

Bible Special 06-05-09a

This is the 9th of May, 2006. We are going to do a special tonight. Since we are between series, in a week or two perhaps, we're going to start the Gospel of John.

But we have an opportunity to take a look at a couple of things that might not come up in a normal series study, so we're going to look at that tonight. The title of our special study tonight is, What Makes the Bible Special? In preparation for our study, as is our custom, we'll take a moment before we begin to exercise our individual priesthood. No one can do this for you.

You have to do it for yourself to go before God and ensure that sin is confessed, that proper attitude is manifest, and that we are asking and seeking and knocking as we look at the truth of God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, we are grateful for the opportunity to spend time together in fellowship, receiving the blessing of the presence and the spiritual gift you've given to each one here. We thank you for the truth of your Word, the power that it imparts to our lives through the ministry of your Holy Spirit.

We pray that our study this evening will contribute to equipping us for every good work. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

It is very often the case that as we study the Word of God, we find ourselves standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before. A lot of the things that I am able to dig up by way of commentary and insight from God's Word comes from men smarter than me, older than me, some of them long dead, who spent their lives studying God's Word and have left the fruit of their labors, the results of their study, behind in various forms. And I don't want to pretend that I'm thinking everything up all by myself.

You all should know, and I'm sure you do know, that there are many great men of God who have written and have done careful study, and we avail ourselves of that. It would be silly to go back and try to reinvent the wheel. The study that we're going to undertake tonight about the uniqueness of the Bible is similarly dependent on the work of men who have gone before, who have carefully organized the principles and the issues in this study.

I want to acknowledge in particular Josh McDowell. He's written several books that are what you might call apologetic in nature, not meaning I want to apologize for Christianity, but an apologia, or an apology, originally was a defense, a justification. Of course, it has changed its meaning in our modern language, but apologetics is still a formal area of study in seminary, in theology, and it is the defense of the faith.

Now, before you glaze over, think about this. You're a Christian, or you wouldn't be here listening to me, right? Why are you a Christian? There are certain things that you believe about the world and about invisible truth that are a part of being a Christian. We know that the essence of salvation is trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, right? When we die and we see ourselves standing before God, if God were to ask us the question, well, what's keeping me

from tossing you into the lake of fire? Why should I let you have eternal life? Why should I let you come into the heavenly realms and enjoy blessing and a future amongst the saints and amongst the angels and with the Lord Jesus Christ and with me? If God asked that question, what's your answer? A lot of people would try to say, well, I've been a really good person, and when you look at humanity as a whole, I'm kind of average, I'm in the middle, I wasn't a criminal, I didn't really break the law, I was nice to people, and I loved my family and I loved my friends, and I was salt of the earth, I'd give people the shirt off my back, and I did a lot of favors for people, and I think I lived a generally good life.

And God would say, goodbye, and into the lake of fire they would go, right? Because that is not the basis of salvation. That's not the key to eternal life is being a good person. It's great to be a good person.

We as believers ought to be good persons, but that is not the ground upon which you stand to claim eternal life and to claim a future with God. Well, how do we know that's not the case? A lot of people say, well, I just think there's a God up there somewhere, I believe in God, and I think He's fair, and I think He's going to put the nice people and the good people in heaven, and He's going to take the mean people and the bad people, and He's going to put them in hell. That's just what I believe.

Well, how do you know they're not right? Where do we get our information? And how do we know it's trustworthy? Are we just somebody else with an opinion? You know, in flu season, it seems like everybody has a nose, and they're all drippy and sneezy and runny. Well, everybody has an opinion, don't they? How do you know that what you believe is the truth? People say, oh, so you're a Christian. Well, Effendi over here is a Hindu, and here's a guy that's a Buddhist, and here's a guy that's a Muslim, and here's a guy that follows the teachings of Confucius, and here's somebody who is Unitarian, and here's somebody who believes something else.

Yours is just another religion. Your Bible is just another one of many holy books. We've got the Bhagavad Gita, and we've got the writings of Mohammed in the Koran, and we've got Confucius, and we've got this, that, and the other.

What's so special about being a Christian? What's so special about the Bible? Do you have an answer for that question? We believe the Bible, and we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but if somebody questions us and says, well, how do you know that that's better than my Buddha belief or my Koran belief or my fill-in-the-blank belief? Well, that's what we want to look at tonight. It's important for you to have something besides a blank stare if somebody asks that question. And once again, Mr. McDowell, not only has he written a book called Evidence That Demands a Verdict that's all about the Lord Jesus Christ, and then there's a volume 2. He had a great big thick book.

It's like 300 and something pages full of evidence for the reality of Jesus Christ and the facts that are recounted in the New Testament and so on. And then, when he finished that up, everybody read it and thought this is great, then he published another one called Evidence That

Demands a Verdict Volume 2. And if you want to read an interesting apology, an interesting defense and substantiation for the claims specifically of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Gospel, those are some great books to have on your shelf. It's not something you can sit down and necessarily read from beginning to end, but it's a great reference.

It's sort of a question and answer format. And one of the things that Josh McDowell does in those books is talk about the fact that we are all in the business of figuring out what's true, right? We take in information through our senses and we treat this as evidence. I can look at a car driving down the road out my window.

I can look at a car driving down the road on my TV. Now, which one's real? Well, hopefully, the car driving down the road outside my window is real, and hopefully the one I'm looking at in my TV is not real. It was real at the time they filmed it, but this is an image.

It's a pretend. And sometimes it's not even a real car then. They do everything with computer-generated images now, CGI.

And a lot of the car commercials that you look at, those shiny cars that are rolling down the road, there's no car involved. It's all computer graphics set against a background that they filmed someplace. In some cases, the backgrounds are fake.

So, then this begins to call into question our senses. Have you ever had a fever and gotten a little delirious? I have. And let me tell you, if you're delirious, you cannot trust the evidence of your senses.

Have you ever had an inner ear infection and lost your balance, lost your ability to tell what's up and what's down? Your body tells you you're standing up, and suddenly the floor is flying up and hitting you in the head for no good reason. You're standing upright, and the world moves and hits you in the face. I've had that happen to me, and it's very disconcerting.

And then when you're laying there, the world is just flip-flopping around. One time you're on top of it, another thing you're underneath it, and you figure out what is the matter with the planet. It's not the planet at all.

Our perception is off. What's my point here? How do you know what's true? We say, well, a lot of people say, I believe science, because science is based on fact. We observe, and we test, and we have evidence that we subject to rigorous testing and proof.

That's how we figure out what's real. Well, it all kind of all depends on the process, doesn't it? Who's doing the testing? What are their assumptions? What are they looking for? Where does their funding come from? Are they on a government grant that isn't going to be extended unless they come up with something? Do you think that might influence the way data gets processed? The way the reality gets published? I'm not saying that every scientific study is bogus because they're just grubbing for money, but this has an influence on what people consider to be true, doesn't it? What is truth? That is the famous question that was asked at a

certain point. Do you remember who asked that question and what the occasion was? What is truth? Who asked that question? It was Pilate talking to Jesus during the trials before the crucifixion.

What is truth? What makes you think the Bible is what you should believe instead of the Koran, or the Bhagavad Gita, or any one of these other quote-unquote holy books? What makes you think the claims of Jesus Christ have any merit, any truth, any priority over the claims of other religions? Well, that's what we're looking at tonight. Mr. McDowell has also written a book called *Answers to Tough Questions*, and I'm going to be following an outline which is excellent from that book. And if you ever want more detail, why, track down Josh McDowell's book, *Answers to Tough Questions*, and you'll get it in great detail.

But I wanted to cover some of these things tonight because we're getting ready to study the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is questioned by modern critical scholars and by ne'er-do-wells and atheists and naysayers and godless, pagan, savage, indigent homosexuals and all kinds of other perverted enemies of God. And we're getting ready to study it.

It's a long book, and we're going to spend quite a bit of time, and I don't want you sitting there in the middle of chapter 1 saying, Why am I studying this? I'm not even sure it's the Bible. We need to have an answer. If somebody says, Christianity? You believe the Bible? You believe that Genesis 6 days of creation nonsense? Why? Well, you don't want to just be sitting there looking like a bug-eyed fool.

You want to have some idea, right? So, I hope to help provide that for you this evening. It is a given, and something that you know already, that we believe the Bible, and the Bible alone is the revealed Word of God. That's our first point.

We believe, and we teach, and we affirm, that the Bible, and only the Bible, is the Word of God. That's why we're not Catholics. You know what the Catholics believe? Oh yes, the Bible is the Word of God, but so is everything that the Pope says when he puts his hat on a certain way.

He puts his hat on a certain way, and he's speaking ex-cathedra from the cathedral, when he's sitting on his Pope seat there, and he says, alright, get ready, I'm about to speak something profound. It's as good as the Bible. And papal pronouncements, and papal bulls, and various things that they, little edicts that they come up with, they call them bulls, if you can believe it.

Papal bull. You're supposed to believe the papal bull. I'm just saying, that's what the Catholics do.

They believe that the Pope is the vicar of Christ. Vicar as in vicarious. What does vicarious mean? Well, you're smoking, I quit smoking, I'm just sniffing and enjoying your cigarette vicariously.

That's what ex-smokers try to do. It's substitute. I'm sort of having a pseudo-enjoyment of you actually enjoying something.

Vicarious. Substitute. The Pope is the substitute of Christ on earth.

The vicar of Christ. That's what vicar means in Latin. Substitute.

In Greek, the word is ante. So if you're the vicar of Christ in Latin, then you're the ante of Christ in Greek. Which, not a title I would want to claim to myself.

Hello there, I'm the Pope, I'm the ante-Christ. But that's how you would say it in Greek. At any rate, they claim that there are other sources of divine inspiration, that God speaks through the man in the pointy hat.

Now, Christianity, Protestant Christianity, Biblical Christianity, teaches that the Bible alone is the revealed word of God. It has come to us through the agency of man. Human authors have written it down.

But, the ultimate author is God Almighty. This is the claim that the Bible makes for itself. All scripture is God-breathed.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God. That's one of our memory verses, isn't it? Remember which one? 2 Timothy 3.16. It's kind of like John 3.16 is where you get salvation. God so loved the world.

2 Timothy 3.16 is after you're saved, what do you need to know? All scripture is given by inspiration of God. Your two 3.16 verses there give you everything you need to know to get started. John 3.16, now you're saved.

2 Timothy 3.16, now you know how to grow. All scripture, say it with me, All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. That is the essence of the Christian life, and it all hinges and is founded upon and based upon the Bible.

Well, how do we know the Bible is what it claims to be? Is there any evidence? Is it reasonable to believe? Obviously, like most things in life, you're not going to be able to prove it. Somebody tells you they love you. Can they prove it? They can give evidence, but proof is a pretty tricky word, isn't it? Someone can tell you a thing and allege that it is a fact, and they can give evidence for that fact.

Can you prove that George Washington lived? We have a lot of evidence, but unless you can transport back in time and see him walking around, maybe it was an elaborate fabrication by the founding fathers. As more and more time passes, we think that Jesus existed, and there are people who say, no, he was an elaborate fabrication. There may have been a rabbi upon which he is loosely based, but basically the Jesus of the Gospels and the Jesus of the New Testament is a fabrication by the later church.

He didn't really live. Why can they say that, and they can't say it about George Washington? It's just the passage of time. We have less concrete evidence.

We've got things that George Washington signed. We've got contemporary portraits that were painted of him by Gilbert Stewart and others. And so we say, well, look, here's evidence.

If this wasn't George Washington, who was it? There's much less tangible evidence for Jesus, and so it's easier for them to say, see, he never really existed at all. Well, the Scriptures claim to be inspired by God and to be profitable. Peter tells us that prophecy did not come by the imagination of man, by the will of man.

This is 2 Peter 1.21. Holy men of God spoke as they were carried along by God's Holy Spirit. That's how Scripture came to us. That's what Scripture says about itself.

In the Old Testament, and if you're taking notes, this is an interesting factoid. In the Old Testament, over 2,000 times, you have the phrase, and God said, and God spoke, saying. The Old Testament makes reference to God speaking directly over 2,000 times.

The Word of the Lord came. God said. Now, just because the Bible claims to be the Word of God doesn't make it so, does it? There are other books who claim to be inspired, such as the Book of Mormon, but look at the characteristics of the Bible.

How many books are there in the Bible, in our English Bible? There are 66 books in our English Bible. The division is a little bit different in the Hebrew Old Testament, but we have 66 books. Those 66 books were written over a period of about 1,500 years by about 40 different authors.

40 different people. 1,500 years. 66 books.

And yet, there is a consistency and a unity of the Bible that is unmatched in any other quote unquote holy book, even those that were ostensibly written by one guy. Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon, and he couldn't keep his stuff straight. He was trying to emulate King James English, and he made mistakes.

He contradicted himself. He made errors of fact. He made errors in dates.

He contradicted the Bible itself in several places, trying to talk about the lost tribes, and Jesus coming to America, and a lot of other nonsense. And yet, in the Bible, you have people from widely diverse backgrounds. You have military generals like Joshua writing.

You have royal princes like Moses writing. You have prime ministers like Daniel writing. You have simple tradesmen like Peter writing.

You have shepherds like Amos writing. You have tax collectors like Matthew. You have doctors like Luke.

People from all different backgrounds used by God to produce this writing. It was written in

different places. Moses put together the first five books of the Bible.

Probably Genesis was largely edited together in Egypt when Moses had access to the royal libraries there, where it's likely that Joseph, decades and decades earlier, had deposited family records and things that had been handed down from the times of the flood and of Noah and Shem through Abraham and down in the family, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. And Moses had access to that. Where do we get these detailed records of genealogical family names and dates and how long they lived and when they died? God didn't have to stick all those numbers in Moses' head.

He had reference materials that God preserved for him in the libraries of Egypt. So some of it was written there. Some of it was written out in the wilderness.

The books of the law that God delivered to Moses at Sinai. He had to come down and write that down on tanned animal hides. Some of it was written in prison.

Remember Paul the Apostle writing in prison, chained between Roman guards in some cases. Men in exile like the Apostle John writing the book of Revelation. Wide variety of circumstances.

Wide variety of authors. And yet when you look at the Bible, there is an amazing consistency. It has a single theme.

And it never contradicts itself. It never goes off in a weird direction. It doesn't go off into cosmogony or cosmology and try to say that the planet Earth rests on the back of a big turtle like some of the pagan, heathen, godless people over in India and so on believe.

There were many contemporary myths. Ancient man had all kinds of wild ideas about the gods and about the origin of the universe and about the nature of the sky and the stars and the planets and what the Earth was like and what the powers were that brought about weather. And these myths were very non-scientific and easily disproved.

None of those are in the Bible. And the Bible was written in very early times. At times when everybody in surrounding cultures believed these nonsensical, totally unscientific, easily disproved things.

All of the statements in the Bible when they do relate to astronomy or geology or history or any of the other sciences that we can verify, they always come up factual. They always come up verifiable. In all of the books of the Bible, you don't ever find anachronism of any substantial nature.

You don't find anything that is easily and directly disproved. And it's a unity. From Genesis to Revelation, there is a theme.

It is the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. Here is man starting out in a perfect condition. Fallen.

And here is God's provision. Here is God's grace. Here is God's compassion.

Here is God pleading with man to return to Him and be restored and renewed and brought back to relationship. Now, what about you? What about me? What's our situation? Have we got everything wired together? Can we live a life apart from God and everything is going to be great? Well, there is two kinds of people on the earth. There are people who answer that question, yes.

And there are people who answer that question, no. You and I are people who answer that question, no. I cannot live my life on my own.

I don't have the answers. I can't be the God of my own universe. I don't know enough.

I'm not smart enough. And everything I put together falls apart. I am corrupt.

I am fallen. I am sinful. I wound others.

I hurt myself. I can't control the evil that is in my nature. I've tried and it just doesn't happen.

That's what you and I believe as Christians. There are people who think, oh no, hey, I'm actually a pretty good person. I've got everything under control.

Oh yeah. Everybody loves me. I don't hurt people.

My life just gets better and better. I'm treading on the upward way. New heights I'm gaining every day and I'm doing it all myself.

I'm on a road to self-improvement. Those people are deluded. That may be a personal perspective, but they ought to ask people in their periphery.

They ought to get a reality check. Because the truth is, none of us does righteousness. No, not one.

We have all together gone astray. We have gone everyone his own way. The Bible from Genesis to Revelation has a common theme.

Fallen man needs deliverance from God. Fallen man needs connection to God. Fallen man needs relationship with God.

Apart from God, we perish. Apart from God, we are corrupt and we become more corrupt. Apart from God, we are on a downward degenerating trend.

Nothing can reverse that downward spiral except the power of God. That is the message from Genesis to Revelation. It's a consistent theme.

You can find that theme reflected in every single book of the Bible. Every single book, without exception, has that theme. Now, Josh McDowell asks a question.

He says, people sort of take it for granted that the Bible is united in presenting this message. Try this. Let's say you were in school.

Let's say you're at work. Josh McDowell says, try this. Get ten people.

Sit them all down in separate places. Give them a sheet of paper and a pencil. And ask them a question about the meaning of life.

Let them write a paragraph and say, please tell me what you think is the meaning of life. What you think life is all about. How you think life works.

Have them write a little paragraph. When you got those ten responses back and looked at them, how unified do you think it would be? How much in common would those answers reflect? Well, these are ten people all living at the same time in the same country, speaking the same language, in the same culture, watching the same TV set, reading the same papers, on the same internet. And if those ten can't agree, how could you get 40 people from widely different backgrounds, scattered over 1500 years of history, to write books that all say the same thing? It's miraculous.

It's extraordinary. And it is a work of God. And this is the uniqueness of the Word of God.

This is the uniqueness of the Bible. Somebody says, why do you think the Bible is the Word of God and not some other book? There's no other book like it. The great archaeologist William Foxwell Albright, greatest archaeologist from the ancient Near East in the first half of the last century, in the early, mid 1900s.

W.F. Albright was the authority in the area of archaeology. You know what he said? He says, to the writers of the New Testament, the Hebrew Bible was Holy Scripture and they were the direct heirs of its prophets. It is accordingly quite impossible to understand the New Testament without recognizing that its purpose was to supplement and explain the Hebrew Bible.

The New Testament isn't an appendage. It's not a separate creation. It goes with.

It's a directly linked set of literary works to the Old Testament. The Bible is a unity. The New Testament authors, Albright, who wasn't really a Christian per se, says the New Testament authors clearly saw themselves in a continuum with the Old Testament writers.

The purpose of their writings was to supplement and explain the Hebrew Bible. So the Bible is unique. The Bible is unlike anything else in the world.

Why? Because it is the inspired Word of God. We're going to pause and take our break. When we come back, we'll continue our look at the uniqueness of the Word of God.