATION



FACING THE OBSTACLES



- 1 - Buy The Truth**
- 2 - Overcoming the Obstacles**
- 3 - Corrupted or Preserved?**
- 4 - Science and the Bible**
- 5 - God’s Signature**
- 6 - Consistent Witness**
- 7 - The Foundation**



“Buy the truth, and do not sell it....”

— Prophet Solomon (Proverbs 23:23³)

Imagine walking into a crowded marketplace packed with billions of people.

Yes, billions.

Stretching farther than the eye can see are ten thousand shops and booths. From every direction, zealous vendors are calling out, shouting, chanting, arguing, pleading, praying—some softly, some through loudspeakers, each claiming to offer exactly what you came to buy:

The Truth!

Don't laugh. Oxford University Press has published an encyclopedia identifying ten thousand distinct religions worldwide. And that doesn't include the thousands of sects and denominations found within those religions.⁴

So what are we to buy? Who are we to believe?

If there is only one true God, and if He has revealed the truth about Himself and His plan for mankind, how can we possibly recognize it?

Four thousand years ago, the prophet Job raised a similar question:

“Where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its value... It cannot be purchased for gold, nor can silver be weighed for its price... The price of wisdom is above rubies.” (Job 28:12-13,15,18)

Must we stumble through life confused and uncertain, or can we know the wisdom and truth of the one true God?

We are about to find out.

THE BOOK OF BOOKS

The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *Biblia*, meaning *book of books* or *library*.

After more than two millennia of communicating orally to and through men like Adam, Noah, and Abraham, God used about 40 men over more than 15 centuries to put His message in writing. These messengers were called prophets or apostles. The term *prophet* literally means *one who speaks out*

and *apostle* means *messenger*. Today we have what they wrote in one volume—the Bible. Terms such as *the Holy Scriptures*, *the Writings of the Prophets*, and *the Word of God* are also used in reference to the Bible. The *Torah*, *Psalms*, and *Gospels* refer to specific sections within the Bible. In Arabic, these Scriptures are called *al-Kitab-al-Muqadas*, meaning *the Holy Book*.

Century after century, the Bible outsells every other book in the world. To date, in part or in whole, the Scriptures of the Bible have been translated into more than 2,400 languages, with 1,940 other translations in progress.⁵ No other book comes close.

Yet despite its unparalleled popularity, the Bible is the most despised and feared book in human history. Over the centuries, world governments and leaders, secular and religious alike, have declared the all-time best seller illegal, persecuting and even executing citizens caught in possession of it.⁶ To this day, some nations enforce this policy. Even in “Christian” countries,⁷ Bible reading is banned from public classrooms and institutions.



TORTURED

When I was growing up, my father was a friend of Richard, a man who had spent fourteen years in communist prisons in Eastern Europe where he was regularly deprived of sleep, starved, hung upside down and beaten, locked in a refrigerated cell, burned with red hot poker, and carved on with knives. With my own eyes I saw some of the deep and ugly scars on his body. Richard’s wife was also arrested and sentenced to forced labor in a prison camp for the same “criminal activity” as her husband.⁸

What was their crime against the atheistic state?

They were caught teaching the Bible to others.

OSTRACIZED

My friend Ali was in big trouble. His father had arranged a family meeting of the men.

The senior uncle was present.

The younger brothers were called in.

Finally, Ali the firstborn son was set in the middle.

Ali’s father gave a passionate speech, which concluded something like this: “You have shamed our family! You have betrayed our religion! You must leave the house and never come back. I must never see your face again!”

The uncle interjected, “Yes, and if you are not out by tomorrow, I’ll throw your belongings into the street!”

Why the anger?

After nearly a year of reading the Bible, Ali had chosen to believe it.

THE LIVING WORD

What makes the Bible such a controversial book?

What causes governments to forbid it and parents to disown their children for believing it?

What drives millions of monotheists to share common ground with atheists in their disdain for these ancient writings?

Could the Bible’s claim to be the living, active, penetrating, and judging Word of God have something to do with it?

*“For the word of God is **living and active**. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it **penetrates** even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it **judges** the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* (Hebrews 4:12 NIV)

STANDING FAST BY THE BOOK

My wife and I, and our now-grown children, have spent most of the past twenty-five years in Senegal, West Africa. Nearly all of our neighbors follow the religion of Islam. *Islam* means *surrender* or *submission*, and *Muslim* means *one who is submitted*. The book revered by Muslims is the *Qur’an* (also spelled: *Koran*). What I write flows from thousands of personal dialogues with Muslim friends and acquaintances from Senegal and around the world.

Although I have invested considerable time studying both the Bible and the Qur’an, ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE will focus on the Bible. Years ago, a Senegalese friend and I produced a 100-program chronological radio series in the Wolof language of Senegal.⁹ Each broadcast features a story and a message from the prophets of the Bible. Some listeners have asked, “Why do you not also teach the Qur’an?” Here is my answer:

In this country, children begin to recite the Qur’an when they are three or four years old. Qur’anic teachers and schools can be found in every neighborhood, but who is able and willing to teach the stories and message contained in the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel? As you know, the Qur’an states that these books of the Bible have been given by God to all mankind as *“guidance and light ... and an admonition.”* (Sura 5:46¹⁰) The Qur’an also declares: *“If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been **reading the Book** [the Bible] **from before thee.**”* (Sura 10:94¹¹) And to those who believe the Bible, the Qur’an says: *“**O People of the Book!** ye have no ground to stand upon unless ye **stand fast by the Law** [Torah], **the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord.**”* (Sura 5:71) As one of the *People of the Book* who has been *reading the Book* and

standing fast by it for more than three decades, it is my privilege to make known the stories and message of the prophets you seldom hear. These Scriptures, some written more than 2,000 years before the Qur’an, contain truth not found anywhere else.

HIS STORY

Your parents may have counseled you, “Never trust a stranger.” They knew that before you can safely trust someone, you need to know something of his or her history.

Think of a few people you trust.

Why do you trust them?

You trust them because over a period of time you have learned they are trustworthy. They did you good, not evil. When they told you they would do something, they did it. When they promised to give you something, they gave it. You know them to be trustworthy because you know their history.

The Bible provides hundreds of historical narratives of God interacting with men, women and children. Each story offers a unique opportunity to meet the Creator of heaven and earth, to hear His words and observe His works in the context of thousands of years of human history. What is He like? Yes, He is great, but in what way is He great? Is He consistent? Does He ever contradict Himself? Does He keep His promises? Would He deceive us? Should He be trusted?

His story answers all these questions and thousands more.

The Bible is God’s history book which not only reveals the big picture of human history; it presents *HIS story*.

THE ULTIMATE DRAMA

Everyone loves a good story.

The Bible contains hundreds of stories which together make a single story—the most captivating story ever told. The Bible’s narrative about God and man is the ultimate mystery drama—a story of love and war, good and evil, conflict and triumph. From origins to endings, it provides logical, satisfying answers to life’s big questions. It has a climax and conclusion like no other.

A few years ago, after I finished telling God's story to a group of men and women in our home in Senegal, one of the ladies, with tears in her eyes, commented, "What a story! Even if people don't believe God, at least they ought to admit that He is the best screenwriter of all time!" This lady had gotten a glimpse of how all the parts of Scripture fit together to present the drama of the ages, in which God Himself is both the Author and Hero.

THE GREATEST MESSAGE

The Bible contains more than the most captivating story ever told. Embedded in its narratives is the most compelling message ever delivered—a message from God

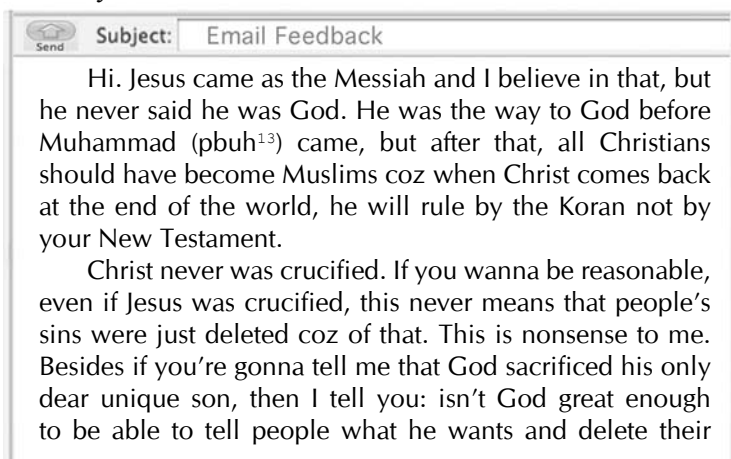
Over the years, I have discussed the Bible's message with thousands of Muslims. Many are personal friends, others I know only by e-mail. In both contexts, most discussions can be distilled into a single question:

What is the message of the one true God?

E-MAIL FEEDBACK

This question comes packaged in many ways.

The following e-mail came to me from the Middle East, written by a man we'll call Ahmed.¹²



sins without having to sacrifice his "dear son" and torturing him???? The whole sinners thing makes no sense to me.

Islam is the only perfect religion that was ever sent to earth, and that's the reason why I have to think that it's true and that it's the last religion to be sent by God. It's the only religion that has a solution for every aspect of life. You are not left to guess what God's opinion will be in a certain thing.

The Koran is the greatest miracle ever sent to a prophet! Ok, create one verse that is similar, or even close to one of the Koran verses!! You will never be able to even if you were the most fluent person in high level Arabic...

Besides there are predictions in your Bible, the original one, about the coming of Muhammad...

What I believe and know is that the Bible is mostly fake right now and is corrupt since all its books were manipulated...

For your information friend, I read the New Testament, not coz of looking for the truth, but for personal interest, and not once, but twice, and I see that there's nothing in the world that comes near the greatness of Koran which is indeed the words of God, sent by his angel to Muhammad, and if you can prove the opposite, then do it. [sic¹⁴]

Peace,
Ahmed

Ahmed's challenge and comments must not be ignored.

Our Creator does not treat such matters lightly, and neither should we. In the ancient Scriptures of the prophets, God has provided clear answers for every issue raised by Ahmed because each issue relates to the eternally-significant question:

What is the message of the one true God?

The prophet Job raised a couple of similar questions:

"Where can wisdom be found?" (Job 28:12)

"How can a man be righteous before God?" (Job 9:2)

THE JOURNEY

In a confused world with thousands of conflicting responses, it is not my purpose to add my ideas or answers to the mix. Instead, I invite you to join me with mind and heart on this journey through the Book of Books to discover its embedded answers to life's ultimate questions. As we travel together, we will observe what is true according to the Scriptures and we will reflect on the prophets' responses to the challenges raised by Ahmed and others.

Following a time of orientation (Part I: chapters 1–7), our journey will officially begin where the Bible begins: at the dawn of world history. From there we will travel through time and into eternity (Parts II & III: chapters 8–30).

The journey will conclude with a visit to Paradise itself.

TRAVEL OPTIONS

ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE can be viewed as three books in one. Part I confronts the obstacles that prevent most people from ever exploring the Bible. Part II unveils the central message of the best story ever told. Part III goes behind the scenes for a closer look at God's awesome purposes for people.

Most travelers will find the first part extremely beneficial in preparing for the journey. Nonetheless, if you already know the Scriptures of the prophets to be trustworthy, or if you are simply anxious to hear God's story and understand His message without delay, feel free to go directly to Part II. Once you have completed the entire journey, you can return to Part I.

If you prefer to travel at an unhurried pace, you may choose to spread the book's 30 chapters over a month-long period, reflecting on one chapter per day.

If you are a Muslim, you may want to take this pilgrimage during the 30 days of Ramadan. You should be able to proceed with confidence since the Qur'an says: *"There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error,"* and: *"Say O Muslims: We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received*

from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered." (Qur'an, Sura 2:256,136 Pickthall¹⁵)

Whichever route you choose, here is one vital travel tip: Once you begin, do not skip any part of the journey.

Each new stage builds on a previous stage. Even if you don't instantly understand all you see, keep reading and reflecting until the final page. Some parts of the journey will be strange and challenging, but there will be oases of refreshment along the way.

No matter how many obstacles you encounter, travel on.

THE TRUTH

Multitudes around the world hold the opinion that no one can know what is true or false concerning life's big questions, such as: Where did the human race originate? Why am I on earth? Where will I end up? What is right and what is wrong?

In the West today it is popular to make statements such as: "Everything is relative," or: "It is wrong to think that a person can know absolute truth." One does not need a PhD in logic to recognize the self-contradictory nature of such declarations. If there is no absolute truth, how can those who hold such a view make assertions about "everything" or insist that anything is "wrong"?

We can be thankful that the Creator of the universe, who has revealed His truth to mankind, does not share popular opinion. To all who seek Him with an honest heart, He says:

"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

THE RIGHT CHOICE

A couple of years ago, Musa, a 79-year-old neighbor in poor health, asked me to visit him three days a week in order to read to him from the Bible. Musa had studied the Qur'an all his life, but had never taken time to consider the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David, and the Gospel about Jesus—books which the Qur'an sternly admonishes all Muslims to receive and believe.¹⁶

Musa listened intently as we explored key stories in chronological order and learned how defiled sinners can be declared righteous by their Creator and Judge. On more than one

occasion Musa told me, “After each session, I don’t just think about the things we have studied, I meditate on them!”

One day, after learning another important truth revealed in the Scriptures, Musa exclaimed with obvious frustration to his wife and daughter who were sitting nearby, “Why has no one ever taught us these things?”

Later, when Musa’s neighbors learned he was studying the Bible with a foreigner, the gossip began. The pressure became so intense that my elderly friend asked me to stop coming for a time, explaining, “I am not rejecting the truth, but the strain on my family is too much.”

After waiting about six weeks (to let the gossip die down), my wife and I paid Musa and his family a visit. He welcomed us warmly and asked some well thought-out questions. Before we left, he commented, “The important thing is that I make the right choice before I die!”

Musa understood just how important it is to “*buy the truth and...not sell it.*”¹⁷ Four months later, our dear friend died.

In recalling the times we spent together, I will never forget his response to my question, “Musa, if you were to die tonight, where will you spend eternity?”

After some hesitation, he responded, “I will go to Paradise.”
“How do you know?” I asked.

Grasping the Scriptures with both hands, he replied, “Because I believe this!”

THE PROMISE

I dedicate this journey of discovery to those of you who, like Musa, want to *make the right choice before you die*. May the one true God take you by the hand, help you over all the obstacles, and lead you into a clear and accurate understanding of who He is and what He has done for you.

“You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13)

That is God’s sure promise to you.



“Before you know it, ignorance will kill you.”
— Wolof proverb

Nearly three millennia ago, God declared, “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*” (Hosea 4:6) To this day, most people, including those with college degrees, live and die ignorant of what the biblical prophets have written.

Considering the Bible’s antiquity and influence, can a person be rightly called well-educated apart from a basic grasp of what the Bible says?

Just as the world’s population has come up with thousands of religions, so it has come up with thousands of reasons for ignoring the Scriptures. In this chapter and the next we will consider ten of those reasons. And once we begin our journey, we can expect to encounter and overcome many more obstacles.

TEN “REASONS” PEOPLE REJECT THE BIBLE:

1. “MYTHS”

In secularized Western and European nations, many declare the Bible to be little more than a collection of stirring myths and beautiful sayings invented by men. Most hold this opinion without ever having objectively investigated the Scriptures.

In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional classic, *The Celebrated Cases of Sherlock Holmes*, the detective's colleague, Dr. Watson, questions Holmes about a specific criminal case:

"What do you deduce from it?"

"I have no data yet," Holmes replies. "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts."¹⁸

Many people commit this "capital mistake" with the Scriptures. They draw their conclusions without sufficient data and twist facts to suit theories that won't disturb their worldview and lifestyle.

2. "TOO MANY INTERPRETATIONS"

Some people do not read the Scriptures because they hear one group proclaiming, "The Bible says this!" and another countering, "No, that is not what it means! It says this!" The assumption that the Scriptures cannot be understood is no surprise.

While the Bible allows for different points of view on certain issues of life,¹⁹ when it comes to matters of eternal consequence it leaves no room for diverse interpretations. God's Book can be understood, but we must observe what it says.

The legendary Sherlock Holmes also told Watson, "You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead from the hall to this room."

"Frequently."

"How often?" asked Holmes.

"Well, some hundreds of times," replied Watson.

"Then how many are there?"

"How many! I don't know."

"Quite so! You have not observed! And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed."²⁰

Similarly, many see assorted statements in the Bible, but few observe what it actually says. Consequently, it is no surprise that people come up with a variety of interpretations.

Here is a clarifying question: Do I want to understand God's message? Am I prepared to seek for God's truth with the same

passion and scrutiny I would use to search for hidden treasure? King Solomon wrote: "If you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will...find the knowledge of God." (Proverbs 2:3-5)

3. "CHRISTIANS"

Many reject the Bible because of evil perpetrated by people who claim to follow it. "What about the Crusades in which 'infidels' were slaughtered under the banner of the cross?" they ask. "What about the Inquisition? What about injustices carried out by people today who claim to believe the Bible?" The truth is that anyone who bears the name *Christian* (meaning *Christ-like*) and fails to reflect the love and compassion of Christ is a living contradiction to what Jesus Christ exemplified and taught. Jesus told His disciples: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:43-44 NIV)

Others ask, "What about Christians who lead lives characterized by dishonesty, drunkenness, and immorality?" Again, a person living in moral uncleanness is living in direct disobedience to the Scriptures which declare: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) To be "justified" is to be declared righteous. Later, in our journey through the Scriptures, we will discover how sinners can be forgiven and declared righteous by God.

Still others ask, "But what about Christians who bow before statues and pray to Mary and the saints?" In brief, any who practice such things are following the traditions of their church rather than the teaching of the Word of God which declares: "You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an

engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 26:1) Bowing before statues, exalting man’s authority above God’s authority, praying mechanically without knowing the one true God are all forms of idolatry. Many are confused because they assume that *Christian* and *Catholic* are identical terms. They are not. Neither are *Christian* and *Protestant*. Going in and out of a church building makes a person a Christian no more than going in and out of a barn makes a person a horse.

4. “HYPOCRITES”

Another reason some give for not reading the Bible is “because of all the hypocrites.” Sadly, many who claim to believe the Bible say one thing and live another. They twist the message of the Bible and use God’s name for their own selfish purposes. Many preachers have been exposed as self-indulgent and immoral. Some tell you that if you send them money you will be blessed with health and wealth! The Bible exposes such impostors as “*men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.*” (1 Timothy 6:5)

Jesus had this to say to the self-seeking, superficial religious leaders of His day:

“Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” (Matthew 15:7-9) And to His disciples, Jesus said, “*When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.*” (Matthew 6:5)

Seeing that each of us has been guilty of some form of hypocrisy (pretending to be something we are not), should we let another’s hypocrisy prevent us from getting to know our Creator and allowing His authentic Word to transform us into the people He intends us to be?

5. “RACISM”

Some reject the Bible because they view it as favoring certain people groups more than others. While most of us must plead guilty to some level of racism or ethnocentrism (favoring our ethnic group above others), the Bible is clear: “*God does not show favoritism.*” (Acts 10:34 NIV)

For example, did you know that the prophet Moses married an Ethiopian woman?²¹ Have you read the story about how God, through the prophet Elisha, cleansed the commander of the Syrian army of his leprosy after he humbled himself before God?²² Or that God commanded the Jewish prophet Jonah to proclaim His message of repentance and salvation to the city of Nineveh (in Iraq)? Jonah hated the Ninevites and wanted God to destroy them, but God loved them and showed them mercy.²³ Are you familiar with the important role Persia (Iran) has played in God’s unfolding story of redemption for the world?²⁴ Have you considered the touching account of Jesus sharing the message of eternal life with a sinful Samaritan woman, even though the Jews avoided Samaria and labeled all Samaritans “unclean”?²⁵

Our world is plagued with racism, but our Creator is not. In His eyes there is only one race—the human race.

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord...though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being.”

(Acts 17:24-28)

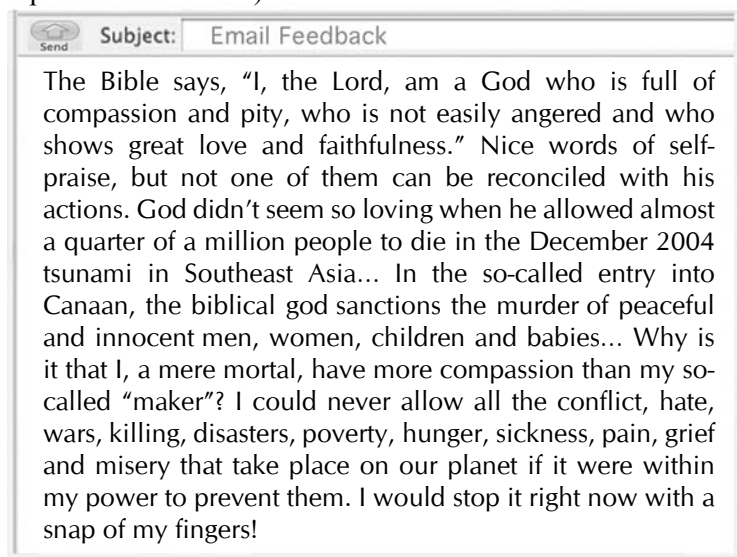
This declaration that God has made all people “*from one blood*” is confirmed by modern science, which states: “The human genetic code, or genome, is 99.9 percent identical throughout

the world. What's left is the DNA responsible for our individual differences—in eye color or disease risk, for example.”²⁶

The Creator and Owner “*of heaven and earth,*” who “*is not far from each one of us,*” cares for you and me personally and wants us to “*seek the Lord*” and understand His message. He has arranged every detail of our birth. He loves all people of every nation, language, culture and color, and invites them to call on His Name in their own heart language.

6. “THE BIBLICAL GOD SANCTIONS MURDER”

This e-mail came in from an atheist (or secular humanist, as he prefers to be called):



Many ask, “If God is both good and all-powerful, why doesn’t He put a stop to evil?” Yet few ask, “If God is good and all-powerful, why doesn’t He put a stop to *me* when I commit evil deeds?” We want God to judge evil, but we do not want Him to judge us.

Having noted this inconsistency, we concede that our humanist friend has raised some tough challenges. While there are no simple answers, there are satisfying answers. Later in our journey through the Scriptures, as we come face to face with the character of God and the far-reaching consequences of sin, God’s answers

will become clear. Meanwhile, here are three principles to prevent us from judging our Creator when He allows and even orders calamities that snatch away the lives of men, women, children, and babies:

1) **Man sees only a fragment, but God sees the whole picture.**

What people classify as “unjust” tragedies in which “innocent” victims die “before their time,” God sees from the perspective of eternity. He declares that a person’s fleeting earthly existence is only the prelude to the main event.²⁷ There is more to life than meets the eye. For example, imagine a fetus in his mother’s womb. If he could rationalize, based on his limited worldview, he might tell God: “What did I and other unborn babies do to deserve being locked up in an embryonic sac? We hear kids outside laughing and playing, and here we are entombed in this dark, watery world! It isn’t fair! Why is it that I, a mere fetus, have more compassion than my Maker?”

Apparently, unborn babies do not challenge their Creator in this way, but adults do. “*But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’*” (Romans 9:20 NIV)

2) **What is wrong for man is not necessarily wrong for God.**

As the Source and Sustainer of life, He also has the right to terminate it. The prophet Job, who lost all his possessions and his ten children in a succession of disasters, declared: “*‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.’ In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*” (Job 1:21-22 NIV)

Our upcoming journey will provide behind-the-scenes insights into some of the strange yet wise designs of God.²⁸ We will meet the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, who does not force humans to love and obey Him. We will also discover why the world is in its present dire condition.

3) **In the end, God will execute perfect justice for all.**

As we struggle to make sense of past and current events, it is helpful to remember that our Creator has all the data about every soul; we do not. God operates, not by our moral standards, but

by His. We do not tell Him what is right and wrong; He tells us. Though God permits people to make wrong choices that adversely affect others, He is not indifferent to evil. A Day of Judgment is coming when God will judge every man, woman and child according to *His* standard of righteousness. The extremes of His love and justice are infinite.²⁹ *“The LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him.”* (Isaiah 30:18)

If you, like our e-mail correspondent, view yourself as having *“more compassion than [your] Maker,”* keep reading. God reveals His secrets to those who are humble and patient enough to hear Him out.

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever....” (Deuteronomy 29:29)

7. “GOD’S BOOK WOULD NOT CONTAIN...”

Some justify their dismissal of the Scriptures by saying, “If the Bible were inspired by God it wouldn’t include revolting stories of people committing adultery, incest, genocide, treachery, idolatry and the like.” According to their concept of inspiration and revelation, God’s Book should be essentially limited to direct quotes from God.

However, since the Scriptures are intended to introduce people to their Creator within the framework of history, should it come as a surprise that the Bible records not only the words and works of God, but also the sins and shortcomings of humanity? Does God not have the right to reveal His glory, purity, justice, mercy, and faithfulness against the dark backdrop of mankind’s failure? Dare we dictate to the Almighty how He should or should not reveal Himself and His message?

“You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘He did not make me’? Can the pot say of the potter, ‘He knows nothing’?” (Isaiah 29:16 NIV)

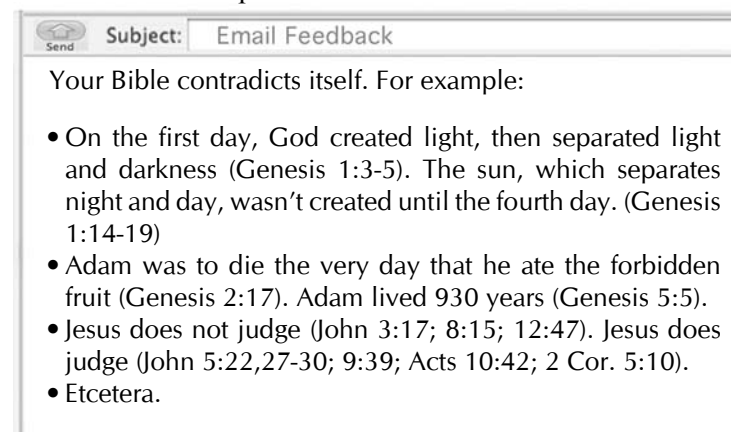
The Bible records many historical events that God allowed but did not approve. The true and living God is the One who delights to transform a bad situation into something good. Perhaps you have read the gripping story of Joseph, the eleventh son of Jacob (Genesis 37-50). His ten older brothers hated and mistreated him and sold him as a slave to the Ishmaelites. Joseph was unjustly put into prison, but it was through that very adversity that Joseph ascended to the throne of Egypt and saved his brothers, the Egyptians, and the surrounding nations from starvation. Later, after his brothers had a radical change of heart, Joseph told them: *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”* (Genesis 50:20 NIV)

8. “FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS”

Many insist that the Bible is full of contradictions, yet few take time to study it objectively. Is it fair to condemn the Scriptures based on what someone else says about them? Can any book be understood by merely reading a phrase here and there? Should a great book be read only to find a typographical error or an inconsistency in its text? Of course not. Yet that is how many people read the Bible.

Years ago, I received an e-mail with a long list of supposed errors and contradictions in the Bible which the correspondent had copied from some website.

Here is an excerpt:



Now I would like to ask you a question: Does your religion allow me to ask questions and use my brain before accepting it or does it ask me to close my eyes and stop my brain from producing questions? Because I am asking myself if it is possible that God could have done so many errors in His Book and I naturally answer NO!? [sic]

Yes, the same God who says, “*Come now, and let us reason together*” (Isaiah 1:18), wants me “to ask questions and use my brain.” God invites each of us to reflect on His Word for ourselves. Copying and pasting someone else’s list of “contradictions” will not do. Solomon said, “*The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.*” (Proverbs 14:15)

The solutions to the correspondent’s “contradictions” will be resolved as we think our way through the Scriptures.³⁰ For now, however, perhaps we can all agree on this: Life is too short and eternity too long to not do our own honest research.

If you have ever eaten a delicious, juicy mango, you know that trying to describe its flavor to someone is not enough. It must be tasted. Likewise, accepting what someone else says to you about God’s Word is not good enough. You must taste it for yourself.

“*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!*” (Psalm 34:8)

It is in a person’s own eternal interest to be a careful student of the Scriptures, one “*who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*” (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV) Not paying attention to the context (the entire section in which an alleged contradiction is found) is not the correct way to handle the Word of Truth.

To illustrate, there are biblical statements commanding us *not to judge*, while others command us *to judge*.³¹ Are these Scriptures contradictory? No, they are complementary. On the one hand, God’s Book tells me, as a creature limited in knowledge, not to judge (condemn) another person’s motives or actions from a self-righteous, fault-finding spirit. On the other hand, I am commanded to judge (discern) right from wrong and to differentiate truth from error based on what the Scriptures say.

So what about the supposed contradictions in the Bible?

I have personally found satisfying solutions for all such apparent contradictions. I have also discovered that until people *want* to understand the Scriptures, they will find a new contradiction as quickly as their old one is cleared up.³²

Do you *want* to understand God’s message? Then don’t go to God’s Book looking for your own idea; go searching rather for His. Study the Bible book by book. Don’t try too hard to interpret what you read. Let it interpret itself. The Scriptures, written by many prophets over many centuries, are their own best commentary.³³

“*He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.*” (Daniel 2:22)

9. “I DO NOT BELIEVE IN A NEW TESTAMENT”

Some time ago, I received this e-mail from a lady:

Send Subject: Email Feedback

I do not believe in the new testament. I only believe in the original testament. I do not believe any words from God can be edited and rewritten for newer times. [sic]

Like so many, this correspondent had not yet understood why God’s Book contains an Old and a New Testament. These two basic sections of Scripture do not mean that God’s Word has been “edited and rewritten,” but rather that God’s plan for mankind, which was *foretold*, has been and is being *fulfilled*.

Events in history are referenced by the date they occurred. For example, the prophet Abraham’s birth is dated as taking place in approximately 2000 **BC**, but the destruction of New York’s Twin Towers is dated **AD** 2001.³⁴ World history is divided into two parts. So is God’s Book.

The Bible has an Old Testament and a New Testament. *Testament* is another word for *legal document, contract or covenant—an agreement between two parties*.³⁵ For now, let’s take a cursory look at the Scripture’s two parts. As we journey through the Old and New Testaments, the purpose and power of these two sections will become clear.

Part I: The Old Testament. Written in Hebrew and Aramaic, the Old Testament Scriptures contain “*the Law of Moses* [also called the Torah] *and the Prophets and the Psalms.*” (Luke 24:44) These Writings, transmitted by God to some thirty prophets over more than a thousand years, provide a record of God’s intervention in human history—from the creation of Adam to the time of the Persian Empire (circa 400 BC).

In a prophetic sense, the Old Testament looks down the corridor of time to the end of the world, announcing hundreds of historical events before they happen.³⁶

The Old Testament describes the covenant God offered people before the birth of Jesus Christ (BC). *Christ* is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah* which means *The Anointed One* or *The Chosen One*. By foretelling key events yet to take place, these Scriptures pointed forward to the Messiah who would come to rescue people from sin and its consequences. The old covenant also included this important promise:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant**....” (Jeremiah 31:31)

Part II: The New Testament. Written in Greek, the New Testament Scriptures are also called *the Gospel* (or *Injil*, Arabic for “Good News”). Written down by no fewer than eight men during the first century AD, the New Testament records the Messiah’s initial coming to earth. It also provides a divine commentary on the Old Testament Scriptures and foretells how world history will conclude. All of its prophecies are in perfect harmony with those found in the Old Testament.

The New Testament describes God’s great offer to people as a result of the Messiah’s coming (AD). These Scriptures point backward, showing the historical fulfillment of hundreds of key events foretold by the prophets.

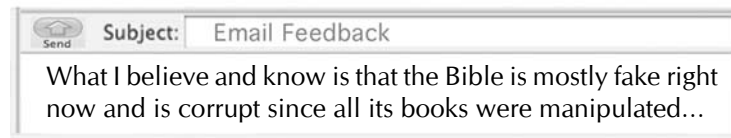
Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also points forward to the day when the Messiah will return to earth. It was for good reason the Messiah said, “*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets* [the Old Testament]. *I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*” (Matthew 5:17)

There is no contradiction between the Old Testament and the New. Like a seed that germinates and grows into a mature tree, God’s age-old plan for mankind takes root in the Old Testament and grows to maturity in the New Testament. Every section of God’s Book points to the message He wants us to understand.

The lady who wrote the e-mail is correct in her belief that no “*words from God can be edited and rewritten for newer times.*” What she has failed to recognize is that “*words from God*” can and will be fulfilled.

10. “CORRUPT”

Up to this point, we have faced nine obstacles that prevent people from reading and believing the Bible. However, the most common objection I hear from my Muslim friends has not yet been addressed. Ahmed already expressed it in his e-mail:



Is Ahmed right? Have the original Scriptures been corrupted? The next section provides the answer.



*“The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.”*
— Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:8)

The following e-mail excerpts from four different parts of the world express the thinking of more than a billion people worldwide:

Send Subject: Email Feedback
We believe in all divine Scriptures, but in their original form.

Send Subject: Email Feedback
Don't forget you got the old testament and the new testament in which words have changed. In the holy Quran the words have been same over the years.

Send Subject: Email Feedback
Your Bible is a corrupted text that has been rewritten, added to and re-edited from the very beginning to match your sick beliefs.

Send Subject: Email Feedback
I hold that the Bible was corrupted centuries and even millennia ago, and that most if not all of the New Testament is complete hogwash created by a false Prophet named Paul. Therefore, to quote the Bible to me is a waste of typing and/or cut and pasting.

Are these allegations valid? Has the infinite God allowed finite man to corrupt and manipulate the Scriptures He revealed to His prophets so long ago?

A PERSONAL WORD TO MUSLIMS

Here I would like to speak directly to my respected Muslim reader.

As you probably know, the Qur'an clearly declares that the biblical Scriptures—the Torah (*Tawret*), Psalms (*Zabur*) and Gospel (*Injil*)—were given by God for “**guidance and light**.” (Sura 5:44-51) It also states, “*To you [Muhammad] We [Allah] sent the Scripture [Qur'an] in truth, **confirming the Scripture [Bible] that came before it, and guarding it in safety.***” (Sura 5:48) And, “*The Messengers We sent were but men, to whom We granted **inspiration: if you do not realize this, ask of those who possess the Message [the Bible].***” (Sura 21:7) The Qur'an also warns: “*Those who reject the Book and the **revelations with which We sent our messengers...in the Fire they shall be burned.***” (Sura 40:70-72)

The Qur'an repeatedly declares that the books of the Bible were inspired by God and that those who reject them will be sent to hell. That is what the Qur'an says.³⁷

Such Qur'anic declarations create a serious dilemma for Muslims everywhere, because the Bible and the Qur'an present two radically different messages regarding the character of God and His plan for mankind. This is why most Muslims have concluded that the Scriptures of the Bible have been corrupted.

The following questions have helped many think through that conclusion.

QUESTIONS MOSTLY FOR MUSLIMS

- Do you think God is able to protect His own Scriptures?
- If so, do you think He is willing to protect them?
- If you believe that the Scriptures of the prophets have been corrupted:
 - *When* were they corrupted?
 - *Where* were they corrupted?
 - *Who* corrupted them? If you think Christians or Jews altered the Scriptures, why do you think they would have tampered with the sacred books which many of them willingly died for?³⁸
 - *What* evidence can you present?
 - *Why* might the Almighty have allowed finite men to corrupt His written record and revelation for mankind?
- If God would allow humans to corrupt the books of prophets like Moses and David, *how* do you know that the book you trust hasn't suffered the same indignity?

The purpose here is not to overwhelm anyone with questions, but since this corruption charge is believed by so many and is of eternal consequence, here is one more:

- Do you think the Bible Scriptures were tampered with *before* or *after* the Qur'an was delivered?

Before you read on, take a moment to work out your response to this before-or-after question. You may even want to write out your answer before continuing.

BEFORE?

If your response is that the biblical texts were corrupted *before* the Qur'an was written, then why does the Qur'an declare those Scriptures as "*guidance*" for mankind and not deception, as "*light*" and not darkness? Why does the Qur'an say, "*Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed therein*"? (Sura 5:46-47) And why does it declare: "*No change can there be in the words of Allah*"? (Sura 10:64)

If the Scriptures of the Bible were considered unreliable, why did the Qur'an command: "*If you are in doubt as to what We have revealed to you, ask those who read the Book before you*"? (Sura 10:94 Shakir³⁹), and "*you bring the Law [Torah] and study it, if you be men of truth*"? (Sura 3:93)

While some were accused of "*distort[ing] the Book with their tongues*" (Sura 3:78), the Scriptures themselves were considered uncorrupted and intact.

AFTER?

On the other hand, if your response is that the biblical texts were corrupted *after* the Qur'an was written, then it must be pointed out that Bibles in circulation today are translated from ancient manuscripts which predate the Qur'an by many centuries.

By the time the Qur'an was first recited, the Scriptures had already been distributed in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and had been translated into many languages such as Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, Ethiopic, and Armenian.⁴⁰

Think about this. How could a group of men have inserted corruption into books of such celebrity, books translated into so many languages, copied by the hundreds of thousands, and rapidly distributed throughout the known world? Imagine endeavoring to collect all the original-language copies as well as the countless translations—and then attempting to change each to create the uniformity we find in these translations today. It would be an impossible task.

The conclusion is clear:

- To claim that the Bible was corrupted *before* the Qur'an was written is to contradict dozens of Qur'anic verses.⁴¹
- To claim that the Bible was corrupted *after* the Qur'an was written is to contradict the historical and archaeological evidence supported by thousands of ancient manuscripts.

This conclusion raises a new set of questions.

From where did these thousands of biblical manuscripts and translations come?

Where are the original writings?

ORIGINALS AND THEIR “DESCENDANTS”

Because all things on earth, including books, fade and wear out, the Bible’s original manuscripts (also called *autographs*) are no longer available. However, safeguarded in museums and universities around the world are thousands of early copies which “descended” from the originals written by the prophets.

Whether referring to the Torah, the Gospels, Aristotle the philosopher, Flavius Josephus the historian, or the much more recent Qur’an,⁴² all the original documents are worn out and gone. So it is with all books of antiquity. Only the “descendants” of the originals remain.

In Senegal, most people believe that the Bible has been falsified. They do not trust it. Paradoxically, they do trust their *griots*. A griot is an oral historian whose main task is to memorize the genealogy and oral history of his family, clan and village, and to pass on that history to the next generation. A griot’s ability to retain detailed family information and communicate it with a reasonable degree of accuracy is impressive. Yet as good as griots are at what they do, accuracy and details get lost over time. The oral method of preserving truth among men cannot match the precision of the written method.

Why are many people quick to trust the oral testimony of men yet slow to believe the written testimony of God?

Is that wise?

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater... he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given.” (1 John 5:9-10)



SCROLLS AND SCRIBES

The Scriptures were written long before the time of paper, printing presses and computers. The prophets wrote God’s words on scrolls made from animal skins or papyrus.

These original scrolls were then hand-copied by scribes. Scribes were distinguished professional people of the ancient world who could read, write, draw up and duplicate legal documents. Some scribes also duplicated biblical texts. Their aim was to copy them with perfect accuracy. “At the ends of some books, the scribe gave the total number of words in the book and told which word was the exact middle, so that later scribes could count both ways to be sure they had not omitted a single letter.”⁴³

Despite their extreme care, minor variants found their way into copies: an omitted word, phrase or paragraph, or a miscopied number.⁴⁴ However, not one foundational truth is affected by any of the variations found among ancient manuscripts.

Scholars have never had a problem with trivial copying errors in an ancient text, secular or sacred. The fact that such variants remain in these hand-copied texts strengthens the case that the biblical Scriptures have not been tampered with. Unlike the Qur’an, the Bible has no history of anyone ever attempting to make “a perfect copy” and then burning the remaining manuscripts.⁴⁵

God has preserved His message for us. But how can we be sure that the Scriptures of today are actually what the prophets and apostles wrote?

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Until recently, the earliest known copies of the Old Testament Scriptures (written by the prophets between 1500 and 400 BC) dated back to about AD 900. Because of the great length of time between the copies and the originals and because these ancient texts had been copied and recopied over the centuries, critics claimed that it was impossible to know with certainty what the prophets had written.⁴⁶

Then the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

The year: 1947.

The place: Khirbet Qumran near the Dead Sea.

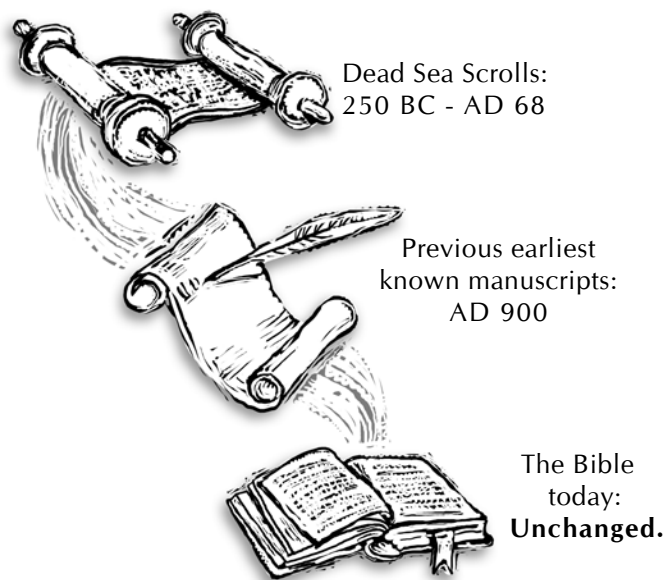
The breaking news: A Bedouin shepherd boy in search of a lost goat stumbles upon a cave with clay jars containing many ancient scrolls in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

Between 1947 and 1956, more than 225 biblical manuscripts were found in eleven caves. Scholars dated these scrolls as having been penned between 250 BC and AD 68. Most of these manuscripts were more than 2,000 years old. What a find!

The scrolls had been hidden in the caves of Qumran around AD 70 (the year Rome leveled Jerusalem) by a group of Jews known as the Essenes. These men resolved that no matter what happened to them personally, these writings must be preserved for future generations. While the Jews themselves were either killed or scattered into the nations, the Scriptures were preserved. For nearly 1,900 years the papyrus and parchment scrolls remained hidden in clay jars in the ideal dry climate of the Dead Sea region.

When news broke to the world about the discovery of these ancient documents, many thought they would contain significant differences from the more recent manuscripts, which were a thousand years younger. Perhaps the claim that “the Bible has been changed” would be confirmed!

The skeptics were disappointed. Only insignificant differences in spelling and grammar were found. These ancient manuscripts contained the same words and message as present-day Bibles.



What is the official verdict of Dead Sea Scroll scholars regarding the idea that these Scriptures have been tampered with or altered? “*The evidence to date suggests that such alteration did not take place.*”⁴⁷

BEST-PRESERVED BOOK IN HISTORY

As for the New Testament, there are more than 24,000 ancient manuscripts, including 5,300 in original Greek, 230 of those dating before the 6th century AD. These establish the New Testament as the best-documented text in history.

By comparison, consider the writings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who lived between 384 and 322 BC. Aristotle is one of the most influential thinkers of all time. Yet everything we know of his philosophy and logic comes from a small number of manuscripts of which the earliest date to AD 1100—a 1,400 year gap from the time of the original writings. Still no one questions the authenticity or preservation of Aristotle’s thoughts and words.

In addition to the thousands of New Testament manuscripts, scholars have found thousands of quotes from the New Testament in non-biblical texts which were written before AD 325 (date of the oldest complete surviving New Testament manuscript). These quotations are so extensive that nearly the entire New Testament could be reconstructed from these writings alone.⁴⁸

The evidence shows the New Testament to be the best-preserved text of antiquity.

DIFFERENT BIBLES?

Perhaps you have heard someone say, “But there are so many different Bibles! Which version is correct?”

It is important to understand the difference between ancient biblical manuscripts and the various translations of those scripts. The manuscripts were copied by scribes long ago, centuries before the Qur’an. The Bibles in print today are translated from these ancient texts.⁴⁹ In whole or in part, the Bible has been translated from its original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) into more than 2,400 different languages.

One of those languages is English.

The Bible is available in dozens of excellent English translations, called *versions*. Each English version reads somewhat differently, which is what happens whenever words are translated from one language into another. The words translators choose may vary, but when faithfully translated, the meaning and message remain the same.

In this book, the *New King James Version* (NKJV) is the primary translation used. It is an accurate word-for-word translation in today's English. The *New International Version* (NIV) is also used in a number of places, since it is sometimes easier to understand.

Here is an example of the same verse in these two versions:

NKJV: *“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”* (Matthew 6:16)

NIV: *“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”* (Matthew 6:16 NIV)

Though the wording varies, the meaning is the same.

GOD IS GREATER

Ironically, perhaps the best refutation of the charge that men have falsified God's written Word is announced throughout the day from mosques around the world.

I heard it this morning.

“Alla-hu Akbar! Allaaaaa-hu Akbar!”
(God is greater! God is greater!)

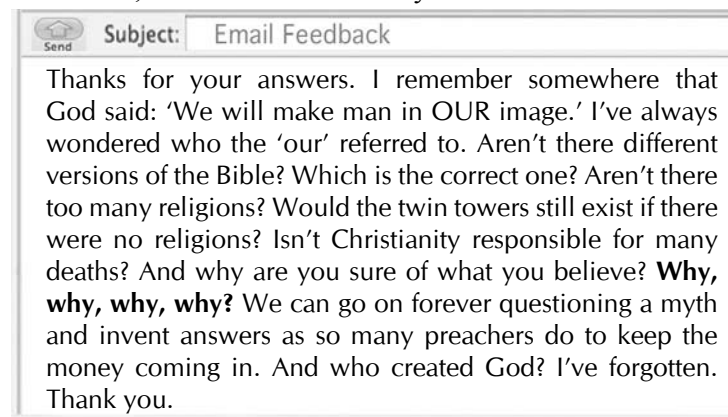
Yes, *God is greater*—greater than man and the eons of time. For the blessing of all nations and for the sake of His own reputation, the true and living God has safeguarded His message for every generation.

God is not only the Creator and Sustainer of His world; He is the Author and Guardian of His Word.

“Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.”
(Psalm 119:89)

ENDLESS OBSTACLES

At this point it would be nice to think that everyone preparing for the journey has overcome the obstacles that keep them from listening to God's Word. Yet experience shows otherwise. For many, there will always be another barricade on truth's pathway, and another, and another.⁵⁰ Recently I received this e-mail:



While God's Book does provide satisfying answers to man's toughest questions, at some point, those who want to discover eternal truth this side of the grave must stop focusing on *man's whys* and start reflecting on *God's words*.

REAL REASONS PEOPLE IGNORE THE BIBLE

The Bible reveals the real reasons people reject God's truth. Here are three:

1. CORRUPTED HEARTS

Some people never reflect on the Scriptures simply because they do not really want to know their Creator-Owner.

In assessing the human heart (not the cardiovascular pump, but the inner control center—the soul) the Scripture declares: *“They are corrupt.... The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside....”* (Psalm 14:1-3)

Man’s rejection of the Bible has nothing to do with corrupted Scriptures; it has everything to do with corrupted hearts.

King Solomon wrote: *“God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”* (Ecclesiastes 7:29) If left to our natural inclinations, we will choose to go our own way, devise our own schemes, and live and die in the religion of our parents. We will actually search for reasons *not* to seek to know God. Shortly after we begin our journey through the Scriptures, we’ll discover why we are like that. For now, know that God has good reason for the repeated warnings in His Book: *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”* (Matthew 13:9)⁵¹

2. WORRIES AND WEALTH

Many people fail to understand God’s Message because their total focus is on the here and now. *“The worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it.”* (Matthew 13:22 NIV)

Jesus of Nazareth told the story of a rich man who had ignored the Scriptures of the prophets during his entire life. Perhaps this man had tried to ease his conscience by claiming that the Scriptures were unreliable. Whatever the case, the man eventually died and found himself in hell. To provide the living with clear warning, God allowed this man to communicate briefly with the prophet Abraham in Paradise. The rich man asked for a drop of water to cool his tongue, but received none. Once this man comprehended that he was forever without hope, he begged Abraham to send someone back from the dead to warn his five surviving brothers, *“lest they also come to this place of torment!”*

Abraham’s response was clear.

“Abraham said to him, ‘They have [the Scriptures of] Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’

And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’

But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16:27-31)

God has declared His written Word to be a more convincing confirmation of His truth than miraculous signs and wonders. God has provided and preserved the Scriptures of His prophets for us and He expects us to *“hear them.”*

3. FEAR OF MAN

Some people never study the Bible because they are afraid of how others will react.

A neighbor once told me, “If it wasn’t for my family, I would read the Bible!” Meanwhile, the Bible tells me, *“The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.”* (Proverbs 29:25)

How about you? Do you fear what family and friends might think, say, or do if they catch you reading the writings of the very prophets they claim to honor?

Fear not. *“Whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.”*

From God’s perspective, there is no legitimate reason to ignore His message.