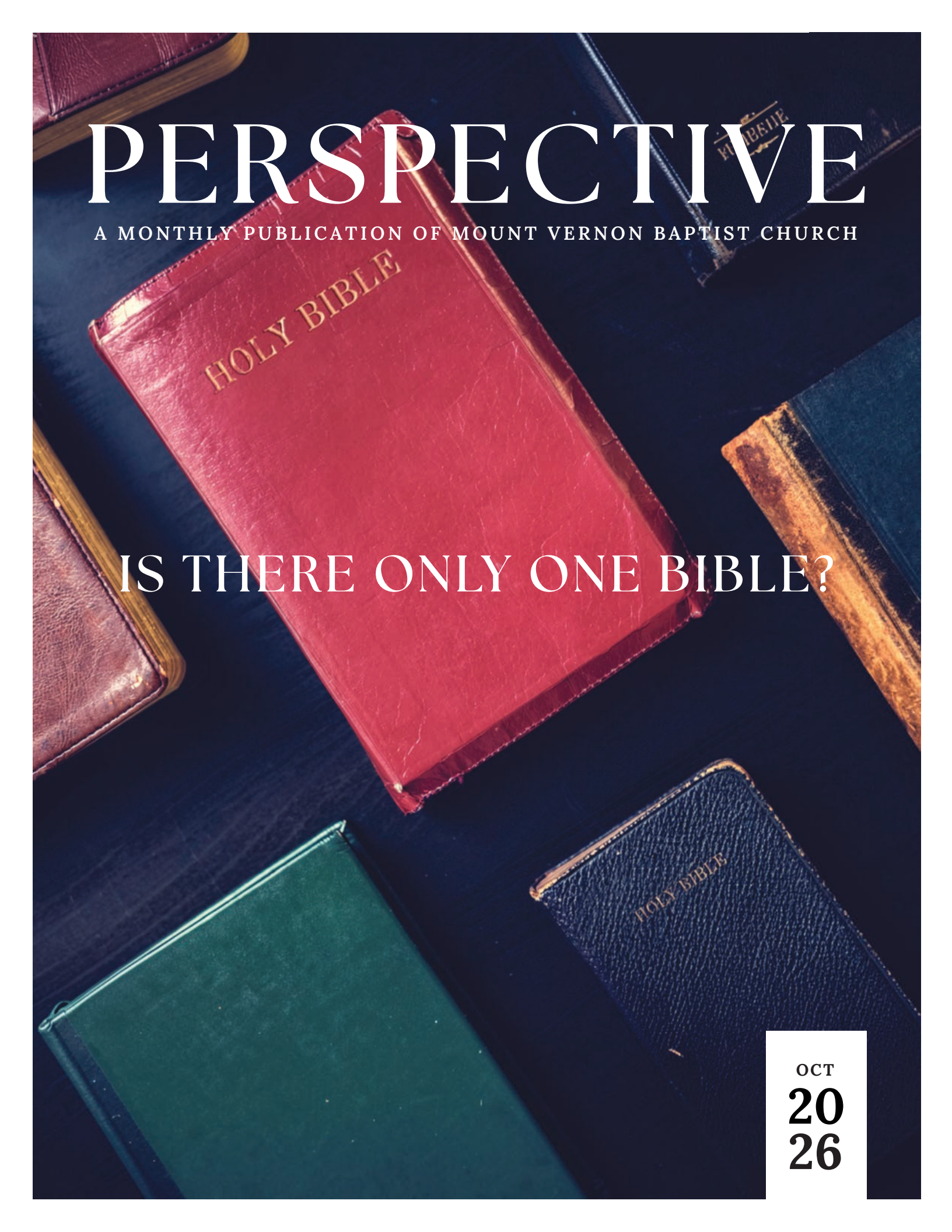




PERSPECTIVE

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH

IS THERE ONLY ONE BIBLE?

OCT
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IS THERE ONLY ONE BIBLE?



Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. This is a truth that should never be far from the Christian's heart. So many believers were taught this song from the moment they could sing, and it remains a sweet and tender truth throughout the entirety of the Christian life. The Bible is where we learn of the steadfast love of the one true God towards his people. In his Word, God reveals who he is, how he is righteous and holy, who man is as a creature in rebellion, and how merciful and gracious he is in sending his Son to redeem his people for eternal life in his presence. Glorious truths, gloriously given.

But how do we know that the Bible is the place to go for such divine truths? What about all the other books that claim to be from God? The Qur'an of the Muslim faith makes a divine claim, as does the Book of Mormon. Not to mention the myriad of books on Amazon that claim to be from an experience in the afterlife that carries heavenly authority of having truly experienced the divine. How should the Christian relate to these things, and why?

Because the Bible is God's self-attesting revelation, there is no higher authority than the Bible itself by which we may determine the

authenticity of the Scriptures. Christians should be encouraged and bolstered in their faith by the archeological evidence for the historicity of the Scriptures and the manuscript evidence of a faithful preservation of the Bible. However, it is not because of these things that we believe the Bible is the true Word of God. To make such an argument would be to set our personal criteria as the evaluator and judge over the Bible.

Ultimately, we must make our appeal about the exclusivity of the revealed Word of God to the proper ultimate authority, the Bible itself. In some ways, this article is meant to bolster the confidence of the believer, as opposed to making an apologetic argument about a specific other book that claims to be from God. It is on the authority of the Bible itself that we recognize that Christians are to look for no further Word of God than what has been authoritatively given in the Scriptures. As we do this, we will see that the Bible is the only Word of God, his self-revelation, because he himself has told us that his revelation is final in the Bible, that his plan of redemption has been clearly and finally set forth in the Scriptures, and that those who would come later claiming to add or change the message laid out in the Bible are perverting,

distorting, and manipulating his self-revelation in a manner worthy of death.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORLDVIEW

As I begin to make the case that the Bible sets forth the teaching that it is the only Bible, a word of introduction is necessary. This argument from ultimate authority is not an argument of special pleading. To appeal to the Bible as the final authority is not to make a circular argument that holds no logical force. This is because every person, at bottom, must make an argument from final authority. The Muslim who claims the Qur'an is the ultimate authority does so by appealing to the Qur'an. The Mormon who makes a case for the Book of Mormon does so by appealing to the Book of Mormon. The Hindu makes a case for the Hindu worldview by appealing to the plethora of traditional teachings of various gods of the Hindu system. The modern atheistic materialist makes a case against God by appealing to the sufficiency of reason, which he believes is reasonable. The point, I trust, is made. There is no person who does not appeal to a final authority on the basis of that authority itself.

Every worldview has a final authority, and that authority must be taken by faith in the authority itself. Evaluating these different authorities cannot be done by appealing to a different final authority. Of course, the Muslim will object to the Christian on the basis of the Qur'an, and of course the Christian will object to the Muslim on the basis of the Bible. When the question is one of the final authority for our worldview, we cannot attempt to set aside our worldview to make that case. So, the Bible cannot be proved by putting off a commitment to the Scriptures. This is to seek a "view from nowhere," and ultimately it is an exercise in substituting a different final authority to sit in judgment over the Bible.

Sometimes, we think of the world like we think of children playing with a box of Legos. The kids playing can all see that there are some green ones and blue ones and red ones. The difference is not between the individual Legos, but between how they put all those Legos

together and what kind of shapes are created. We can fall into the error that the world is comprised of a neutral body of facts. We think that everyone knows $2+2=4$ and that the facts of the world are accessible and understandable by people universally. This body of neutral facts is the Legos, and we organize them into different shapes, or worldviews. The difference between people is not the facts, but how we order those facts into an image that depicts our worldview. Where we have a worldview issue, we must start back with the facts and argue for the building of our worldview instead of the building of our neighbors'.

This, however, is not the way the world works. Saying something is a "fact" at all requires a framework for understanding what is true and what is false, also known as a worldview. Take, for example, $2+2=4$. To say this is a fact requires a worldview that understands a distinction between true and false. It must also be a worldview that holds that truth is knowable by humans and able to be articulated in human language. Additionally, it must be a worldview that maintains that the structure of the universe is fixed and baked into the order mankind experiences. After all, how do we know that $2+2=4$ will still be true tomorrow? At all points, when we argue for that which is good and true, we argue from within our worldview. Mankind has no ability to merely set aside our fundamental commitments.

Because this is the case, the Christian is absolutely free to defend his position by arguing from his worldview. The Muslim also has the same freedom. The question is which worldview makes sense of the world and our place in it? Which worldview can account for what it argues? Which worldview falls apart from within its own framework? As Christians, we believe that the only way to make sense of the world and our place in it is to start with the Triune God of the Bible as he has revealed himself and his actions therein. Every other worldview is internally inconsistent and cannot account for what it posits as true. Put simply, we believe every other worldview must borrow from the Christian worldview at some point to

make sense of the world. God is authoritative over all things and sovereign over all things, and we must begin from this point.

With this introduction, then, it is understandable why faithful Christians would make the case for the singularity of God's self-revelational Word in the Bible by appealing to the Bible itself. Christians are not making a circular argument but are rather recognizing that their final authority for determining what God has said and what he has told us about himself is his Word. The Bible itself, the self-attesting Word of God, clearly teaches that God intended to reveal himself finally in the Bible, and that those who would add to or change the message of the Bible have corrupted God's self-revelation. The Christian should take great confidence in the Scriptures, and as the Scriptures teach, should reject any later work that claims the authority that God alone maintains.

THE BIBLE AS GOD'S FINAL SPOKEN WORD TO HIS PEOPLE

God's culmination of self-revelation was given in the person of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1–4 lays out the case for the supremacy of the Son as the revelation of God—a revelation that cannot be improved upon or bettered by a later revelation. While God spoke to his people in various means and at various times (Heb. 1:1), the revelation Christians enjoy is the revelation of the person of Christ who is the heir of all things and the one by whom the world was created (Heb. 1:2). The writer of Hebrews clearly sees the previous revelation God gave his people as pointing forward to the Son who was to come (Heb. 2:1). The revelation of Jesus Christ is a better revelation because he is the exact imprint of the nature of God and he holds all authority and power over the universe (Heb. 1:3). By his work on earth, he showed himself superior to all others and worthy of all worship (Heb. 1:4, 6). The revelation of God in Christ is a climactic and definitive revelation. It cannot be bettered because it came from the authoritative Lord of the universe. In him, there is a salvation that was declared by Christ himself and then by those who heard (Heb. 2:3). Lastly, God himself supplied an overabundant witness to this

revelation through the Holy Spirit, whose power attended Jesus and the Apostles' ministry (Heb. 2:3). For all of these reasons, we should not look for another to come. God's plan of redemption is made clear in his self-revelation of Christ. His message is the final fulfillment of God's promises of one who would come and make propitiation for sins (Heb. 2:17). The supremacy and climax of God's revelation is found in Jesus Christ. There is no need for further revelation than the Bible itself because the Bible is the revelation of the Son of God.

Because the revelation of Christ is the climax of God's revelation of himself, Jude can write to believers that they ought "to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Notice the "once for all" language. The revelation of God found in the Scriptures is God's definitive revelation. No change may come to this revelation. Contention for the faith was necessary because others had crept in and perverted the gospel, teaching a different message than the one revealed by Christ himself.

Similarly, Paul instructed the church at Galatia that if someone was to preach a "gospel" contrary to the teaching and message of the gospel of Christ, he should be accursed (Gal. 1:8). The message of the gospel of Christ is so supreme that to preach another gospel is a damnable offense. To trifle with, add to, detract from, manipulate, twist, distort, or change the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is an act of rebellion against God, a denial of Christ, and a severe position to take. Paul speaks severely against those who would preach another gospel because he believes God's Word to his people is exceedingly clear. Believers have what they need to discern the true gospel and disapprove of those who would claim to speak for God in another way. All those later texts that seek to speak on behalf of God and change or manipulate the message of the Scriptures are violating the very thing that Scripture demands must not be trifled with.

Jesus himself authorized the apostles to have a unique ministry. They continued to deliver his word to the church as the body of believers was

established and built up in the immediate time after Christ ascended into heaven. These were men with a direct commission (John 15:16) who witnessed the resurrection (Acts 1:22, 1 Cor. 9:1), and who were the foundation—that could only be laid once—of the church on the authority of Christ (Eph. 2:20).

The point here is that these men were commissioned in a way that continued to reveal God's Word to God's people in a distinct way from the rest of church history. They communicated what they had received from Christ and continually pointed back to Christ himself as the climax of God's self-revelation (1 Cor. 15:3). Importantly, at no point did they point forward to another to come who was greater than Christ who had come. And at no point did they leave believers expecting a further revelation that would add to the message they had received. Instead, as we have already seen, they definitively warned Christians not to listen to others who would come and claim to speak for God with a message different than the one that was given.

The Scriptures also teach that the Lord did not leave his people alone in their ability to discern true revelation from God from that which is false. By the Holy Spirit, given by the Father in the name of Christ, the believer is empowered to discern the truth of the Word of God (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit gives the believer true ears to hear the words of the Good Shepherd.

THE CHRISTIAN REJECTION OF LATER TEXTS CLAIMING CONTINUITY WITH THE BIBLE

With all this evidence, then, the Scriptures clearly teach that they are the only authoritative Word of God where he reveals himself to his people. Christians should reject any writing or author that comes along after the time of the close of the New Testament with a claim to divine authorship or any message that would change, alter, or add to the message found in the Scriptures. The Bible itself teaches that Christians can see the self-contradictory nature of those who would come along and desire to show themselves in continuity with biblical revelation while also adding or changing

it. For example, the Mormon tradition tries to hold the Book of Mormon as a later revelation to the prophet Joseph Smith in continuity with the Bible. The Mormon church claims the Book of Mormon is “a volume of Holy Scripture comparable to the Bible.”¹ However, this raises lots of problems. How can a book that claims to be divine revelation in continuity with the Bible not also be contradictory to the Bible itself? The Mormon tradition would like to uphold the Bible as Scripture, but also the Book of Mormon. But in doing so, they are self-contradictory. On the one hand, official LDS teaching says that Mormons “have a great reverence and love for the Bible.”² Yet, in the very next paragraph it states, “as the Bible was compiled, organized, translated, and transcribed, many errors entered the text.”³ So much so, that the teachings of the Bible have been corrupted and are not discernable. So, which is it? Why would you have a great reverence for a book that has a message that is not discernable and corrupt? Or, if it is worthy of reverence and love, why would one not listen to what it says about the dangers of “correcting” its message, as the LDS church has admitted to doing?⁴ The point is, you cannot have it both ways; to attempt to do so is self-contradictory.

In many ways, the Islamic tradition has fallen into the same grave error. The Qur'an itself makes appeals to biblical revelation as coming from God (Qur'an 2:136). Yet, though Mohammad sought to portray himself in continuity with biblical revelation, he does not teach fundamental doctrines articulated in Scripture.⁵ To deal with this tension, Muslim leaders have long taught that the difference between the teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible is due to the corruption of the text of the Bible. Again, this poses a problem for the Muslim faith. If the Bible was corrupted by the time of Mohammad in the 600s, why does Mohammad continue to appeal to the Torah and the Gospels as sources of God's revelation? And if it had not been corrupted, why does it contradict those teachings? It is a self-refuting position to maintain.

Undoubtedly more could be said about the plethora of ways the Lord's word in his Scripture has been manipulated, twisted, and changed by those that would seek to preach another gospel, not that there is another gospel, in our own day. However, it is helpful to understand that this challenge is not new to church history. The Gospel of Thomas is an example of the church having to defend against a later text that claims divine authority at odds with what is found in the Scripture.⁶ Importantly, this book claims to be the words of Jesus, yet teaches doctrine that is at odds with the message of Jesus found in the Gospels. The theme of the Gospel of Thomas is summed up by Michael Kruger, who wrote that it is "more concerned with teaching us to find the divine spark within ourselves."⁷ Not to mention, by all accounts, the author of the text had to resort to borrowing a name to give his work more notoriety, a practice that Paul would call an "empty deceit" (Col. 2:8). For this reason, the people of God never considered this work as divine revelation. It has obvious differences from the message set down by the Scriptures and was therefore opposed with the vigor due to the one who blasphemes against the Lord God.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Bible is an unbelievably sweet gift from our God. In it he tells us about himself and his plan to redeem his people. We have the message of salvation promised in the Old Testament, consummated in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and explained and set down by the apostolic witness. As the old hymn goes, "What more can he say than to you he hath said, to you whom for refuge to Jesus have fled?" The Bible is sufficient to communicate all that God would have us know about who he is and what he has done. Because of that, we need not look for any further revelation nor trust any book which claims to speak the very words of God. Yet, in the fallen world we inhabit, these claims are regular and frequent. Whether it be from alternate religions like the Mormons or Muslims, books that claim a vision from the afterlife in which Jesus spoke, or anything of the like, our practice should be the practice of the

Christians who have gone before us. We must hold fast to the sixty-six books of the Bible as the only revealed Word from God himself and treasure those words all the days of our life.

— John Weichel

Resources

¹The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, "Bible, Inerrancy of," *Church of Jesus Christ.Org*. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/bible-inerrancy-of?lang=eng>

²The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, "Bible, Inerrancy of."

³The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, "Bible, Inerrancy of."

⁴The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, "Bible, Inerrancy of."

⁵Samuel Green, "Understanding and Answering Islamic Criticisms of the Bible," *The Gospel Coalition*, February 2, 2024. <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/understanding-and-answering-islamic-criticisms-of-the-bible/>

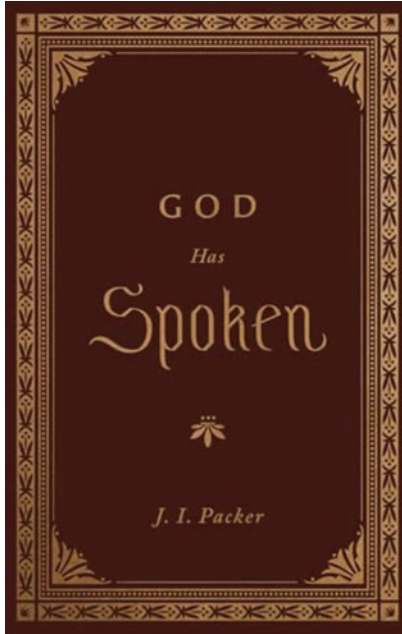
⁶C.E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12.

⁷Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 278.

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

GOD HAS SPOKEN

Written by J.I. Packer | Recommended by Jenny Ireland



In this third edition of *God Has Spoken*, J. I. Packer defends the reliability, inerrancy, and infallibility of Scripture against biblical criticism. His goal is to help believers read and study the Bible properly so that they can “celebrate God’s gift of revealed truth.” Packer presents evidence from the teachings of the early church and the historic Reformed tradition, while also including modern documents and references for further study. A significant portion of the book examines passages from both the Old and New Testaments, exploring what it means for God to reveal Himself, as well as the purpose and means of His revelation.

While reading *God Has Spoken*, I had a brief conversation with a young Mormon missionary who asked me what I thought about the Book of Mormon. I was able to recall several things I had recently read about revelation and Scripture, and this encounter became a real-time example of how a wrong understanding of revelation can lead to false religions and empty philosophies. It challenged me to think more deeply about the doctrine of Scripture. At a heart level, *God Has Spoken* encouraged me to rejoice in the fact that God has chosen to make Himself known to sinful humanity. Not only has He revealed Himself, but He has also made known the way of salvation so that we can be brought into relationship with Him.

I cannot afford to take my reading and study of Scripture for granted, because it is the very Word of God—not merely something to hear and read, but something I am called to obey.

Although the average believer may feel removed from the debates surrounding biblical criticism, *God Has Spoken* demonstrates that Christians need to be convinced of the reliability and trustworthiness of Scripture, not only to defend the faith but also because Scripture is the means by which they come to know and enjoy God. Packer engages scholarly debates throughout the book, yet he writes pastorally, helping believers think rightly about the Bible and, thus, to think rightly about God. This book would be especially helpful for those wrestling with the doctrine of Scripture, those who regularly have conversations with skeptics, and even church members who desire a renewed sense of awe over the truth that God has spoken!

BOOK EXCERPTS

We only truly honour the God who has spoken in his Son to us blind sinners by listening humbly, teachably, and without interrupting, to what he has to say, and by believing, on his authority, all that he is pleased to tell us- about revelation, no less than any other subject.

– “Chapter 3,” p. 78

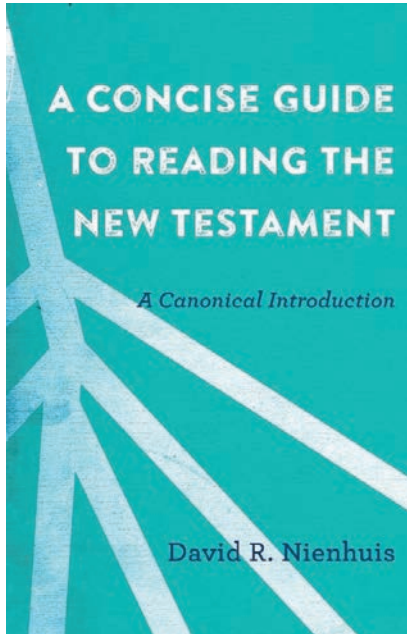
Here, again, the decisive qualification is not academic scholarship, but rather a praying, humble, teachable heart. The rule that applies is that to him that hath shall be given: it is only as we obey God up to the limit of our present insight into his will that our insight will be deepened and our vision enlarged. Live by the light you have as to the bearing of Scripture on your life, and you shall have more light; neglect the light you have, and you will actually darken it, so that in the outcome you will have less. This solemn alternative faces every Christian every day of his or her life

– “Chapter 5,” p. 125

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

A CONCISE GUIDE TO READ THE NEW TESTAMENT

Written by David R. Nienhuis | Recommended by Matt Tillman



A Concise Guide to Reading the New Testament: A Canonical Introduction is a very accessible and informative primer to the New Testament. David R. Nienhuis charts a middle path between academic over-analysis and the fragmented way most churches teach the Bible. He tries to teach the reader about the *way of the Word*, or to be exact, the way of Jesus. To this end, he provides a concise reading guide to the New Testament, taking a bird's-eye view so the reader can see the flow of narrative through the entire text.

Key to Nienhuis's guide is the belief that the New Testament canon structure is not arbitrary, but purposeful, supporting the overall narrative. He spends a chapter on each gospel and Acts, explaining their unique features and how they build on each other to introduce the reader to Jesus and his kingdom. By the end of Acts, the reader is ready to dive into the letters of Paul, who so clearly argues salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. But lest the reader overinterpret Paul and assume we are free to sin, the letters from James, Peter, and John hold us back from this error. This holistic understanding of the New Testament promotes an accurate interpretation of individual texts.

It can be difficult to identify an overarching theme for books of the Bible by reading a few chapters a day in your quiet time. I've noticed the gospels read differently, but I have never been able to pin down their distinct messages. Nienhuis clearly explains each author's intent and shows how their ordering is intentional. For instance, Matthew is appropriately the first gospel since it's the most Jewish and provides a smooth transition from the Old Testament. While Matthew is focused on the joyful call to discipleship, Mark emphasizes its painful cost. The entire book is filled with insights like these which help the reader understand the larger story of the New Testament.

I would recommend this book to anyone seriously studying the New Testament. It would be helpful to read a chapter from the book and then read the corresponding section of Scripture. You could easily incorporate it into your Bible reading plan as an intro for each book. It's a great tool that can open your mind to the larger story the New Testament is trying to communicate.

BOOK EXCERPTS

The Bible, which has been provided for us to be the written Word of God, is intentionally designed to guide readers through a process of learning the way of Jesus, who is the embodied Word of God.

– "Introduction," p. 5

We might say that the Pauline message teaches us about what it is for us to have faith in the risen Lord, and the Catholic epistles teach us what the Lord taught us about living faithfully.

– "The Catholic Epistles," p. 138

BIBLE READING PLAN

OCTOBER

TAKE UP & READ

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message.
Take Up & Read!

October 1	John 14	October 17	John 7
October 2	Isaiah 65:17-25	October 18	Revelation 22:1-5
October 3	Genesis 3	October 19	John 11:1-44
October 4	Revelation 21:1-8	October 20	Luke 7:11-17
October 5	Revelation 21:9-27	October 21	John 5:19-29
October 6	Ezekiel 48:30-35	October 22	Romans 6:1-11
October 7	Isaiah 60:1-22	October 23	Psalms 33:1-9
October 8	Hebrews 12:22-24	October 24	1 Corinthians 15:35-58
October 9	Ezekiel 43:1-12	October 25	John 11:1-44
October 10	John 17	October 26	Revelation 22:6-21
October 11	Revelation 21:9-27	October 27	Matthew 24
October 12	Revelation 22:1-5	October 28	2 Peter 3
October 13	Genesis 1	October 29	Isaiah 55
October 14	Genesis 2	October 30	Deuteronomy 4:1-8
October 15	1 Corinthians 15:20-28	October 31	Titus 2:11-14
October 16	Ezekiel 47:1-12		

*Sermons in Bold

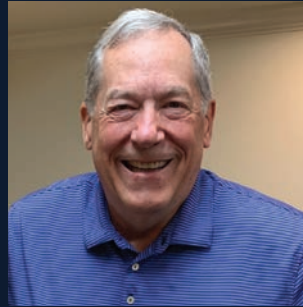
NEW MEMBERS



JANE
BREWER



DAKOTA
MCINTIRE



ROSS
MURPHY



DIANE
MURPHY



MIKE
SCHILLACI



JORDAN
SHABABY



LAUREN
SHABABY



ZACH
SMITH



EDEN
SMITH



PAUL
TEMPLE



GABRIELLA
TEMPLE



NELSON
WANG

"We must grasp once again, the idea of church membership as being the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honour which can come a man's way in this world."

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES



MOUNT VERNON

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