

# Is The Bible the The Word of God?

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One of the slow-eating cancers which afflicts the minds of the religious in this century is the peculiar notion that the Bible is the very Word of God. This notion is as absurd as is this generation's habit of calling a building a church. The Bible never claims for itself the lofty title of "Word of God"; yet, strangely, multiplied thousands insist that the Word of God is what the Bible is. But holiness and truth are not contrary to common sense. If the Bible were the Word of God, then the Word of God can be bought and sold with earthly currency, and the more money one has, in that case, the more Word of God one can possess.

As much reverence as is due the Bible, it is beyond the limit of truth and good sense to call it the Word of God, as a simple study of the Scriptures themselves easily shows. That "*the Word was in the beginning with God*" does not imply that God had a Bible by His side during creation. And that "*the Word became flesh and dwelled among us*" does not extol the wonder of book making. It extols the wonderful love of God in Christ Jesus, the Word of the Father incarnate.

## INTRODUCTORY VERSES

Those to whom the Word of God comes are themselves called "gods" (Jn.10:35), because the Word of God entering into a man transforms that man to a level of understanding, a life, which is above the realm of normal earthly existence. It enables a man to see life aright, from the divine perspective (Ps.119:105). The Word of God is truly, as David said, a thing to be received with great joy (Ps.119:162). We are guided securely through this life only by the Word of the Lord (Ps.17:4; Isa.30:21), for anyone seeking the truth about life need look no further than the Word of God. His Word is truth itself (Jn.17:17). God's Word has been thoroughly tested through time, in the most difficult of life's circumstances (2Sam.22:31; Ps.18:30), and has been proved absolutely trustworthy. When God speaks, a Law is created that cannot be abrogated by anyone (Ps.119:89), neither can any being overthrow the purpose for which His Word is spoken (Isa.55:10- 11). The angels are directed in all their ways by the Word of God (Ps.103:20). In any situation, all the time, God's Word is right (Ps.33:4; 119:105).

The "Word" is used at times as a synonym for God's promises (1Kgs.2:4; Deut.9:5; 1Kgs.8:56; 2Chron.6:10; Rom.9:9). By the Word of the Lord, according to Psalm 119, David was promised life (vv.25, 107, 154), strength (vv.28, 116), salvation (v.81), mercy (v.58), blessings (v.65), merciful kindness and comfort (vv. 76, 82), understanding (v.169), and deliverance (v.170). "Word" is used in reference to the promises God made to Abraham concerning his having a son by Sarah (Rom.9:9) and concerning the land of Canaan being given to his seed (Dt.9:5). To break a promise is called "breaking one's word" (Num.30:2).

Some fear God's Word, and some do not (Ex.9:20-21). The man who fears God's Word will find favor in His sight (Isa.66:2,5). Daniel, who trembled at the Word of God by the mouth of the angel (Dan.10:11; cp. 4:17; Lk.1:38), was dearly loved by God (Dan.9:23). Thus to fear and obey God's Word is wise, for God will give favor to the man who trembles at His Word (Isa.66:2; Jer.26:2-3). Despising the word of a king in the ancient world was a crime punishable by death (Ezr.6:11; Eccl.8:4); nevertheless, obedience to the Word of God takes precedence over allegiance to the word of any man (Dan.3:28; Acts 4:19; 5:29). The clear lesson being that obedience to the Word of God is to be chosen over life itself, and many are those who have been forced to make just that choice.

Jesus said that those who hear the Word of God and do it are more blessed than Mary, his mother (Lk.8:21). Such people are considered by the Lord to be his true family (Lk.11:27-28). But it is not in a man to know the Word of God. We depend entirely upon the mercy of God to acquaint us with His voice, or Word. It is in this sense that the Bible states that the Word of God was "revealed" to Samuel (1Sam.3:7), the young child who would faithfully deliver God's Word to Israel throughout his lifetime. To this humble child, God revealed Himself, "by the word" (1Sam.3:21). A human who unfaithfully communicates the Word of God, either by covering it or adding to it has sinned (Deut.4:2). The happy result of obedience to the Word of God is the possession of a testimony to His greatness. It is by such a testimony that one overcomes this unbelieving world (Rev.12:11).

Some titles given the Word of God in the Bible are:

- The word of God's grace. . . Acts 14:3; 20:32.
- The word of faith. . . . . Rom.10:8.
- The word of reconciliation. . . . 2Cor.5:19.
- The word of truth. . . . 2Cor.6:7; Jas.1:18.
- The word of life. . . . . 1Jn.1:1.
- The word of Christ. . . . . Col.3:16.
- The faithful word. . . . . Tit.1:9.
- The word of righteousness. . . . . Heb.5:13.
- The word of the oath. . . . . Heb.7:28.
- The word of exhortation. . . . . Heb.13:22.
- The word of prophecy. . . . . 2Pet.1:19.
- The word of my patience. . . . . Rev.3:10.

## The Word is a Spoken Thing

The Word of God is what God says, just as your word is what you say. When the Word of God comes, it comes from God's mouth (Dt.8:3; Isa.45:23; Jer.9:20; Ezek.3:17). The Bible, on the other hand, is the divinely-inspired record of the history which occurred when the Word of God came to various individuals. It is a record written by faithful men, men who would not lie. "*The word of God came*" is a phrase used very many times in the Bible, and, clearly, one should not understand that phrase to mean that "the Bible came", especially in the light of the fact that the Bible for the most part had not yet been written when the Word of God came to those men and women. And when the Word of God comes, it comes "SAYING". According to the evidence presented to us in the Bible, one never "reads the

Word of God"; rather, the Word is always a thing to be heard. The Word of God came "saying" to many prophets and other especially blessed people. Here are the 16 individuals who, we are told specifically, received the Word of God, when it came SAYING:

- The Word came to Abram SAYING. . Gen 15:1, 4
- The Word came to Samuel SAYING.. . 1Sam.15:10
- The Word came to Nathan SAYING. 2Sam.7:4; 1Chron.17:3
- The Word came to Gad SAYING. . . 2Sam.24:11
- The Word came to Solomon SAYING. . 1Kgs.6:11
- The Word came to Shemaiah SAYING. 1Kgs.12:22; 12:7
- The Word came to the unnamed prophet SAYING. 1Kgs.13:9,17
- The Word came to Jehu, the prophet, SAYING. 1Kgs.16:1
- The Word came to Elijah SAYING. 1Kgs.17:2; 18:1; 19:9;
- The Word came to Jacob SAYING. . . 1Kgs.18:31
- The Word came to Isaiah SAYING.. . 2Kgs.20:4
- The Word came to David SAYING. . 1Chron.22:8
- The Word came to Jeremiah SAYING. Jer.1:2-4,11,13, etc.
- The Word came to Ezekiel SAYING. . Ezek.3:16
- The word came to Haggai SAYING.. . Hag.1:1
- The Word came to Zechariah SAYING. . Zech.1:1

Can any rational person believe that the Bible came talking to these men? Of course not. The Word is something that is heard. It was heard by Micaiah (1Kgs.22:19), by Elisha (2Kgs.7:1, 16), by Isaiah (2Kgs.20:16), by Jesus (Lk.5:1), and many others.

### **The Word is Not the Bible!**

God's Word is what God says. The Lord spoke the Word to Moses (Josh.14:10), as He also spoke the Word to Nathan (2Sam.7:25). In neither case was God quoting the Scriptures, for in both cases it was entirely new information being given from God to those men; still, it was the Word which was being spoken. The Word was spoken concerning God's curse on Eli's house (1Kgs.2:27). And again, this Word was not a repeat of formerly written material. It was new information out of the mouth of God. Although the Lord commanded Joshua to read the Scriptures, Joshua obeyed the Word of God by doing what God told him to do, not by reading a Scripture and claiming that it applied to him (Josh.8:2, 27). When the unnamed prophet of 1Kings 13 spoke the Word of God to King Jeroboam, he too was repeating what God had told him, not what he had read. There was, in fact, nothing he could have read that would have given him this Word. So it is with every man of God who spoke the Word of the Lord. In every case they spoke what they had heard from God, new information which was needed in the situation that existed. Ahijah (1Kgs.14:18; 2Chron.10:15), Jehu, the prophet (1Kgs.16:12), Joshua (1Kgs.16:34), Elijah (2Kgs.1:17; 2Kgs.9:36), Jonah (2Kgs.14:25), the young prophet who spoke to Jehu (2Kgs.15:12), Isaiah (Isa.16:13), Jeremiah (2Chron.36:21-22; Ezr.1:1), and all God's true prophets (2Kgs.24:2; Jer.18:18) spoke what they heard from God, not what they read out of the Bible!

The false prophets of Jeremiah's day could quote Isaiah's ancient Word from God, that He would defend Jerusalem for David's sake. But Jeremiah and the few other faithful prophets living then had a new Word: God now would destroy Jerusalem, the city He had promised to defend. Their new and living Word was rejected, and the old Word which applied to Isaiah's generation was clung to instead - to the destruction of the nation.

Jesus spoke the Word, and even though he occasionally quoted from the Law and prophets, anyone would have to admit that the Word he spoke was new to mankind (cp. Mt.5:21-22, 27-28, etc; Jn.13:34), because he was preaching his Father's Word, not his own (Jn.8:26). And anyone was blessed who believed that new Word from God which Jesus brought (Lk.7:7; Jn.4:50; 17:6; Acts 13:48). The Church, too, is to speak the Word (Acts 4:29, 31; 1Thess. 1:8) as Paul and Silas did (Acts 16: 32), but we can only speak the Word if God allows us to hear it. Those whom God honors by communicating with them are, by the mere act of receiving God's Word, set apart and given authority in the church (1Tim.5:17; Heb.13:7). Yet it is obvious that not everyone who owns a Bible has such authority. One may own a Bible without having the Word of God.

Nature itself is moved by the Word that proceeds from God's mouth (cp. Ps.148:8; Jer.22:29). Demons flee, they are cast out by the Word of God (Mt.8:16), while humans who are graced with the privilege of its coming, and who receive it, are blessed beyond measure (e.g Acts 10:44). So powerful is God's Word that by hearing it, faith and wisdom are created in the heart of man (Rom.10:17). It is quite understandable that David should lie awake at night meditating with great joy upon the Word of God that had come to him (Ps.119:148, 162). And it is no wonder that some surrendered their lives rather than deny the Word which they had received from God (Rev.6:9; 20:4).

Hearing the Word of God is worthless, however, if obedience to the Word doesn't follow (Heb.4:2; Jas.1:22-23). Even listening to the Word with excitement is condemned, if obedience does not follow (cp. Ezek.33:30-33). Disobedient children of God may cause others outside of the kingdom to despise the Word of God (Tit.2:5), and such children of God themselves then become worthy of death (Num.15:31; 20:24; 1Kgs.13:26; 20:35-36; 1Chron.10: 13; 2Chron.34:21; Prov.13:13; Isa.5:24; Jer.23:33-40; etc.). It is as tragic as it is true that some reject the Word of God and turn down God's offer of eternal life (Mt.13:1-23), for the faith the Word can create in the heart is thereby despised, and darkness and death is chosen instead. Israel did not believe God's Word and was condemned to wander for 40 long years in the wilderness (cp.Ps.106:24-26). God rejected Saul as Israel's king because he rejected the Word of God which Samuel spoke to him (1Sam.15:23, 26), and the demon which God sent upon him drove the pitiful king to insanity. Moses angered God with disbelief at His Word on one occasion (Num.11:23) and suffered a heartbreaking loss. But those who, like Moses, truly love the Word of God are perfected in His chastening love, as Moses was (1Jn.2:5). Afflictions, we are informed, can teach us to obey the Word of God (Ps.105:28; 119:67).

God's Word is a spoken thing. It is not a dead letter. It is something that is spoken by God to man and, then, the content of that Word is delivered by those men to other men, either orally or in writing. But the letter that is written or the message that is spoken by those men is not the Word of God; rather, those communications are testimonies to the Word which had been received. The Word came to the prophets, and they spoke or wrote the messages that they had heard from God. The words which men heard from those prophets was the prophets' declaration of the Word of God, their testimony to what they had experienced from God. The prophets received the Word of God, and the people were called upon to believe that God had actually spoken to those holy men. Paul did not read from the Scriptures to the Philippian jailer when he preached to him and to his household the Word of God. He had heard from God, was communicating to the jailer what he had heard from God, and the jailer was being called upon by Paul to believe that God had actually spoken to him, that what he was preaching was a true witness of a divine communication. When Paul wrote to the church concerning the return of Jesus that "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord", he did not mean that he had read in the Bible that Jesus was coming again. He meant that God had revealed to him the truth of the second coming of our Lord and that he was relaying that truth to them. That was the Word of the Lord because that is what the Lord told Paul.

When the Bible says that "*The word of the Lord came unto John in the wilderness*" (Lk.3:2), should we think that some one travelled into the wilderness to bring John a Bible? Or when we are told that Jesus gave the Word of God to his disciples (Jn.17:8), should we believe that he gave them copies of the Scriptures? I know that we are told that the Word of God came "*by the hand of Jehu the son of Hanani*" against Baasha and his house (1Kgs.16:7), but that doesn't mean he was carrying the Word of God in his palm! It only means that God used Jehu to deliver His message to Baasha. It was something said, not read. Paul was forbidden by the Holy Ghost at one point to carry the Word of God into Asia Minor (Acts 16:6); nevertheless, because of the numerous Jewish communities that were in that region, it is safe to assume that many copies of the Scriptures were there. That David was to be anointed King of Israel (1Chron.11:3) was not something Samuel found in the book of Moses' Law. David's name is not found in the books of Moses. The Word of God that came to Israel concerning David came from God's mouth to Samuel and then from Samuel's mouth to all Israel.

Moses "*showed the word*" to Israel (Dt.5:5). Samuel "showed" young Saul the Word of the Lord (1Sam.9:27). God showed His Word to both Jeremiah (Jer.38:21) and all of Israel (Ps.147:19). And Israel was called upon by Jeremiah to "see" the word of God (Jer.2:31), as Isaiah did (Isa.2:1). None of this means that the Word of God was Scripture that could be seen physically, because in every one of these few cases of the Word being "shown", what was being "shown" had never been heard, much less written down, before. When, for example, the prophet Samuel told the young man Saul to stay with him a while, "*that I may show thee the word of God*", there was no verse of Scripture to which Samuel could have turned that would have said, "Saul, you have been chosen to be king over Israel." Had those Scriptures existed, the whole nation would already have known who had been chosen as king without Samuel's guidance. And even though the Levites were blessed with the service of God for "observing" the Word of God (Dt.33:9), it is incomprehensible that God blessed them for simply looking at the Bible.

When we are told that those in Jerusalem who received Peter's word were baptized (Acts 2:41), does anyone really believe that what they received from Peter was a copy of the Bible? John was in exile on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God (Rev.1:9), and he hadn't even written the book of Revelation! As did others to whom the Word of God came, John bore witness to the Word of God that came to him by putting in writing what he had heard (Rev.1:2). What he wrote was not the Word. What he heard and experienced from God was the Word. The book is his testimony, his faithful account of the things Christ Jesus showed him (Rev.1:19). The Word of God to a man may be recorded on paper by that man (cp. Josh.8:35; 2Thess.3:14), but the message written is not the Word of God. It is testimony to the Word that comes from God, a testimony that may be accurate or inaccurate, believed or rejected. It is foolish to despise the Word of God, regardless of how one learns of it, whether through vocal testimony or written testimony. When Philip took the Word of God to the Samaritans and they received it (Acts 8:14), it was a joyful event, but what sensible person could possibly believe that Philip was passing out Bibles in Samaria?

Taken to its logical conclusion, the belief that the Bible is the Word of God must lead one to draw some very strange conclusions. For the sake of argument, let's say that the Bible is the Word of God and see, using the following Scriptures, how absurd that thought really is.

### **If the Bible Were the Word of God...**

The Word of God was in Balaam's mouth (Num.22:38) indicating that Balaam's mouth was enormously wide. However, surgery was probably not required, as it was with King David. In his case, we are told that the Word was in David's tongue, of all things (2Sam.23:2). Who might have performed the surgery and wedged the Bible into his tongue, or how he was able to chew and speak afterwards is unclear, but notions that advanced medical techniques were unknown to those ancient people are clearly unfounded. Why, according to the Scriptures, it was normal procedure for the Word of God to be implanted not only in the mouths of God's people but also in their HEARTS (Dt.30:14; Rom.10:8; Ps.119:11; 1Jn.2:14)! Modern surgical procedures are inadequate to perform such an operation. Jeremiah, however, did not enjoy the Word being in his heart. It burned like fire, he said (Jer.20:9; 23:29). This must have been a terrible disappointment to Jeremiah, because he was overjoyed when the Word was first given to him (Jer.15:16). Jeremiah's difficulties notwithstanding, we are exhorted to taste the Word of God for ourselves (Heb.6:5). This exhortation indicates that having the Word in our stomachs may be as beneficial as having it in our hearts. For those of us who are concerned about such matters, infection will not be a problem if the Bible is in your mouth, heart, or stomach, because the Word of God is pure (Ps.119: 140). So, press on, fellow pilgrim, until we have the Word inside of us! We must do so; otherwise, we will be unable to believe Jesus (Jn.5:38; 8:37).

If the Word is the Bible, then apparently it used to be custom of the church to leave their Bibles lying in the walkways of their cities, because Peter said many stumbled at the Word (1Pet.2:8). Peter himself, however, did not follow that tradition. He refused to leave his Word for any reason (Acts 6:2). Further, if the Word of God is the Bible, the next time one is sick, he should place the Bible on his hurting parts, because the Word heals and delivers (Ps.107:20). And anyone desiring spiritual cleanness should take the Bible apart and tape the pages over himself, for the Word also sanctifies (1Tim.4:5). After all, if the Bible is the Word of God, it created and sustains this

universe (Ps.33:6; Heb.11:3; 2Pet.3:5,7), and if the Bible (being very small at that time) destroyed the ancient world with the flood (2Pet.3:6), it can surely heal and sanctify. Exactly how the earliest church washed itself using the Bible is not clear (Eph.5:26), but if we bathe using the Bible, I firmly believe that we shall become as clean as they did by bathing with it. No wonder David praised the Word of God (Ps.56:4,10). It cleansed him (Ps.119:9) and gave him life (Ps.119:50), as it did to the dry bones in a valley in Babylonia (Ezek.37:4).

If the Bible is the Word of God, every foolish statement made in these paragraphs has to be true, if that notion is carried to its logical conclusion. Anyone can easily understand that the Word being in David's tongue meant simply that, being moved by the Spirit of God, he proclaimed the Word of God to Israel (cp.Ps.119:172). Of the honor of speaking the Word of God to his fellow Israelites, David said, shortly before his death, "*The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue*" (2Sam.23:2). The Bible didn't create and doesn't sustain this universe. By the Word of his power, Jesus himself created and holds this universe together (Heb.1:3). But, just to drive the point home, let's continue with more of these outrageous conclusions, which must be true if the Bible is the Word of God.

In Samuel's day, the Word of the Lord was hard to find (1Sam.3:1). Amos told of a time when men will travel in every direction, looking for the Word of God, unable to find it (Amos 8:12). This leaves one with the impression that the times when there was a lack of the Word were rare, but according to the Biblical evidence, there must have been a lack of Bibles many times (if the Bible is the Word of God), for we are told that the kings of both Israel and Judah often sent "inquiring" for the Word of God. Ahab (1Kgs.22:5), Jehoshaphat (2Kgs.3:12), Josiah (2Chron.34:21), and Zedekiah (Jer.37:17), all sent to ask for the Word of God. Why they didn't have their own copies, we are not told. According to the Law, they were supposed to. It may be that they were simply unable to catch their copies of the Word, for Psalm 147:15 tells us that God's Word runs very swiftly. Nor are we told why they always sent to the prophets to find the Word. Apparently, whenever a king's Word started running, for some reason it ran to the prophets. At any rate, it seems that the prophets were forever well stocked with Bibles. Everyone seemed to know where to send for the Word when they wanted one.

There is no Scriptural basis for thinking that the prophets' Words were slower of foot than the kings' Words, but owning slow-footed Words would explain why the prophets seemed to have the Word when they needed it. Or maybe one long-forgotten qualification for being a prophet was that one had to be fleetfooted, so as to be able to catch the Word when needed. If the kings had known that the Word is actually God (Jn.1:1), they probably would have tried harder to keep up with their copies, but that truth wasn't revealed until Jesus came. At any rate, there seemed always to be much envy against the prophets for having the Word when no one else could keep up with theirs. As an added thought, the great speed of the Word also explains why the phrase, "standing on the word" is not found in the Bible. Apparently there were very few who were able to catch the Word so that they could stand on it. What would be the point in standing on it anyway? It couldn't get a person very high. If Zacchaeus had stood on the Word instead of climbing a tree, he probably would have never seen Jesus at all!

*"His Word runneth very swiftly"* One of the truly puzzling mysteries concerning the run-away Word of God, however, is its remarkable escape from heaven itself! The Psalmist was so confident that the Word would never be able to make a getaway from the heaven that he proclaimed, "*For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven*" (Ps.119:89). However, many times the rambling Word made an appearance here on earth. I suppose, when the available information is weighed, it would be imprudent to condemn the kings of Israel for being unable to catch their speedy Word, if it even avoided capture in the celestial realm! After all, if the Bible was not content to abide in heaven, how could one expect it to sit still in a mere earthly palace?

Now, concerning the scarcity of the Word which Amos mentioned, it may be that there were times when the Word was so scarce because the Word is not bound (2Tim.2:9), and if the Word of God is an unbound book, it would be very difficult to keep it together! This "loose-leaf" manner of the Word may also explain why the poor among the flock would easily recognize the Word (Zech.11:11). It does not explain, though, why the rich could not recognize it. This could also help explain Peter's remark that so many stumbled at the Word. If the Word was running swiftly and was falling apart at the same time because it was not bound, it could leave a paper trail that many would have to walk through! Actually, the Israelites may have intentionally allowed their Words run free, especially in wintry weather, because we are told that the Word of God melts ice (Ps.147:18). Were it not for so much unbelief in this country, we would see our highway maintenance crews in wintry weather turning their fast-running Bibles loose onto ice-covered roadways! Oh, for a revival among our government officials, before every mile of asphalt and concrete in the nation is thoroughly pickled with their salty chemicals! *"He casteth forth His ice like morsels.... He sendeth forth His Word, and melteth them."*

We are longing for the day when the Lord returns and sets up his printing press in Jerusalem and puts an end to this seemingly endless scarcity of the Word. We know he will do this because we are told that in the last days *"the word will go out from Jerusalem"* (Isa.2:3; Mic.4:2). And we know he will employ many people in his printing company, for the Psalmist wrote, *"The Lord gave the word. Great was the company of those that published it"* (Ps.68:11). We long to learn how to make copies of the Word, unbound, yet staying together - and increasing! It is difficult to understand, but something about a Bible made like this makes it very tough. Jeremiah said (23:29) that the Word was like a hammer that smashes things. Perhaps this is why Ezekiel was commanded a couple of times to *"drop his word"* on various places (Ezek.20:46; 21:2). This certainly explains why Ezekiel was not told to drop his Word on those dry bones! The pages of the Word were probably scattered as a result of the unbound Word being dropped, but that is just my theory. I really don't know how the scarcity of the Word could have happened; I only know that it is necessary that the Word be dropped and scattered. This must be what Paul meant when he said the Word must be rightly divided (2Tim.2:15). How the pages of the Word could be wrongly divided when dropped isn't clear yet. It may have something to do with what it is dropped upon. Actually, dropping the Word may be a mysterious part of the divine plan to increase the Word, as happened in the book of Acts (6:7). It may be, when the Word is dropped, rightly divided, and gathered back together, that more pages are miraculously added. By all indications, this happened often in the days of the earliest Church. So large did the Bible grow that we are told that *"the Word of God multiplied"* (Acts 12:24; 19:20). We should note that all this increase in the Word in the days of the early church occurred in spite of Moses' stern warning not to add anything to the Word he gave to Israel. How Peter, Paul, and the other writers of the Old and New Testaments will fare in the judgment for their transgression

is a matter of some controversy. As an added note, those who have poor eyesight will be relieved to learn that God has "*magnified his word*" (Ps.138:2)... "*For thou hast magnified thy Word*".

### **We Need the Word of God Desperately!**

Now, my friends, can any of us any longer cling to the bizarre conviction that the Bible itself is the Word of God? The Word of God is alive, will live forever, and is far sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating the souls of men, not their bodies, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb.4:12; 1Pet.1:23, 25). What man of even small intelligence would believe that the Word of God is a book when all the evidence is evenly and sensibly weighed? Isn't it a strange thing that the book, which so many call "the Word of God", itself tells us otherwise? The life-giving Word of God is the light, the guidance of God, which comes through the leading of the Spirit of God. For this reason the Spirit is called the Word of God (Eph.6:17). If the Scriptures were the actual Word of God, they could give life. But they aren't, and so they can't. Jesus condemned those in his day who trusted the Scriptures to give them life. According to the Bible in its entirety, the Word of God is the communication of God directly to men, which men are then expected to proclaim that Word "upon the house tops". The covenant God made with Abraham and the Law of Moses which confirmed it are called the Word of God because God Himself communicated with Abraham and with Moses (2Chron.16:15; 34:21; 35:6; Ps.105:8; Isa.9:8; Hab.3:9; Hag.2:5; cp.Gal.5:14; Heb.12:19).

The Word is always a thing to be preached, not read (Mk.2:2; Acts 8:4, 25; 10:36; 11:19; Tit.1:3, etc.)! To "preach the Bible", as some boast of doing, is nothing. Satan quoted Scripture to entrap Jesus. He had to quote the Scripture, for he had no Word of God for Jesus. But ministers of God are called "*ministers of the word*" (Lk.1:2), and preaching is called the "*ministry of the word*" (Acts 6:4), because "*He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God*" (Jn.3:34). The man sent from God is not confined to the Words which other men have heard from God. Prophecies are called the Word of God many, many times (Jer.28:9; 32:8; Lam.2:17; Ezek.12:25,28; Mk.14:72; Lk.2:26-29; 22:61; Col.1:25-26), and in no case were the utterances of the holy prophecies mere readings from other ancient writings. Jesus' prophecy of Peter's denial of him is called the Word (Mk.14:72; Lk.22:61). Indeed, everything Jesus ever said was the Word of God, for he spoke only what His Father told him to say (Jn.8:28; 12:49-50). The prophets, moved by the sheer power of the Word that came to them, "*cried out in the word of the Lord*" (1Kgs.13:2). A prophecy that fails, by the way, is not the Word of God (Dt.18:21-22; cp.2Kgs.10:10), except in cases such as Jonah's. The people of Nineveh whom he said would be destroyed repented in fear of God's Word against them, and God mercifully withheld his wrath. His forgiveness, then, became His new Word for Nineveh, just as true as would have been His previous Word of destruction, had they not repented.

Do not they who esteem the Bible to be the Word of God, and say that it is infallible, understand that the Word of God can be corrupted (2Cor.2:17; 4:2)? It can be corrupted because they who have received communication from God can be influenced by money, fear of men, or other considerations, to communicate the Word incompletely or with respect of persons (1Kgs.22:13; 2Chron.18:12; Jer.23:28; 26:2). Faithful delivery of the Word can be hindered by religious traditions of men (Mk.7:13; 2Thess.3:1), and it is by those who teach that the Bible is the Word of God that the true Word of God is most frequently contradicted when it is revealed.

There were some holy men who walked so closely to the heart of God that their word was enforced by God as His own. We are told that on one occasion in Egypt, "the Lord did according to the word of Moses" (Ex.8:13, 31). Of course, we know that Moses was not giving the orders. He was sent into Pharaoh's presence to say what God had told him to say. On another occasion, we are told that God forgave Israel its transgression "*according to Moses' word*" (Num.14:20), after Moses fervently prayed for Israel's pardon. God gave to Elijah the power both to stop or start the rain. Only "*according to my word*", said Elijah, would the rains return to Israel (1Kgs.17:1). But James reveals that Elijah did not "claim it by faith" or cling to some Scripture, thinking to "stand on the word", but that he "*prayed earnestly that it might not rain*" (Jas.5:17). It was in response to the "*fervent prayer of a righteous man*" that the rain stopped, and by the same earnestness in prayer the rains started again 42 months later (1Kgs.18:41-45), but even at that, Elijah's latter prayer for rain was only in response to the Word of God, which came SAYING to Elijah that it was time for the rains to come again (1Kgs.18:1). Elijah's word would have meant no more than anyone else's, had not he first heard from God. After Elijah's departure from this life, God struck the Syrian army blind "*according to the word of Elisha*" (2Kgs.6:18). And what was Elisha's word? It was an humble, prayerful request that God would strike the enemies of Israel with blindness (2Kgs.6:18). The pronouncement, or word, of any man is only as authoritative as its source. If that word comes from the heart of a man lead by the Spirit, that word is worth hearing and will never die, but the word of a deluded man is of little worth.

Seeing, then, that there were some who walked so closely to God that God performed the words that proceeded from their mouths, it is no wonder that the faithful among God's people also did according to the word of those men. Israel did according to the word of both Moses and Joshua (Ex.12:35; Num.27:21), as did the sons of Levi at Mount Sinai (Ex.32:28), and Aaron with his sons (Lev.10:7). Jesus prayed that his Father would reward those who responded in faith to the word of his disciples (Jn.17:20), their word being, of course, the preaching of the gospel of Christ Jesus, preaching which, according to Peter, was only possible if inspired by the Holy Ghost sent from heaven (1Pet.1:12). Any plan of action can be referred to a "word" (cp.Ezr. 10:5), and we might say that the gospel is God's plan of action for those who would be saved. And those who are sent by Him and who faithfully communicate His wonderful plan are truly preaching the Word. Moreover, it is by the word of men who are anointed to do the work of God that disputes among the saints are to be settled (Dt.18:21). As the Lord of all righteousness, Jesus will settle all disputes when he judges men in the final White Throne judgment by the Word he speaks (Jn.12:48). He was given this authority from the Father. He does not speak his own words, but the Father's (Jn.14:24). God the Father is the only real authority there is anywhere. All power is His, and there is no power except by Him (Rom.13:1). Only His Word prevails.

### **False Claims on the Word**

To claim falsely to be speaking the Word of God is punishable by death (Dt.18:20). Such ministers not ordained by God are called "false prophets", for they falsely claim to have heard from God (e.g. 1Kgs.13:18). But their message comes from their own imaginations, not from the living Word of God (Isa.8:20) They deny the Word when it is spoken because the Word is not in them, despite what they

claim (Jer.5:13; Jn.5:38). The word of false teachers will eat a person's soul like leprosy, slowly killing the feelings of the soul (2Tim.2:17; 1Tim.4:1-2), and those who believe the word of false prophets will die with them (Jer.5:14; Ezek.14:1-14). God mocks those who thus claim to "speak the word", saying that it will not come to pass (Isa.8:10). God will, however, send his Word to a liar, a false prophet, to accomplish a certain purpose (e.g. 1Kgs.13:20). But even when a man's word comes to pass, if he then attempts to turn the saints out of the right way, he is still worthy of death (Dt.13). Such ministers, and those who hear them, scorn those who bear the Word of God in truth (Jer.20:8; Amos 7:10- 13; 1Thess.1:6; Mk.4:17).

The Word of God is difficult for the self-willed to understand (Isa.28:13). In fact, the ungodly are burdened by and ashamed of the true Word (Jer. 6:10). Those who reject the Word of God are left with no wisdom and fall into a trap (Jer.8:9). Only those with no light in them speak contrary to the Word of God (Isa.8:20). In Jeremiah's day, the professional prophets "stood on the Word", as it were, and denied that Judah would be destroyed, but if the Word of God had been in them those prophets would have known what was in store for the nation, would have helped Jeremiah turn the people's heart again to the Law, and, with him, would have prayed that God would not destroy them (Jer.23:22; 27:18). It was principally because of men who falsely claimed to be speaking the Word of God that Jeremiah and other faithful men failed in their efforts to save the nation from disaster. The Word of God can be hindered in its fruitfulness by the word of vain talkers (Mk.7:13; 2Thess. 3:1). Jeremiah lamented the effect of the doctrines of men whom God had not sent with His Word, because by their word the Israelites were influenced not to believe the truth and be saved. ***"Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets",*** wept Jeremiah, ***"All my bones shake. I am like a drunken man whom wine has overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness" (Jer.23:9).*** Any man who has heard from God concerning the confused condition of the church must feel now, as did Jeremiah, the frustration of seeing the influence wielded among the children of God today by men who have not heard from God, knowing the troubles that must lie ahead without a revival of the living Word of God in the church.

Men not ordained by God are condemned to preach nothing but what they have heard and read of other men. That is the only gospel they have to offer. And that is why they must teach that the Bible is the Word of God. They can claim to have the Word of God if it is a book. Doing so excuses their lack of a testimony of experiencing the Word being spoken to them. They have no Word of God to preach, because God has not spoken to them. But he whom God sends is not confined to the words which God spoke to other men. He has his own commission, fresh from God, and he has an authority that no man can have except he be sent from the Lord. The gospel of Jesus Christ is more than a "word only" gospel. It is not a mere repetition of past messages to past generations, however eloquent that repetition may be made. Paul thought little of a "word-only" gospel with no spiritual power (1Thess.1:5; 1Cor.2:4-5). The kingdom of God is not in word, Paul said, but in power (1Cor.4:20). When Jesus' spoke, his words were with power (Lk.4:32,36), and God confirmed the fact that both Jesus and his disciples were speaking His Word by granting miracles and wonders to be performed by his hand (cp.Mk.16:20).

The Spirit and Christ Jesus are both called the Word of God (Eph.6:17; Rev.19:13) because they communicate perfectly the will of God. They never act on their own or contrary to the divine will, and they never misunderstand or misrepresent anything. Jesus is the very expression of God's will. The Spirit is His very life. Every man that is truly sent of God will lead others to the power and life of the Spirit that Jesus suffered for us to receive from God. Said Paul, ***"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.... And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1Cor.2: 1,2,4,5).*** Amen.

#### Conclusion

In the introduction I said that the notion that the Bible is the Word of God is a "slow-eating cancer". I say this because the effects of such a belief are to slowly dull the ear of man's heart to the true and living Word of God. It slowly but inexorably diminishes the role of the living God in the decisions that men make, because it has the effect of sending them to the Scriptures for guidance rather than to their knees, in faith communing with God. In time, such wrong thinking diminishes the fear of God in the human heart, dulls one's awareness that God is intimately concerned and involved in our lives, and diminishes the zeal for holiness that nothing but personal communion with the living God can produce. To say that the Bible is the Word of God is to say that the Bible was in the beginning with God and is God. And to do that it is to make an idol of what is only a tool of righteousness, a record written by holy men as testimony of the Word of God which came to them.

The Scriptures are not themselves the Word of God, and they can only be rightly understood by the person who has himself heard from God. God still speaks. He has spoken to me. And the Word of God which came to me opened my eyes to the meaning of the Scriptures. To understand the Bible requires the same revelation and anointing which was required to write it. Only He who inspired the writing of the Scriptures can possibly inspire a man to interpret them correctly. In comparison to the Word of the living God, the Bible is a dead letter which kills every soul which looks to it for life (2Cor.3:6).

Despite the reverence for God which appears to attend the somber declaration that the Bible is "the infallible Word of God", that declaration sprouts from the envious heart of Satan, who would rather glory in the works of men - even the Bible, the written work of righteous men - than to glory in the living power of God. It is Satan who inspired that unknown minister who first proclaimed the Bible to be God's Word. His evil purpose was to discourage fervent prayer, and to discourage men from expecting answers from God Himself; that is, to "read the Word" rather than humbly to prepare their hearts to receive it. That the Bible is the very Word of God is a wickedly cunning lie, the effects of which are discouragement, confusion, and death, even if its proponents boast of devotion to Christ and an ever closer walk with God - through the Scriptures, of course, rather than through experience with the power of God's Spirit. The Word of God is what God is saying this moment, not what He said two thousand years ago, or even what He said yesterday. It is true that He doesn't change; still, the Bible bears witness to the truth that His instructions to man have changed many times. God told Moses to hit a rock on Mount Horeb with his rod (Ex.17), but later when Moses hit another rock with his rod in Kadesh- Barnea God was angered, because His instruction this time to Moses was simply to speak to the rock (Num.20).

If the Bible were the Word, then man would exercise a certain degree of control over it: where it may be found, who may receive or purchase it, and in what form it comes. And since there are numerous (and often conflicting) versions of the Bible, man himself determines in those cases the very content of the Word of God - if the Bible is the Word. This, of course, would mean that man himself is God, for God is the only possible source of the Word. And while few who affirm that the Word of God is the Bible would actually claim to be God, the original inspiration for that doctrine, unbeknown to them, came from just such a cunning and deceitful spirit, a spirit which "*savors not the things that be of God, but those that be of men*", a spirit whose hidden desire is "*to be like the Most High*" (Isa.14:14). This lie, that the Bible is the Word of God, not only originated in the envious heart of that wicked creature who determined to make himself "like the most High", but also that lie is believed and promulgated by men who are not yet thoroughly purged from the carnal nature, which itself is a kindred spirit to that "angel of light".

John wrote, "*If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*" (1Jn.1:7). This cleansing from all sin is promised to the church when the church walks together in the light! Please listen to my words! All of Satan's devices against the church are intended to prevent or destroy fellowship, both the fellowship of the saints among themselves and the fellowship of the saints with the Father and the Son, because he understands, as we have not, that the church will never be perfected without fellowship. For the church to be thoroughly cleansed from sin, we must have fellowship! As members of the body of Christ, we are vitally important to one another. I need your testimony. You need mine. And when we humble ourselves to receive from one another what each of us has received from God, we participate in that holy communion which cleanses the saints of God from all unrighteousness. Satan understands this better than the church understands it. And because that is true, he has worked harder to prevent fellowship than we have labored to achieve it. He has preached more fervently that the dead letter of the Bible is the Word of God than we have prayed fervently to receive the living Word of our God. He has suffered more to stand firm for his lie than we have suffered to come to the knowledge of the truth. He has condemned the light of the Spirit when it shined more earnestly than we have rejoiced at its shining. He has hated us more than we have loved one another. As a result, in his incredibly clever way, Satan has persuaded many of us to relegate to a second-place position our life-giving communion with God through the Holy Ghost, and to cling with a death-like grip to the Bible instead.

Though he will not win the war against Christ's body of believers, to this point in church history Satan has decisively won the battle and has triumphantly succeeded in dividing us and preventing us from growing into fellowship with one another in light. His hatred of us, to this point, has far exceeded our love for one another. And his wisdom to accomplish evil has far exceeded our power and faith to accomplish the will of God. He has prayed and received more from God than the saints have had the faith to believe they should pray for, because his ministers are in the pulpits stealing our faith with dead doctrines and slowly killing our love for and desire to be united with one another. That the church will ever be "perfectly joined together" on this earth seems, to most saints that I know, a hopelessly idealistic dream. Those ministers whose Word is the Bible have nothing to offer the saints but discouragement and death. Satan has, in very great measure, quenched the hope in many saints' hearts of ever seeing the church united in God's divine order. He has accomplished his purpose of persuading many saints to give up hope in God's power to heal our confusion, that they might more easily be persuaded to accept without prayerful complaint his alternative to the unity for which Christ died. His alternative is religion without the power, truth, and glory of the Holy Ghost. And this is the only religion available to us if the Bible is the Word.

May God grant us grace to see, even as the Scriptures themselves warn us, our only access to God is by the Spirit (Eph.2:18), and to hope to be guided into all truth by the Bible is a vain hope indeed, a hope inspired by the devil and promoted by his ministers. God's ministers lead people into fellowship with God Himself, for they have received from God the Words of eternal life. They teach men to listen to God, to learn of God, and to know God's voice. As the Scriptures tell us, "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God." The fellowship which results from the church listening a man who has truly heard the Word is the church's only hope of attaining to a common knowledge of God, and unity of faith and doctrine (1Jn.1:7); indeed, to provide for it is the very reason Jesus died (Jn.17:11; 20-23).

In the last hours of his life on earth, Jesus pleaded with the Father to make his followers one, so that the world might be able to believe that he was truly sent from God (Jn.17). How can the world be expected to believe that Jesus is the only answer for this world, if the church itself is divided into a thousand sects? A divided church is a poor witness to the glory of Christ. A divided church is both a disgrace to the holy name it bears and a joke to this unbelieving, skeptical world. We should be deeply ashamed of ourselves and our revered sects. We should weep in disgrace for our divisions, for they are irrefutable evidences of our profound spiritual corruption.

A church "perfectly joined together" is what Jesus prayed for, and what he suffered and died to create. And it is the saints' fellowship in the light of God which Satan most hates. As much as Satan may dislike any soul coming to Jesus for forgiveness of sin, he much more despises the truth of God which will unite us as one in Christ. Satan labors far more strenuously to prevent saints from maturing into perfect unity than he labors to prevent sinners from ever coming to Christ. His dread is that one day the church will, in heartfelt repentance, cry out to God for the Word it now boasts of having on the shelf, and that we will confess our desperate need to be made one in Christ through the power and love and wisdom of the Holy Ghost.

Living fellowship with the living God can never be attained by merely reading the Bible. There must be a communication, a Word, from God to man in order for fellowship to exist. What Satan has accomplished is to have persuaded many of us to think that we have heard from God just because we have read the Bible. This persuasion robs us of our zeal for fervent prayer and devotion, the means of really obtaining a Word from the Lord. And if Satan thought he could convince some of us that there is no longer such a thing as God speaking to man, don't you think that He would try to do it? Not only has he tried, but he has in great measure succeeded, so that many thousands now regard any man's testimony of hearing directly from God as heresy. But though many more than this be persuaded to deny the reality of God's Word being heard today, the Word of God will still prevail, and all who hear and obey His Word are destined to prevail with it.

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