

Defending the Bible, Pt. 1—It is God-Breathed  
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Last week we started our summer sermon series that Ashley and I will be walkin' us through, and we're callin' it the "Defender Series." And the idea is that we were gonna take some of the various issues or challenges to the Christian faith that you deal with in your everyday life, in the give and take of conversation or dealing with people, or in reading books; those things that would challenge your faith and maybe cause you to doubt you or those around you; the kinds of things that, when you look at 'em and they're said to you or they're challenged at you, that will put you in kind of two minds, where your faith and your doubt are kind of pressed, and your quandary is "Is what I believe really true?" And we decided what we'd do is walk through a series of those questions. We're not doing it like an apologetics class or a seminar or a textbook would present it. We just simply took a survey, and we identified some of the questions and challenges you run into. We ranked 'em by the number of responses people had; and we're just tryin' to work through those different ones each week.

And the particular one we're gonna deal with this week relates to the Bible, this book which is actually a collection of sixty-six books that are written over a span of sixteen hundred years by about forty different authors, divided into two—Old Testament and New Testament, combined as one called the Bible, the Scriptures. It's the foundation for our belief. If you look at our core commitments it'll say, over there on that wall, that 1) We believe in the centrality of Christ; 2) We believe in the authority of Scripture. This is where we go for our answers. So this is a really important book for us. And our understanding of it, and our belief in it, is foundational to who we are.

And one of the challenges that we face, one of the more common challenges you run into, according to our survey, one of those things that people often raise with you, or you even wonder about yourself, is the question that challenges "Is the Bible man-made and contradictory?" The challenge comes at us that this book was really just simply put together by men and it's full of contradictions; it doesn't have any really unique authority; it's just men's opinions collected over centuries, put together, and oftentimes in conflict with one another.

That's the challenge that's often raised with respect to the Bible, and I can see why it is. For example, it *is* man-made. There were human writers that were involved in this, and they had their own unique styles, their own unique vocabularies. You had the prince, like Isaiah; you had a king like David; you had a farmer like Amos; you had a fisherman like Peter; you had a Jewish rabbi like the Apostle Paul. And they all wrote in their distinctive styles and their distinctive ways. They all have the imprint of humanity on them as they're written.

Secondly, the miracles that are recorded in the Scriptures are incredible, the type that make you sit back and say, "Whoa! Did that really happen? Did the Red Sea really part? Did that iron axe head really float to the top of the water when the prophet was told it would? Did Jesus really feed five thousand with a few loaves of bread and a few pieces of fish?" I mean, the miracles make you stop and say, "Whoa!"

And then the teachings at times are confusing, and they make us scratch our head in wonder. I mean take, for example, the teaching of the triune God, that God is one, yet three persons. That stretches us. It doesn't seem to fit our categories and our ways of thinking. And so we wonder, "Boy, what is this?" And then there are the commands. Some of 'em are kinda strange—don't wear garments that are mixed cotton and wool. Others conflict with our culture dramatically, and we wonder, "Are these just ideas people had goin' throughout history? And their culture and their situation, it seemed to make sense?" And so, yeah, there's reasons people look at it and say, "This is just man-made. It's just opinions."

And then there's the contradictions, or apparent contradictions. For example, you have one passage that says that, in injury, there should be "*fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, just as he has injured a man so it shall be inflicted on him.*" Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, fracture for a fracture...and then you have in the Bible also, "*Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other cheek also.*" And then you have, in the area of theology, you have the Apostle Paul saying, "*A man is justified, set right with God, by faith apart from works of the Law.*" At the same time, writing in another area, another church leader by the name of James writes this: "*A man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.*" You say, "Whoa, what's going on here?" And sometimes it relates to historical instances. You'll read, for example, in the gospel of Matthew, that Jesus came to an area, a specific area; and as He came to that area two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. Two men, demon-possessed, coming to Jesus, in Matthew. Same incident described in the gospel of Luke, by Luke,

says He was met by a man from the city, who was possessed by demons, coming out of the tombs. Two men or one? So I can see why people wrestle with “Is this man-made, and does it really have contradictions?”

We’re gonna address that question this week and next. And our response, our basic response, is gonna be this; basic response, it is just a direct response to that statement—“The Bible is man-made and contradictory.” Our response back, my response back over the next two weeks is gonna be the Bible is God-breathed. It’s more than man-made. It is God-breathed, and it is consistent. It is consistent. That’s where we’re gonna go the next couple of weeks. Number one today—it is God-breathed. Next week we’ll be looking at the fact that it’s consistent. We’ll be looking at those contradictions, apparent contradictions, and say “How do we respond to those?” But today we’re gonna deal with that first question—“How can we say it is God-breathed?”

The idea when we say that means that it is inspired by God, that He is the One behind the words. There may be human style; there may be human vocabulary; but He is the One who is producing the message through these men, that He is the One making sure that what He wants revealed is known. And that’s a key distinction between God-breathed, God-inspired, and man-made. What we’re talkin’ about when we present the scriptures to individuals, and when we hold it up as the truth we follow, we argue that this God-breathed document is truth received by revelation. In other words, God makes truth known to us through the Scriptures. That is in contrast to, very different from, opinion formed by reason. The Bible, we say, is not people just sitting down, thinking about God, and coming up with their ideas about Him—some of them very noble, some of ‘em very dramatic, some of ‘em very impressive, some of ‘em kinda ‘fruity’, ok. It isn’t man-made ideas when we come to scripture. What we’re dealin’ with in Scripture is God telling us what He is like, who He is, and how to relate to Him. It is not discovery by men; it is revelation by God. Now, in saying that you may say, “Ok, Larry, how do you prove that? It’s one thing to say it; it’s another thing to demonstrate it.” How do you back up the idea that this book is God-breathed, it is God’s revelation to us, it isn’t just man’s opinions?

What we’re gonna do over the next twenty minutes or so is I’m gonna walk you through...and we’re gonna have to do it fairly quick, but I’m gonna get you kind of in the arena, the area, so you understand the issues involved and you have a sense of direction and how we answer to that question. And what I’m going to give you is a list of ten reasons; a list of ten reasons why I would say the Bible is inspired. The first nine that we’re gonna go through fairly quickly are what I call “pointers.” They do not prove that the Bible is inspired. They do not provide absolute proof. What they do do is point us in the direction; they’re indicators that yes, this is not an ordinary book. Cumulatively they become very, very impressive in terms of the weight of evidence. But no single one of them is absolute proof that will settle the issue once and for all with everyone. These are pointers; these are indicators that would cause us to say “This is not an ordinary book produced by men. It’s from God.” The tenth one I’m gonna call the ‘decider.’ It’s the one that ultimately puts me over the edge. It’s the one that ultimately causes me to say, “This is God’s word.” That’s where we’re headed. You with me? Alright, let’s start goin’ through. And I know this feels a little bit like a classroom, but that’s just the way it’s gonna be, the nature of this type of study that we’re going through.

We’re gonna take the first one. You’re gonna look at it and you say, ‘Boy, that isn’t very powerful—the Bible claims to be God-breathed. That’s why we believe it’s God-breathed? It just says it?’ Ok, this isn’t a powerful proof, but it is a necessary starting point; ‘cause when we put this up there what we’re sayin’ is you know what? This isn’t an idea we just came up with—‘Well, we read the book and said “Oh, this is kinda special. It must be from God.”’ The Bible itself claims to be God-breathed, so that is a necessary starting point. It says it, for example...and the actual wording is found in 2 Timothy 3, where the Apostle Paul is talking to a younger pastor and he says

*All Scripture is inspired by God...*

...and literally, the term is ‘God-breathed’...

*...and profitable for teaching, for reproof and correction, for training in righteousness.*

If you wanna understand right and wrong, get correct teaching, and know how to live, then the Bible is the source because it is God-breathed. Another writer, the Apostle Peter, talking about the Scriptures and the biblical record, he makes this statement; it gives us a sense of it a little bit. He says

*No prophesy, no word from God, was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. [2 Peter 1:21]*

And you can almost picture wind filling a sail and moving it forward; and that's what would happen with these individuals when they wrote the Scriptures as the Spirit of God would come upon 'em and they would begin to write, and they would write using their own vocabulary, their own styles, but God would move 'em to write what He wanted known, and understood, and revealed.

So we start there. The Bible claims to be inspired. Now that makes this an either/or issue. It doesn't leave us any neutral ground. If it claims it, it's either correct or not. If you find that it's not inspired, then it's not a book that you value, because it claims falsehood. You either reject it as man-made lies, or you accept it as inspired word of God. It doesn't leave you middle ground when it claims to be inspired.

Secondly, and we'll follow up on this one right away, is the character of its human writers, the individuals who actually wrote it. As I said earlier, there's quite a few of them. We're not sure exactly how many writers in total there were. But when you look at them, their characters are consistent with their message. We don't have individuals that were delusional; we don't have individuals that's lives were fraudulent. We have individuals whose lives were consistent with their message, and they made sense. And they were individuals who were fully functional in society. David was king over Israel; Moses led his people out of Egypt to freedom. We've got the great prince, Isaiah. Paul—articulate, articulate writer and theologian; we've got John, who was...who spent an entire career defending his faith, and we've got the Apostle Peter, who went from denying Jesus to finally dying for Jesus. These are all men whose lives were consistent with their message, and so their character seems to reinforce the idea that this is not just a randomly-produced book by individuals who were delusional.

Third is its continued existence. The fact that this book still exists amazes me. It's two thousand years old, and it's been intact all the way through those two thousand years. One of the first major efforts to get rid of the Bible was the Diocletian persecution around 300 AD, one of the first official Roman persecutions across the Roman Empire. And one of the number one targets on that persecution is they wanted the Christian Scriptures. And they would go to every church and they would demand "Hand over the Book or die." It was a systematic attempt in ancient Rome to completely wipe out the existence of the Scriptures. It survived.

In modern day what we see most often is what I would call academic attacks. Over the past hundred years there's been three major waves of academic attack upon the reliability of the New Testament. The second one was in full force when I first came into the pastorate, and it began to die away. The third wave started about ten or fifteen years ago, but it's already showing signs of weakening. But periodically and consistently on the academic level, the Scriptures get attacked. Now, you could look at this and say, 'but there's other books that have survived.' Yes, there are. There are other books that are attacked. Yes there are, but I've never seen ones attacked the way the Bible's been attacked academically. How many best sellers have you seen on the New York best sellers list attacking the Koran? And yet, repeatedly on the best sellers list you will find books attacking the Bible. And yet it continues to survive. Now, that isn't conclusive proof that it does point to a direction, but you know what? This is a book that won't go away. There's somethin' special about it.

Next is what I would call its internal consistency; and here we'll pick this up more next week. But I'll just put it in front of you quickly today. Sixty-six books, forty authors, sixteen hundred years, written in multiple languages—Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, multiple styles—we have everything from letters to apocalyptic visions to poetry to proverbs to historical narrative, and varied situations—everything from the captivity in Babylon to the early church in Acts...all sorts of situations, styles, languages, writers and everything else; and yet across that broad spectrum, with all these writers, all these languages, there is a consistent message and story line of God's grace; so much so that when you're done you say, "This isn't ordinary." You don't get this many people writing across that broad a spectrum of time, with this many different styles and cultural settings and everything else, producing a book that is this unified. Again, it's not absolute proof, but it is a pointer that indicates there's somethin' special about this book.

Its historical accuracy...one of the joys I had this past year, and I didn't preach...it didn't come up in sermons, but it was a joy for me as we went through the book of Acts to, as I did my study week-by-week and I would read the background commentaries, I would study the histories related to that book, and it was so encouraging to me to see how often the book of Acts was exact to what historical records we have from that time frame. And in fact, in some times the historians take their lead from the book of Acts. The Bible's amazing in terms of a historical—and I'll use the term here—artifact that is true to its time and place. Now, one of the challenges you have with that is we don't have a whole lot of ancient historical research or materials in original documents to try to do a lot of comparisons with. But where we can make comparisons, it's very accurate. But again, this isn't positive proof. There's areas where we're still scratchin' our head about and sayin', 'Name that place', but archaeologists haven't found it yet. But there's a historical accuracy that's very impressive. You at least know it's not delusional. It's rooted in time and place.

Then there's what I call its "everyday" accuracy. When I think of this, basically it's practical in the direction it gives. Example—it'll make a statement like, you know, 'a fool is wise in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to the counsel of others.' You know, that's good. It'll tell you that an ox makes a really messy barn, but it produces a lot of revenue with its work. Yeah, that's practical direction. It's also sensible in its explanation of things. It'll speak to situations and when you read it, it makes sense. One of my favorites here is when Jesus is dealin' with a lot of religious authorities and they're sayin' 'You can't eat that, and you can't touch that, because boy, if you eat that it'll go in and it'll defile you.' And Jesus comes back and he says, 'You know what? It isn't what comes in that defiles you. It's what's here in your heart that comes out that defiles you. It's your words and your actions that defile you, and they're rooted in here.' That's a sensible explanation of the human condition. In fact, it was that explanation of the human condition that brought me back to Jesus in my college years; and realizing that yes, the Bible does speak to our human condition.

Gotta keep movin'. You're sayin', 'Boy, it's seven, number seven on the list'. Its prophetic accuracy—this is one that...for me, I'll give you my favorite, my favorite of all the prophetic statements or examples in Scripture. It's Isaiah speaking of a coming king named Cyrus. He does this in Isaiah 48 [should be 44], and then again in Isaiah 45. It's a lengthy prophecy where he describes this coming king who is gonna be from another land, who is going to rescue and deliver Israel. The thing is, is he writes this prophecy two hundred years before Cyrus existed. Think about that—an Old Testament Hebrew prophet in Jerusalem names by name a Persian to arise two hundred years later and liberate the Israelite people when they're not even in captivity yet. Isaiah prophecies of the captivity, he prophecies of the deliverer, and he does so by name two hundred years before the man even existed. I read that and I say this isn't an ordinary book.

But that's not what I would call conclusive proof. It's a strong pointer for me, but others would say and look at the book of Isaiah and they would say, 'No way, that would never happen, it is impossible that someone could name someone two hundred years before they existed, and that person would emerge and do exactly what he said he would do. Impossible! Prophecy could never happen.' And so what many scholars have done with the book of Isaiah is they said, 'You know what? It was written by three different men. There was the original Isaiah, there was a middle Isaiah, and there was a final Isaiah. And it was the final Isaiah who lived after Cyrus that talked about him.' I don't buy that, but it's debated.

Let's go to the eighth, its personal impact, what happens when you read this book and you take it seriously. You discover it's not an ordinary book. And here what I would highlight is a statement made in the book of Psalms, Psalm 19. The writer there, David, is saying...you know, he's talkin' about the Scriptures, and he says, 'You know, it's restoring to the soul. It makes wise the simple. It brings a joy to the heart. And it enlightens the eyes—we see things better.' And those who have spent time in the Scriptures can affirm that. We know the restorative effect, the refreshing effect, of spending time in Scripture. We know how we begin to understand things better, that there is a joy to our heart as we spend time in it. And we begin to see things clearer. And yes, I read this book; I spend time in it. That continually happens to me, and I continually say this isn't an ordinary book. No other book affects me like the way this does. But, again, it's not conclusive, 'cause other people read the book and fall asleep.

Then there's this last one, the ninth of the pointers, as it were, and it's called 'the witness within us.' And the idea here is there's something when you read the book, there's just the ring of truth. You sense that 'this is it.' It's a very subjective pointer, and Jesus indicated that we could expect it. He said that if anyone is willing to do His will, God's will, he will know of this teaching, the teaching that Jesus was giving, whether it is of God or not. And what He's sayin' is, you know, if you really want to do God's will, when you read this it'll have a ring of truth to you. If you're really sincere about it, you will sense that it is not an ordinary book. And I would affirm that, but it's not conclusive proof because it's somewhat subjective, and there's other cults out there who present their books and they say, 'Listen, if you read this long enough and hard enough, your heart will warm to it and you'll know it's true.' So that isn't conclusive truth. I think it points the right direction.

So what is the decider for us? And I'm gonna go a little over to do this. Gonna go to the number ten item. And when we come to that I'm going to say very simply it's the witness of Jesus. All those other things mean something to me. I've experienced 'em and they're important to me. But the clincher for me, the thing that causes me to say, 'This is of God; this is not an ordinary book,' is what Jesus said. He taught that His words were of God and from God. He taught that the Old Testament Scriptures—Elijah, Moses, all the others—spoke from God. And He taught that His apostles would also speak from God. He taught the reality of the God-breathed Scriptures. And because of that I believe 'em to be God-breathed.

Now, be careful, you're going to have to track with me very closely for the next four minutes. What I am *not* saying is this...I am not saying that we believe the witness of Jesus in the Bible, concerning the Bible, because we believe that the Bible is God-breathed. Don't try to unravel that sentence. What I'm simply sayin' is we don't start from the position that the Bible is God-breathed, and because Jesus—in the Bible—said it is God-breathed, we believe it is God-breathed. That's *not* the argument here. My starting point with this is simply here, that the Bible provides a reliable record of what Jesus said and did. I do not ask the individual to believe that it was inspired as a starting point. If they want to start with the assumption that it was man-made and it has contradictions, I will grant that starting point. Start there if you desire. In fact, I encourage you to start there. But understand as you do so—it is a reliable record of what Jesus said and did.

And then I move to the second point in the argument. And what Jesus said and did in that record convinces me that He is to be trusted. Which leads me to the third step, that His teachings confirm that the Bible is God-breathed. When I read that reliable record and I come to trust Him as I see Him there, and I come to where He teaches that the Bible is God-breathed, I arrive at the conclusion 'It is God-breathed.'

The crux of the argument, the critical part, is this one right here—that it is, in fact, a reliable record. That's the debate point that is most crucial. As you wrestle with that one you're gonna find yourself dealing with issues of how was it originally written, when was it originally written, how was it copied, how was it eventually collected and collated and put together, how was it transmitted and copied throughout the centuries, and how is it translated in our day. You have to wrestle with all those kinds of questions that are there, and they are real. But you need to understand that as you do that, the Bible does stand up as reliable, historical documentation. Now, I'm not saying that when you look at it you are dealing with something that we would call scientifically verifiable. We are talking about something that is historically reliable. Science can only measure what is repeatable. History works with what is not repeatable. History, by its very nature, is not repeatable. There will never, ever be another D-Day. There never will be. Science can't verify D-Day. That's a task of history. There will never, ever be another crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Science cannot verify that. It is not a repeatable event. It's a realm of historicity. You approach it as a matter of historical record, and you examine the records, and you sort out what are reliable and what are not. And you be relentless in the search and the demands of credibility in your documentation. And I believe the Scriptures will bear up. I'm convinced of it.

That's the intellectual crux of the matter. The emotional one, the heart-level one, is this—what Jesus did and said as we find it in those records indicate He's one to be trusted. That's the heart one. Everything flows from those two.

If you're in two minds about it, I'll give you two things to do...if you're two minds about this question. Number one if you're wondering about the gospels as a reliable record of what Jesus said and did...if that's your trigger point, if that's the one you struggle with and you say, 'Boy, intellectually, I'm just struggling with really being sure of that,' the question I would give you is this—if the gospels are not a reliable record of what Jesus said and did, then what are they? And I will press you relentlessly on that question, and I will press you to be relentless in your pursuit of that question. If you are not sure that they are reliable, historic documents, even if you start with the premise that they're contradictory and they're man-made, that doesn't mean that they're not reliable history. If they are not reliable history, then what are they? We Christians get pressed continually on the historicity of 'em. This is an area we can and should press back. Somebody says they're legend, I'm gonna say, "Prove it." And I'll be relentless on demanding proof that they're legend.

Let me read for you, a quote from a book by a man named Tim Keller. He writes about Anne Rice, a person who is a famous author. One of her more famous books was "Interview with the Vampire." She was raised Catholic. She lost her faith at a secular college. She married an atheist. She became wealthy writing novels about Lestat, who is both a vampire and a rock star. This lady was as anti-Christian as you can imagine. It shocked, recently, the literary and media world when Rice announced that she had returned to Christianity. Why did she do it? In the afterward to her new novel, "Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt," she explained that she had begun doing extensive research about the historical Jesus by reading the work of Jesus scholars at the most respected academic institutions. Their main thesis was that the Bible documents we have aren't historically reliable. Now here's where I wanna quote her directly. She was amazed at how weak their arguments were, and she said,

"Some books were no more than assumptions piled on assumptions. Conclusions were reached on the basis of little or no data at all. The whole case for the non-divine Jesus who stumbled in Jerusalem and somehow got crucified—that whole picture, which had floated around the literary circles I frequented as an atheist for thirty years—that case simply was not made. Not only was it not made—I discovered in this field, biblical criticism...in this field some of the worst and most biased scholarship I've ever read."

If somebody says it's legend, say "Prove it." Say "Prove it."

The other question you're gonna need to answer, though, goes beyond intellectual. If the gospels are a reliable record of what Jesus said and did, and I believe they are historically reliable, can He be trusted? Let's put it more personal. If they are an accurate record of what He said and did, will you trust Him? In this book you have a reliable record of what He said and what He did. The question you need to wrestle with—will you trust Him, yourself, or someone else.

Let's stand.

[Congregation sings the prayer song and is dismissed.]