

***How the Bible Came to Us - #24***  
***The Story of the Bible Never Stops***

1. We have discussed the story of the Bible from its earliest beginnings—at the time when the alphabet was first discovered—all the way down to the electronic age. The Bible has been worshiped, criticized, condemned, burned, and held up to ridicule. But it continues to be the world’s greatest publishing success. We have noted that the Bible was “born” over centuries of time. It makes what some consider to be outlandish claims. But it continues to stimulate a vigorous study based on its unique interpretation of reality.
2. The Bible has never been without its critics. Even groups that hold it in very high respect have disagreed about what should be included within its covers.
3. During the last four centuries, it has sustained attacks the likes of which no other written material has come close. The “Bible” held in the highest respect by Orthodox groups, Catholic groups, Protestant groups, and Jewish groups is not even the same Bible! The effort to produce a critical text of the Bible has demonstrated how many thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of variations there are in the handwritten manuscripts that have developed over the centuries.
4. Let us look at three major ways in which the Bible has been attacked:
  - 1) The “biblical world view” has been essentially dismissed by the scientific and historical communities. Rudolf Bultmann in the 1940s made the case that the world described by the Bible is totally inadequate for anyone with any level of education. The Bible describes a world with three levels: heaven, earth, and hell. No one in the 21<sup>st</sup> century believes in such a world.
  - 2) Perhaps worse than that, the Bible describes a “science” that no one believes anymore. According to Bultmann, this ancient book full of ancient beliefs should be “demythologized.” Apparently, Bultmann’s main goal was to destroy the “myth” of the miraculously born Savior who died a cruel death and then rose from the dead.

Historical scholars have criticized the Bible as telling a very limited and very distorted picture of history. Many of them want to engage in historical quests to discover the truths behind the actual history, and thus, to discredit the biblical narrative.
  - 3) Perhaps worst of all, in recent years particularly, the Bible has been accused of promoting a very negative view of humanity. The Bible is considered to be full of superstition, dogmatism, and intolerance which many have believed to be the cause of holy wars and a lot of violence. Some would interpret it to be xenophobic. That leads to conflicts between groups of people and different races. It is regarded as being intolerant and prejudicial against women, minorities, and slaves. To people who are known for their quest for freedom and independence, why would they want to follow a Bible which continually calls for submissive obedience?
5. But despite all of that criticism, the Bible continues to command the world’s most impressive control of human minds and hearts. No other book is read, even memorized, so regularly and studied in such depth.
6. In the United States alone, there are at least 224 million people claiming to be Christians. There are at least 488,000 separate congregations. But that is not all! There are 2000 synagogues and over 4.4 million Jews who claim to belong to those synagogues. All together, that suggests a group of nearly 230 million people who potentially listen to the stories and teachings of the Bible every week. While we would be the first to admit that not all those people take the Bible so seriously or study it so regularly, even if we take 30% of that number as a reasonable guess of those who do take it seriously, it makes all other literary documents pale by comparison.
7. But that is just the beginning. Countless groups gather voluntarily on a weekly basis to study its truths. Book clubs are devoted to novels, biographies, and histories directly connected to the biblical story. Entire bookstores are focused on religious literature directly connected to the study of Scripture. The mere fact that such stores exist and flourish is a testimony to the Bible’s influence.

8. Despite the very strong anti-religious bias in the news media and in higher institutions of learning in western civilization, large groups of students continue to gather in voluntary groups for the study of the Bible. There are groups that promote Bible study among students such as Campus Crusade for Christ, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and the Hillel Foundation, just to mention a few of the major groups of that sort. Incredible as it may seem, students often take the discussions in these forums more seriously than they do their classes at the same universities!
9. So how do we measure the impact of the Bible on the lives of so many people? Even those who do not claim to be particularly religious, immediately turn to the Bible and to religious themes when a crisis arises. Critics might say, "Look how awful people are despite the fact that they read the Bible." But it could then be responded, "How much more awful would they be if they did not read the Bible!"
10. Furthermore, we now know that the Bible has entered the world of electronic literature in a very impressive way. It is possible to have thousands and thousands of Christian and Bible-related books on one portable computer. More than that, one can have interpretive tools such as Bible commentaries at one's fingertips through electronic media so that even a freshman in college can have more access to more documents and even more original material than the greatest scholars had available to them a hundred years ago.
11. But you do not have to have fancy biblical tools on your computer to study the Bible. There are "chat rooms" and "blogs" and there is even an Internet Bible available through Google. We do not yet even have a glimmer of how this is going to impact biblical understanding and scholarship in the future. Already, there are many young people who regard their real church and their real spiritual roots to be tied not to the building or the congregation where they attend services on the weekend but rather to chat rooms or other biblical study groups which they have found on the Internet.
12. And despite all of the biblical critics, even in the greatest universities in the world, there are significant departments for biblical studies. One can attend Harvard, Oxford, Tübingen, Cambridge, Hamburg, the University of Chicago, or Yale and get a Ph.D. degree in biblical studies. Furthermore, biblical studies have found their counterparts in sociology, history, literature, and virtually every other human enterprise. Virtually any part of any biblical discussion that we have had, or could have, has its experts that have spent lifetimes studying that area in detail.
13. Furthermore, there are enormous groups such as the Society of Biblical Literature, a kind of international umbrella association for those who take the study of the Bible as a lifelong pursuit and have Ph.D. degrees in the field, which meet regularly in various parts of the world. The Catholic Biblical Association has tens of thousands of members as well.
14. How is it possible for an ancient book-grounded in the thought forms of an ancient civilization—to survive and thrive in the anti-religious bias of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? University groups and scholastic societies attack the Bible almost at every opportunity. The news media is very strongly biased against Scripture. Some would like to suggest that anyone who continues to believe in the Bible is no more than semiliterate!
15. We have already mentioned the fact that some attack the Bible because of its patriarchal bias. Others attack the Bible because they see its association with the colonial world. Some of those groups would like to pull the Canon of the Bible apart and add other writings to make it supposedly more favorable toward minority groups and women.
16. But despite all of that, as we have seen repeatedly, when major movies or plays are produced based on biblical themes or biblical ideas, they become huge box office successes. They also generate an enormous amount of controversy. Some examples in recent times include Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, or even *The Da Vinci Code*.
17. But that is not all! When some supposedly new discovery of some ancient biblical document appears, it instantly becomes headline news. The Dead Sea Scrolls have commanded headline news for years. To a lesser extent, the Nag Hammadi Writings have done the same. Even the recent so-called discovery of the Judas Codex made a splash, incredible as it might seem, under the sponsorship of the National Geographic Society which later quietly admitted that many of their claims

were not founded on any truth.

18. We have also talked about the ongoing conflicts in the media and in the university setting between evolution and “creation science.” This ancient Book has created unbelievable controversies in recent years even in school boards across our country. We have reached the place where to be biblically ignorant is to be considered culturally deprived.
19. Thus it is that every year, groups like the “Jesus Seminar” get perfunctory articles in major news publications. But those same major news organizations such as *Newsweek*, *Time*, *US News and World Report*, etc. virtually every year produce Christmas and Easter issues that once again discuss what is new about the birth of Jesus or about His life and death. And those are the best-selling issues of the year.
20. So, it is fair to say that the Bible has not only survived but thrived! How does it do that? No other ancient document even comes close. There are only two comparable writings that might be placed alongside the Bible. One is the *Quran* and the other is *The Book of Mormon* and both of these represent reinterpretations of the biblical story! Each one has implications for how people live their lives.
21. So, we are left with this major question: To a scientific and thinking group of people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where does the Bible fit? It is not “scientific.” It is not “historical.” Its power and influence derive specifically from its spiritual content. It talks about a God who claims to create, sustain, save, even sanctify human lives. It challenges people to live lives which will verify the truthfulness of its teachings!
22. The Bible claims that we are made in “the image of God.” It is not possible to prove that scientifically. Some would even claim that if, in fact, we are made in the image of God, He must be an evil entity. G. K. Chesterton once remarked, “The only Christian theological teaching that is actually empirically verifiable is original sin.” When we look at the world around us, it is hard to believe that humans are supposed to represent all that is good and beautiful and true!
23. But if, in fact, we believe what the Bible teaches about human beings—that we are sons and daughters of God and supposed to live lives like His—it profoundly changes the way we behave toward each other. Every other human being must be regarded as the creation of God and, therefore, of infinite value. If Christians could live that kind of reality, it would “prove” the Bible true!
24. So, whatever we might believe about the Bible, its real existence, its propagation, and its meaning are based on how it affects the lives of its readers. Whether they are Christian or Jewish and despite some awful events such as the Holocaust and many holy wars supposedly over Christian issues, the Bible lives on. That is what gives the Bible its perpetuity. Shouldn’t we live lives that give testimony to its truthfulness?

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