INTRODUCING

CHRISTIANITY

TO MORMONS

A Practical and Comparative Guide

to What the Bible Teaches

ERIC JOHNSON

"For many years, there has existed a tremendous need for a book explaining the biblical gospel of grace to LDS individuals transitioning out of their LDS faith tradition and, with hopeful and tender hearts, seeking Truth Himself. With expert knowledge of the Bible and a loving approach to sharing Truth, Eric Johnson has met this need. It should be a standard for many years to come in introducing biblical Truth to LDS."

Dr. Lynn Wilder
Author, *Unveiling Grace: The Story of How We Found Our Way out of the Mormon Church*

"*Introducing Christianity to Mormons* is a unique book. Eric has studied and taught Christian beliefs for years, and so he captures the heart of core doctrines with clarity. And yet he has spent his life studying the LDS Church and engaging Mormons, so he presents Christian beliefs in a respectful and understandable fashion. This is the first book I will now recommend for those with an LDS background who want to understand Christian teachings."

Sean McDowell, PhD
Biola University professor, coauthor of *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* and *More Than a Carpenter*

"With every passing year, the distinctions between Christianity and the LDS Church are increasingly confused. Most contemporary LDS consider Mormonism a denomination of Christianity, even though their founders would never have described it that way. Now more than ever, we need a guide to help us navigate the differences and engage our LDS friends with compassion and truth. That's why this book is so timely. No one does a better job than Eric when it comes to understanding the differences, focusing on the essentials, and reaching Mormons with love and urgency. If you know Mormons, let this book prepare and guide you every step of the way."

J. Warner Wallace
Dateline-featured Cold-Case Detective, author of *Cold Case Christianity*

"Have you tried to share your faith with an LDS (Mormon) friend only to walk away confused by the discussion? Eric's book offers the Christian great insights on Mormon beliefs, along with guides for more meaningful discussions."

Sandra Tanner
Cofounder of Utah Lighthouse Ministry, coauthor of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality*

"When sharing the Christian faith with members of the LDS Church, using precise language is always paramount. Christians have often expressed frustration when their LDS counterpart gives the impression that they have few disagreements with what Christians have historically believed, even though one of the foundational teachings of their church is that Christ's church fell into a state of complete apostasy after the death of Jesus' apostles. Eric Johnson cuts through this theological fog and offers information that will make for effective conversations."

Bill McKeever
Director of Mormonism Research Ministry (Utah),
coauthor of *Answering Mormons' Questions*

"I have long felt the need for a book that takes LDS beliefs and language into account when explaining the message of Christianity. Eric Johnson has created that book. He has combined theological clarity and a lucid writing style with his extensive experience talking to Mormons to produce a resource I will give away often."

Ross Anderson
Author, *Understanding Your Mormon Neighbor*, executive
director, Utah Advance Ministries

"I wish I'd had this book when starting out in ministry in Utah. I'll be giving many copies of it away. It will be a great help to those who don't understand the differences between the religions that find their origin in the teaching of Joseph Smith and traditional Christianity, to those who are leaving some form of Mormonism for Christianity, and for Christians who live and serve in Mormon communities."

Loren Pankratz, PhD
Lead pastor, The Bridge Community, Centerville, Utah

"Eric Johnson gives us a multifaceted jewel in this book. Viewed from one side, it is an articulate primer for the historic Christian faith. Viewed from another side, it gives Christians the resources to anticipate and field common LDS questions and objections. And from yet another angle, a Latter-day Saint could encounter the material as a winsome and conversational polemic for the core of Christianity. Truth and grace march in lockstep through its pages. As a pastor and theologian in LDS country, I heartily recommend it!"

Dr. Bryan Hurlbutt
Lead pastor, Lifeline Community, West Jordan, Utah

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TO MORMONS

ERIC JOHNSON

*For more than three decades, my wife has supported me
in ministry endeavors and has never complained. Thank you, Terri Lynn,
for your many sacrifices as well as your encouragement
to finish this project. I love you.*

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

MICAH WILDER

I n my library are several books authored or coauthored by Eric Johnson. His newest effort, *Introducing Christianity to Mormons*, is a welcomed addition to his already impressive collection of informative works. Eric effectively lays out a clear and undeniable case for the orthodox Christian faith while juxtaposing it with the convoluted gospel of Mormonism. This book is an essential addition to anyone's library.

In the apostle Peter's first letter to the church, he encourages the saints of God, "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). The significance of this exhortation cannot be understated: As Christians, we are to defend the gospel, but to do so gently and respectfully. In the more than a decade that I have had the honor of knowing Eric Johnson, he has epitomized this scriptural appeal in his apologetic approach to unbelievers.

Since the inception of our continued friendship, I have been greatly encouraged by Eric's passion for the gospel of Christ and burden for reaching the Mormon people with truth. I am humbled by those whom God has called to be missionaries to the LDS people—because I myself am a former Latter-day Saint. To the glory of God, my life was radically transformed by the power of God's Word that was delivered to me through faithful Christian missionaries who stepped out of their comfort zone and shared the good news of Jesus with me. At that time

of my life, I had no reason to consider any truth outside of my religious construct, but by the grace of God, seeds were planted in my heart that ultimately came to fruition.

All too often, Christians have the perception that Mormons—among others—are unreachable. It's easy to assume they are too entrenched into their religious beliefs, and this creates in some people a hesitancy to share the gospel with them. "What's the point?" I have heard many ask. "They will never change." Yes, they can. I am evidence of that. But as Scripture says, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Romans 10:14).

I thank God for Eric's faithfulness to the Mormon people, and for the love and compassion he displays in every facet of his ministry. It is my prayer that this book will 1) encourage Christians to lovingly share their faith with Latter-day Saints, and 2) challenge Latter-day Saints to investigate their own faith and discover the sufficiency of Jesus alone for salvation.

—Micah Wilder

INTRODUCTION

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth."

2 TIMOTHY 2:15[1]

I've never heard this before," whispered the elderly gentleman who was wearing bib overalls and sporting a worn-out John Deere baseball cap on his mostly bald head. "It's all a bit confusing."[2]

It was a hot summer day in July 1987 in Manti, Utah. I was part of a short-term missions group sharing our faith in this very religious state. In fact, more than nine out of ten residents in Sanpete County, Utah, were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

For two years I had attended postgraduate seminary classes in San Diego, California. Desiring a different type of ministry experience, I decided to spend a summer in Utah. It was, I must say, a baptism by fire. If you take out a map and put your finger on the center of the state, it should land on this town of fewer than (at that time) 2300 people. From my experience, most of the residents in this community at that time had never been spoken to by a Bible-believing Christian.

After answering my fellow missionary's knock on their door, this octogenarian and his wife politely invited us inside. Sitting on their 1960s upholstered living room couch, I asked them how long they had lived in Utah. The husband replied, "All my life." Telling us he was born just 14 years after the Manti LDS *temple** was dedicated in 1888, he had

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*   The first time a unique and important term is used, it is italicized to indicate the word is defined in the glossary.

followed in his father's footsteps and became a farmer who never had a reason to travel beyond Salt Lake City located two hours away by car. The couple could get three TV stations—but only, he said, if their roof antenna was positioned exactly right, though he admitted the feed still came in a bit fuzzy. Of course, the Internet would not become available for a few years more.

Knowing that there were no Christian churches in this entire county, I asked, "Have you ever heard of the TV evangelist Billy Graham?"

"Nope," he responded with a shrug. As his wife handed each of us frosty glasses of lemonade, I sensed a golden opportunity.

"Could I share with you what the Bible teaches?" I asked.

"Sure," he replied, "we have plenty of time."

Having had a stuttering problem in elementary school, I spoke in rapid-fire succession—bam, bam, bam. It was a technique I had developed during my early years as I tried to overcome a childhood disability. Meanwhile, I was oblivious to the couple's confused body language. My intentions were right, but my form during the 20-minute conversation was akin to a locomotive careening out of control.

After we left, I realized that the information I hoped to convey had flown over their heads and crash landed in the heap pile of missed connections. This could have been the very first time anyone tried to share the Christian message with this lovely couple. Unfortunately, it would probably be the last time as well.

A few minutes after we left, my companion and I stood under the shade of a tree as we bowed our heads and prayed for this couple. That night, before I went to sleep, I vowed that I would improve my serve so I could better explain the gospel in future encounters. Over the past three and a half decades, I have learned through thousands of conversations that it *is* possible to communicate Christianity in a way that most Latter-day Saints can understand. This is the reason I have written this book.

ARE MORMONS CHRISTIAN?

Evangelical *Christians*[3] and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (abbreviated LDS, with the followers referred to as

Latter-day Saints or *Mormons* and the religion known as *Mormonism*)[4]
face barriers when trying to communicate with each other on doctri-
nal issues. This is because adherents of these faiths share many of the
same theological terms—including *atonement*, *grace*, and *gospel*—but
these words can be defined differently depending on one's background
and presuppositions. This can cause great confusion as well-meaning
people tend to talk past each other and, ultimately, cause hurt feelings.

The question asked in this subheading has been the source of many
emotional debates between Latter-day Saints and evangelical Chris-
tians.[5] In the past few decades, it has become common for many Mor-
mons to insist that "we're Christian too." The intended impression is
that there are few, if any, theological differences. Those who insist that
there are discrepancies could be labeled as contentious or rude. More
than once I have been asked, "Who are you to tell me that I'm not a
Christian? Are you suggesting that I'm not a nice person?" This is cer-
tainly *not* the message I want to convey!

I normally encourage believers to refrain from introducing this con-
troversy in conversations with Latter-day Saints. After all, this tactic is
the perfect recipe for alienating Mormons, whether friends or acquain-
tances. At the same time, it is not hard to show critical differences
between our faiths. Dallin H. Oaks, the first counselor in Mormon-
ism's First Presidency, explained, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-
day Saints has many beliefs in common with other Christian churches.
But we have differences, and those differences explain why we send
missionaries to other Christians."[6]

A feeling of religious superiority common amongst some Mormons is
demonstrated by LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie who wrote: "Modern
Christians, as part of their various creeds and doctrines, have inherited
many myths, legends, and traditions from their ancestors—all of which
views they falsely assume are part of true religion…Indeed, it would be
difficult to assemble a greater number of myths into one philosophical
system than are now found in the philosophies of modern Christendom."[7]

Insisting that Christians believe a "number of myths" while com-
missioning church "missionaries" to be sent "to other Christians" are
sure signs that these leaders do not consider anyone outside their

church's organization to be as *Christian* as they consider themselves to be. The idea is based on how LDS Church founder *Joseph Smith* supposedly "restored" true doctrines considered to have been lost soon after the death of Jesus's apostles in what is known as the *Great Apostasy*.[8]

An official church lesson aimed at children under 12 years of age encourages the instructor to "explain…that the true Church was not on the earth at that time. Jesus wanted his teachings and his Church restored to the earth."[9] Because of this, only LDS baptismal rites are considered efficacious; only this church's *priesthood* is deemed authoritative; and only by work done in church temples can families have any hope to live together throughout eternity. The list could go on. It can be concluded, then, that if Mormonism is true, *all* other religions—biblical Christianity included—are false and their adherents who had knowledge of Mormonism will not be eligible to receive the very best this religion has to offer.[10]

If Christianity needed a "restoration" because God's authority had been lost, then this religion—if Joseph Smith was indeed authorized to be a prophet—is desperately needed. On the other hand, if Christianity did not lose God's authority and true beliefs can be found by correctly interpreting the Bible, then Mormonism is in error and *its* doctrines ought to be rejected.

Historically, Christians have defended their beliefs while condemning *heresies*. Here is a quick comparison of the major doctrines of Mormonism and evangelical Christianity:

DOCTRINE	MORMONISM	EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY
Nature of God	Heavenly Father has a body of flesh and bones (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22) who lived in a previous existence as a human.	God the Father is spirit (John 4:24) and has eternally existed as God (Ps. 90:2; Isa. 43:10; 44:6,8).
Jesus	The firstborn child of Heavenly Father who is the Savior of humanity. Jesus is a god but not equal to the Father.	Jesus is *fully* God who came to the earth as a man and died on the cross. He then bodily resurrected from the dead.

DOCTRINE	MORMONISM	EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY
Trinity	Rejection of the Trinity. God is one in purpose but not one in essence. Each person in the Godhead is a separate god (tritheism).	One God in three persons who is both one in essence as well as purpose. Each Person is fully God but retains His own personality.
Salvation	Depending on the context, "general salvation" is the ability for a person to gain one of the three "kingdoms of glory" through the atonement and grace offered by Jesus, something all humans will receive. "Individual salvation" is equated with eternal life/exaltation; those who qualify for this realm will exist as gods and goddesses throughout eternity.[11]	Three distinctions: 1) Past tense, comes by grace through faith and not by works (Justification); 2) Present tense, good works in a believer's life (sanctification); 3) Future tense, existing in heaven with glorified bodies forever (glorification).
Humanity	All people are commanded to repent by successfully keeping the commandments of God.	Original sin came through the disobedience of Adam, tainting all people and preventing a relationship with God.
Scripture	The Old and New Testaments (King James Version) of the Bible as well as the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Also, those authoritative teachings given by current church leaders.	The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the Word of God. There is a closed canon, with no additional books or writings accepted as authoritative.
Heaven/Hell	Heaven (celestial kingdom) is eternal existence with one's earthly family; hell is equated with a place called "outer darkness" and is not a possibility for most humans.	Heaven is eternal existence with God. Hell is eternal separation from God, a possible destination for those who reject Him.

DOCTRINE	MORMONISM	EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY
Church	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Through the Great Apostasy that took place soon after the death of Jesus's apostles, God's authority was lost from the earth before it was restored by Joseph Smith in 1830.	Depending on the context, the church generally refers to all true believers who have placed their faith in Jesus as Savior. No religious organization or denomination holds a monopoly on Christianity.

It must be understood that people can be sincere in their beliefs and yet be sincerely wrong. Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland explains, "Reality is basically indifferent to how sincerely we believe something. I can believe with all my might that my car will fly me to Hawaii or that homosexuality is caused solely by the brain, but that fervency doesn't change a thing. As far as reality is concerned, what matters is not whether I like a belief or how sincere I am in believing it but whether or not the belief is true."[12]

He adds, "If someone used blind faith and bought the first house he or she saw with a For Sale sign in front of it, but made no effort to get information about the house and neighborhood, we would consider that person foolish. Why? Because when we use our reason and base decisions on the best assessment of the evidence we can make, we increase our chances that our decisions are based on true beliefs…Now if this is the case for day-to-day issues, why should we suddenly abandon the importance of reason and evidence when it comes to religion? We should not."[13]

Maintaining truth in spiritual matters is crucial. Paul didn't mince words when he described the gospel of those legalists who insisted that dietary law and circumcision were necessary for saving faith. Galatians 1:8-9 states, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."

That word *accursed* refers to damnation in *hell*. Those who put their trust in a contrary gospel are destined for eternal separation from God. While a Latter-day Saint might find it silly to suggest that those who belong to a church with the name of Jesus in its title might be in jeopardy, to ignore our differences and pretend Mormonism and Christianity are synonymous faiths does nobody any favors. As theologian Norman Geisler puts it, "Truth is 'telling it like it is'":

> Non-Christians often claim that Christians are narrow-minded, because they claim that Christianity is true and all non-Christian systems are false. However, the same is true of non-Christians who claim that what they view as truth is true, and all opposing beliefs are false. That is equally narrow. The fact of the matter is that if C (Christianity) is true, then it follows that all non-C is false. Likewise, if H (say, Humanism) is true, then all non-H is false. Both views are equally narrow. That's the way truth is. Each truth claim excludes contradictory truth claims. Christianity is no more narrow than any other set of beliefs.[14]

If truth matters, then so does doctrine. Theologian Millard Erickson writes:

> To some readers, the word *doctrine* may prove somewhat frightening. It conjures up visions of very technical, difficult, abstract beliefs, perhaps propounded dogmatically. Doctrine is not that, however. Christian doctrine is simply statements of the most fundamental beliefs that the Christian has, beliefs about the nature of God, about his action, about us who are his creatures, and about what he has done to bring us into relationship with himself…Doctrine deals with general or timeless truths about God and the rest of reality.[15]

Theologian R.C. Sproul rightly said, "I am not satisfied to believe just anything simply for the sake of believing. If what I believe is not

true—if it is superstitious or fallacious—I want to be liberated from it."[16] Why? Theologian Harold O.J. Brown explained: "For many religions, the cardinal test is right conduct or right observance; for Christianity it is right faith…Creeds played a prominent part in the daily worship and life of early Christians. To a degree that is hard for twentieth-century people to grasp, the early church believed that it was absolutely vital to know and accept some very specific statements about the nature and attributes of God and his Son Jesus Christ."[17]

Current thinking amongst many secular people (and even some Christians) is that truth is whatever a person decides it to be. This generally means that all religious paths lead to God. However, it is impossible for two or more competing *worldviews* to each be true. According to the law of noncontradiction, something cannot be *both* A and non-A at the same time. When two religions are contrasted, such as Mormonism and Christianity, essential beliefs might appear to be similar on the surface. When these teachings are thoroughly inspected, though, irreconcilable differences become evident.

Of course, not everyone is open to the gospel. But some are. In Acts 8:26-40, God told Philip to head southwest from Jerusalem toward Gaza. He ran into a man from Ethiopia—the manager of his queen's financial affairs—who was reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" Philip proceeded to interpret the passage that he was reading from Isaiah 53 and explained "the good news about Jesus." The man understood and was baptized in this fish-jumps-into-the-boat encounter.

While not every witnessing scenario is this easy, it is vital that every Christian who hopes to be effective in sharing the gospel has a grasp on the basic beliefs of Christianity, as historian Roger E. Olson writes: "There can be no vital, dynamic, faithful Christian discipleship completely devoid of doctrinal understanding. There never has been and there never will be."[18] Brown adds that "it is important to recognize that the very life of Christianity in general as well as the salvation of individual Christians depends on at least a substantial measure of right doctrine, and where right doctrine exists, contrary views must be heresies."[19]

Grasping the essentials of Christianity as well as the basics of LDS theology is crucial or confusion will reign! Only then can Christianity be accurately contrasted with the teachings of Mormonism.

IF THE (LDS) CHURCH ISN'T TRUE, THEN NOTHING ELSE IS?

Those who have been Mormons for a while may be familiar with an in-house LDS phrase that goes something like this: "If the (LDS) church isn't true, then nothing else is." This saying has been used to spur fellow members on, especially those who might struggle in their faith when troubling information about church history or unique doctrines is discovered. The idea is neither rational nor true. Something *must* be true if Mormonism is not. After all, nothing is *not* something. If Mormonism is not true, perhaps Hinduism is. Or Islam. Maybe there is not a god, thus validating atheism. Or possibly we are living in a Matrix-like illusion and reality doesn't exist, as Buddhism teaches. The list of possibilities goes on.

To make an effort to understand what biblical Christianity teaches, Mormons must put away false stereotypes. For example, some mistakenly assume that the Christian doctrine of "salvation by grace alone" minimizes good works. Another assumption is that Christians believe in a boring heaven where everyone strums on their harps while dangling on puffy clouds![20] Many similar misconceptions could be documented.

Corey Miller, a former Mormon who leads a nationwide Christian college campus ministry called Ratio Christi, uses a simple but powerful illustration to show how different Mormonism is from biblical Christianity:

> Many Mormons initially soft-peddle differences until forced to admit them. So I try to engage with them by illustration.
>
> Me: "Let me ask you a personal question. Do you have a mom?"

Mormon: [Smiling, will reply] "Yes, of course."

Me: "I do too! Can you spell that?"

Mormon: "Umm…M.O.M."

Me: "No way, I spell it the same way. Maybe we have the same mom." I ask, "Can you spell it backwards?"

Mormon: "M.O.M."

Me: [Excitedly I blurt out] "Surely, we have the same mom because it is spelled the same!"

Upon further describing our respective moms, if hers is 6 feet tall and mine only 4 feet tall, then they are two different moms. One can then point out that while we all spell "Christ" and "God" the same way the meanings aren't necessarily the same.[21]

Throughout this book, much effort will be extended to distinguish the beliefs taught in Christianity and Mormonism. Some propose that any disagreement is wrong by citing 3 Nephi 11:29 in the *Book of Mormon*, which says "contention…is of the devil, who is the father of contention." However, disagreements are *not* denigrated by the Bible. As scholar J. Gresham Machen once said, "Men tell us that our preaching should be positive and not negative, that we can preach the truth without attacking error. But if we follow that advice we shall have to close our Bible and desert its teachings. The New Testament is a polemic book almost from beginning to end."[22]

Motives must be considered. Yes, I disagree with Mormon*ism*, but let me unequivocally state that I am *not* against the LDS people. Please don't take this wrong, but I love the Mormon people.[23] While I have had many dialogues with Latter-day Saints over the years, I have never equated their disagreement on doctrinal issues as personal attacks on me. I totally concur with J. Reuben Clark—an attorney who served as a member of Mormonism's First Presidency—when he said, "If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not

the truth, it ought to be harmed."[24] Taking personal pride out of the equation while considering the facts is necessary to fairly consider both sides of the issue.

The Greek word for *gospel*—literally, "good news"—is where the word *evangelism* originates. Sometimes others will feel like the Christian who presents the truth is maliciously stepping on toes, a fear that paralyzes many Christians from sharing their faith. Commenting on Galatians 4:15-20, Pastor Timothy Keller says:

> If you love a person so selfishly that you cannot risk their anger, you won't ever tell them the truth they need to hear. If, on the other hand, you tell a person the truth they need, but with harshness and not with the agony of a lover, they won't listen to it. But if you speak the truth with lots of love evident at the same time, there is a great chance that what you say will penetrate the heart and heal. A gospel-based ministry is marked by loving honesty, not spin, image and flattery. This kind of gospel ministry is costly to the minister. It is not always easy for those they are ministering to. But it is based on the truth; it is pointing to Christ; and it is eternally worthwhile.[25]

With that said, let me assure you that it is perfectly acceptable for Mormons and Christians to disagree in their beliefs. While I will defend my position rigorously, I do not force anyone to accept my position. And I am open to hearing opposing points of view.

Let no Christian be deceived into thinking that a Latter-day Saint should be despised, ridiculed, mocked, or considered the enemy. And vice versa. My intention in writing this book is *not* to provide information for the Christian to "win debates (at all costs)" while purposely putting people down or minimizing their opinions. There is already enough contention in the world without blindside potshots being taken, so it should be a priority to discuss these issues in a civil manner displaying "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). As Keller said, delivering "the truth with lots of love," as taught by Ephesians 4:15, means

that cordiality and honesty can both be accomplished in a noncompromising way.

I will stress throughout that Christians must have compassion for the Mormons they know or meet by realizing how costly it could be for them to even consider leaving their religion. For example, departing the faith could cause irreparable damage with their LDS family and friends. One woman wrote in an ex-Mormon Facebook group, "I have a huge fear I could get in trouble for attending a Christian church. I wish I could just have my name removed or leave first but my husband would divorce me and said he can't get into heaven if I leave the church."

What a dilemma for those who wonder what the ramifications would be if they leave Mormonism. Imagine how deciding to leave could even end up causing a failed marriage, as the woman quoted above feared! No wonder some Latter-day Saints decide to stay in their church while pretending to remain faithful even though, in their minds, they have totally rejected this religion. This realistic apprehension must be appreciated by those of us who have never been Latter-day Saints.

Still, no assurance can be made that there won't be fallout for those who leave. What we as Christians can do, however, is promise them that Jesus cares very much. And we care too. While there might not be an immediate replacement of the friendships they currently have in the LDS Church, they can be assured that there is the possibility of finding a place of genuine Christian fellowship in their community where God's authentic Word remains central. We will discuss this issue further in chapter 10.

A spiritual battle is taking place beyond the physical world. The apostle Paul explained in Ephesians 6:12 that Christians "do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Because of this, 2 Corinthians 4:4 states that "the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Once again, let me be clear. Mormons are *not* the enemies of Christians. The religion of Mormon*ism* is. As God told the prophet Isaiah, "Come now, let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18). Cordial conversations can take place and should always be the goal.

PRESENTING THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY TO MORMONS

During the pandemic in late August 2020, my youngest daughter, Hannah, came to me one weekend morning. "Dad, my coworker has left Mormonism and is wondering if there is a resource that could help her better understand what we as Christians believe," she said.

I began to thumb through more than a dozen apologetic books on the shelves of my personal library, all of which do a great job explaining the Christian position. However, I soon realized that it would be far too easy for someone with an LDS background to miss important concepts in these books since they were not written with a Mormon audience in mind.

"A book written for those who think like Mormons is needed," I told my daughter. "It would need to deal with the essential doctrines of Christianity, focusing on issues such as the authoritative role of the Bible, the nature of God, the personhood of Jesus, the concept of the Trinity, and the meaning of salvation." A good resource, I added, would provide responses to common arguments that utilize the *straw man fallacy* to counter Christian teaching.

Little did I know that I had just given myself a writing assignment that would consume my time for the following year!

I should point out that there are other doctrines considered by Christians to be peripheral or secondary issues. These include the mode of *water baptism* (immersion or sprinkling), God's sovereignty or the human free will (Calvinism vs. Arminianism), and teachings on end times. While these are important and do make for interesting discussions, they are topics that Christians are free to disagree on with their fellow believers. While in-house, back-and-forth disagreement is permitted, we must remember that love needs to be

emphasized in all conversations (1 Corinthians 13:13). In these days of drive-by slanderous comments made in the faceless twenty-first-century social media realm, the higher road should be taken. Unity in the body of Christ should be preserved despite our differences in these secondary arenas.

Finally, there are opinions based on personal taste, such as the type of music used in church settings on Sunday mornings (hymns or contemporary worship), the freedom to drink alcohol (without getting drunk, as Ephesians 5:18 says), or the preference of a particular Bible translation. It's like pronouncing the word *tomato*. Someone in Britain may say "tah-mah-toe," while an American might say "tuh-may-toe." Is either pronunciation incorrect? In the same way, when it comes to nonessential issues, we can dispense freedom to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Since the essential teachings in Christianity will be our focus, peripheral and personal taste issues will not be emphasized.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

The word *apologetics* comes from the Greek word *apologeia*. It's the same word used in 1 Peter 3:15 to describe how believers should "make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." Explaining the teachings of Christianity can get quite complicated. Thus, it is necessary for me to offer plenty of evidence to support my case, as many names and numbers will be used.

Some may complain, "Too many details!" However, for me to say, "The Bible is true, just take my word for it" or "Trust me, the Trinity just needs to be accepted" while not providing adequate support is not fair. For many readers, this book may end up becoming a fire-hose presentation. But while the concepts discussed can be deep, they are important. If necessary, take your time and look up the biblical passages. For me to dumb down the material could result in important points being missed.

For many years I coached softball at both the rec-league and high-school levels. My players knew that many post-practice pep talks would include the following encouragement: "Anything worth doing is worth

doing well." Whether it was running laps to get into playing shape or fielding ground ball after ground ball in practice, winning games through full effort made it worthwhile when we were successful on the field, whether or not we won every game.

Others may suggest that I should have expounded more on certain teachings. Yes, it is possible to get much deeper with any of the topics discussed in this book, but this book was never meant to be the end-all systematic theology. If you need more details on any doctrine, I have listed some wonderful resources at the end of this (and every) chapter where you can pursue deeper thought.

As far as the intended audience, I have written mainly to lay Christians who would like to better share their faith with those who possess an LDS worldview. A secondary audience is those Latter-day Saints who may know little to nothing about evangelical Christian beliefs. This is a book I hope Christians can confidently give to their inquiring LDS family or friends. While critics may claim that this is an *anti-Mormon* publication, I assure you it's not. There is no slandering or talking down to Mormons in any of the pages. The main goal is to lay out essential Christian beliefs and provide adequate supporting material.

To successfully explain Christianity to those who have an LDS background, I'll need to describe the Mormon position as accurately as possible. Thus, LDS source material will be used, especially the words of church leaders called *general authorities.* These leaders have one of the following positions: 1) the *president*, also called the church *prophet*; 2) the *First Presidency*, made up of the president and his two counselors; 3) *apostles*, of which there are 12; and 4) the *seventies*. When cited, the name of the man's office will be placed in front of the name to indicate his position.

Faithful Mormons believe that these men have been appointed by God and, while not considered infallible, are certainly authoritative. A Mormon may say, "I don't agree with my leader on (fill in the blank)." That is possible, but when it comes to understanding authentic LDS doctrine, I think the positions of these leaders (along with the correlated curriculum they endorse) and how they interpret their church's scriptures ought to take precedence over the opinion of a lay member.[26]

There will also be abundant references from excellent Christian thinkers, pastors, and scholars, many possessing master's or doctoral credentials along with their vast experience. With so many great resources available, these citations are used unashamedly to buttress the case for the historic Christian position. The endnotes provide additional nuggets that ought to be considered.

Someone might wonder why I cite so many biblical verses. It could be argued that such a tactic is overkill and hinders readability. I disagree. Since I am an adamant proponent of the power of God's Word, in-text citations and references will provide the biblical support and help prevent mere opinion from ruling the day. The Bereans were considered noble because they did not take the word of an apostle (Paul) at face value; instead, they were intent on "examining the scriptures" (Acts 17:11).

To show how the information has been used in my own witness, I utilize real-life dialogues I have had over the years. By including these conversations, the goal is to show how Christian principles can be introduced to Latter-day Saints. For practically every dialogue, another believer could use an entirely different strategy that could be better than mine. There is no monopoly on evangelistic tactics.[27]

I want to be clear as well that not all Latter-day Saints will present their case the same way as those described in the dialogues. Conversations are like snowflakes. No two are alike, though they are often similar. Because of this, I have learned never to assume another person's beliefs. If a Latter-day Saint's view contradicts Mormonism, I might ask, "Did you know your church leaders/scripture disagree with your belief(s)?" To find out what an individual Mormon believes—regardless of what the church teaches—I have found two questions to be helpful:

1. "What do you believe about (so and so)?"

2. "What do you mean when you say (so and so)?"

Although I have not attained perfection in sharing my faith (who has?), asking questions like these prevents running over the Latter-day

Saint and forces the Christian to take a step back. Since God has given each person two ears but only one mouth, it is important to remind ourselves that we must listen and not completely dominate the discussion.

As a credentialed teacher in California for many years, I like to utilize educational tools to facilitate learning and retention. Thus, each chapter begins with a one-paragraph preview so the reader can anticipate what will be covered. Five discussion questions are provided at the end of the chapter for those who might like to use the book in a group study setting. The Glossary includes many unique LDS and Christian terms used throughout the book. The first time a unique and important term is used, it is italicized to indicate the word is defined in the glossary.

For additional information and resources, I direct you to the website IntroducingChristianity.com. Among other resources, you will find:

- Links to supplemental articles on mrm.org.

- Additional references for a more complete picture of what LDS scriptures and leaders have said about their religion.

- Possible answers to the discussion questions found at the end of each chapter.

- Short videos on the topics discussed in the chapter.

If you would like to respond to the book, write me at eric@mrm.org and put "Introducing Christianity" in the subject line.

BACKGROUND ON THE AUTHOR

You might wonder if I have ever been a Mormon. The answer is *no*. So why have I spent much of my life researching the religion of Mormonism? It is because I have great concern for the Mormon people, including some friends, family, and neighbors—just as the Jewish-raised Paul devoted himself to the Gentiles.

Here are some bullet points describing my history:

- I grew up as the oldest child in a loving Christian home with parents who converted to Christianity just before I was born.

- I dedicated my life to Christ in January 1972 at the age of nine while watching a Billy Graham crusade on television with my parents.

- My faith was challenged as a junior in a Christian high school when I heard how a thousand people followed the command of a cult leader named Jim Jones and committed suicide by imbibing a poisoned drink in November 1978.

- During the next few years, my faith grew as I studied other religions and compared their beliefs to what I was taught at church as well as at a Christian school.

- From 1983 to 1986, I assisted Jeff Howell, the founder of Making Disciples Ministry who is now in the presence of the Lord. Together we engaged in a public setting with Jehovah's Witnesses as well as New Age and Mormon adherents.

- I graduated from San Diego State University in 1985 and began attending seminary, a postgraduate school for those preparing for Christian ministry.

- I went on a short-term missionary trip to Utah in July 1987, as described in the first part of this introduction. On the team was Terri Bade from Washington state; she agreed to become my wife the following year. In fact, she was the "other missionary" in the evangelism story given at the beginning of this chapter.

- I met Bill McKeever, founder of Mormonism Research Ministry (MRM), in 1989 and accepted his invitation to volunteer with him as a researcher.

- I graduated from Bethel Seminary San Diego in 1991 with a Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree (New Testament).

- I taught English and Bible classes at Christian High School in El Cajon, CA, from 1993 to 2010. For several years, I served as the school's Bible department head. I continue to actively hold a clear secondary English credential in the state of California. I was also an adjunct professor at two San Diego-area colleges as well as at the former Bethel Seminary San Diego.

- In 2010, Terri and I moved to Utah with two of our three children so I could work full-time at MRM.[28]

- This is my fifth book project since 2013.

Enough of the preliminaries. Let's get started!

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Systematic theology volumes explain Christian teaching. Do not be intimidated by the fact that these three resources have 1000+ pages. The essential teachings (including scriptural authority, God's nature, Jesus, salvation) are described in much more detail.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 1291 pages. (A second edition published in 2020 by the same publisher contains several hundred additional pages.)

John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, general editors, *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 1023 pages.

Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 1200 pages. A condensed version of the full edition is *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 512 pages.

THE BIBLE

God's Special Revelation

"The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever."

ISAIAH 40:8

CHAPTER PREVIEW

According to Mormonism, the Bible is true only "as far as it is translated correctly." If this claim means that ancient scribes intentionally corrupted the biblical text, then the word translated *is not the correct term. Rather,* transmitted *would be more accurate. While there are no original texts of any Old Testament books, a by-chance archaeological discovery in 1947 eventually led to the uncovering of 11 caves containing hundreds of documents called the Dead Sea Scrolls. In addition, archaeological work undertaken in biblical lands supports the idea that the people, places, and events described in the Bible are historical, not mythological. All in all, the Bible has been properly transmitted and should be considered God's special revelation to help believers understand correct doctrine and behavior.*

Dave approached me on a warm early summer evening while I was passing out Christian information just outside Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

"Do you believe the Bible with its many problems?" he asked as we stood across from each other on the public sidewalk.

He didn't give me a chance to answer before he continued.

"Our church has produced a document called the Articles of Faith. The eighth article states, 'We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly.' While the Bible is part of our scripture, we are aware that it cannot be fully trusted."

He was citing from the 13 *Articles of Faith* written by Joseph Smith that is included at the end of the scripture *Pearl of Great Price*. When a biblical verse or passage offered by a Christian appears to conflict with a unique LDS teaching, Article of Faith 1:8 is often cited by Mormons as a counterpoint.

Before we could continue, I needed to distinguish the difference between the meanings of *translation* and *transmission*.

"In your mind, what does 'translation' mean?" I asked.

"It's taking words from one language and putting them into another, like from Spanish into English," he said.

"Exactly," I said. "If that is what is meant, I would agree that a bad translation of the Bible is possible."

I explained how the Bible has been translated into English over the past seven centuries. Those early pioneers who took on this enormous task did so at a great personal cost, as Roman Catholic church leaders opposed efforts to make the Bible accessible to laypeople because it was considered dangerous. Only ordained church officials were deemed to be qualified to properly interpret God's Word. Meanwhile, those who attempted to distribute the Bible to common laypeople were persecuted. For instance, John Wycliffe (1328–1384) and William Tyndale (1494–1536) were each martyred for their translations of the Bible.[1]

While there are many fine English translations, not all are reliable. For instance, the New World Translation (NWT) published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses, or JWs) has been discredited by most biblical scholars. One reason is that none of the translators of the NWT had a scholarly grasp on the original biblical languages and therefore forced their presupposed opinions onto their readers.[2] Because JWs deny the *deity* (Godhood) of Jesus, for example, the NWT identifies Jesus in John 1:1 as "a god" rather than "God" as reputable translations do.[3] In Colossians 1:16, the translators

added "other" between the words "all things" even though this is nei-ther in the original nor is it implied in the context. The NWT thus reads "all *other* things have been created through him [Jesus]."

Article 8 sheds doubt on the integrity of the monks and other copi-ers of the biblical text over the centuries. This is a question of the trans-mission, not the translation, of the biblical text. As LDS Apostle Neil A. Maxwell explained, "By faulty transmission, many 'plain and pre-cious things' were 'taken away' or 'kept back' from reaching what later composed our precious Holy Bible."[4] The First Presidency reported in 1992, "The Bible, as it has been transmitted over the centuries, has suf-fered the loss of many plain and precious parts."[5]

Referring to Article 8, the late BYU professor Robert J. Matthews made the point clear when he wrote, "Here the word *translated* appears to be used in a broader sense to mean *transmitted*, which would include not only translation of languages but also copying, editing, deleting from, and adding to documents. The Bible has undergone a much more serious change than merely translation from one language to another."[6]

If the Bible cannot be trusted due to "ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests"—as Joseph Smith put it—this would be a serious problem.[7] How can these charges about missing "many plain and precious parts" be countered? This will be the focus of the first two chapters.

SETTING THE TABLE

When it comes to *scripture*, Latter-day Saints typically understand this to refer to any one of four different volumes: the King James Ver-sion (KJV) of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Cove-nants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Wayne Grudem accurately explains that when other "scriptures" like these are added to the authority of the Bible, "the result has always been (1) to deemphasize the teach-ings of the Bible itself and (2) to begin to teach some things that are contrary to Scripture. This is a danger of which the church must con-stantly be aware."[8]

God has revealed Himself in one of two ways. First, He has made Himself available to all humans through what is called *general* or *natural revelation*, which will be discussed in chapter 3. God is also revealed through what is called *special revelation* as seen in divine miracles (to be discussed in chapter 6) as well as the 66 books of the Bible. Collectively, these books were compiled into an official list called the *canon* and were written:

- in a variety of genres: law, poetry, history, prophecy, gospels, church history, apostolic epistles, and apocalyptic prophecy

- by 40 different authors

- in three languages (Hebrew, Koine Greek, Aramaic)

- on three different continents (Europe, Asia, Africa)

- with one basic story in mind (God's great love for people)

The Old Testament is accepted by both Jews and Christians. Roger Olson writes,

> Although some debate exists about the Council of Jamnia where Jewish rabbis met in [AD] 90, it seems that some important steps toward the official canonization process took place there. The Jewish Bible was defined as twenty-two inspired books: Pentateuch through Lesser Prophets. In later Christian Bibles some of the books of the Jewish canon have been separated so that they make up a total of thirty-nine individual books…By and large, then, it is safe to say that most of the early church fathers of the second and third centuries accepted the Jewish leaders' decision to expand the inspired Scriptures beyond just the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and to restrict them to the twenty-two (or thirty-nine) books of the Law and Prophets. This then was "the Bible" of the earliest Christian churches after the apostles.[9]

Fifteen books called the *Apocrypha* originated in the Intertestamental Period (from about 300 BC until the time of Christ), including the two books of Esdras and Maccabees as well as the Book of Tobit and the Book of Wisdom. These writings were never considered to be a part of the primary Jewish or Christian canon. Reacting against the teachings of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church declared that 12 of the apocryphal books were "deuterocanonical" (secondary canonical) during the Council of Trent (1543–1563). It should be noted that Jesus referenced the Old Testament a total of 395 times in the Gospel accounts, yet He never once cited from the Apocrypha.[10]

Besides the four Gospels in the New Testament, there are additional books called gnostic gospels that are not considered authentic scripture. None of these books were written in the first century; with one exception, none were ever cited, read from, or preached by any respected Christian leader during the first three centuries.[11] As New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg notes,

> Given what we know today, are there good reasons for including the gnostic gospels?…The best way to answer this question is to invite readers to access the texts of these documents, read them, and decide for themselves. To begin with, none of them is a narrative of any larger swath of Jesus's life. To call them gospels, therefore, misleads those who have not read them as to their literary genre. Most involve long, rambling discourses attributed to Jesus, supposedly given to one or more of his followers secretly after the resurrection, teaching about the nature of creation and the heavenly worlds, with all sorts of esoteric cosmological speculation.[12]

These writings were never seriously considered for inclusion into the canon by the early church. In the early third century, Origen of Alexandria said there were three categories of books claiming apostolic authority: 1) those that were widely acknowledged, 2) others that

were disputed by some, and 3) the rest that were outright rejected by everyone because they taught false doctrine. Those books considered authoritative were the four Gospels along with Acts, the 13 letters penned by the apostle Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. Because they could not be traced to first-century apostolic writers, disputed books included the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Preaching of Peter*, and the *Acts of Paul*.[13]

A total of 21 of the 27 current New Testament books were readily accepted in the first two centuries of the Christian church. During the third and fourth centuries, Christians determined that Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude were also authoritative. Today the 27 New Testament books that were officially recognized at the Council of Hippo in AD 393 and Carthage in AD 397 are canonical. As New Testament scholar Bruce Metzger told journalist Lee Strobel,

> [T]he canon is a list of authoritative books more than it is an authoritative list of books. These documents didn't derive their authority from being selected; each one was authoritative before anyone gathered them together… For somebody now to say that the canon emerged only after councils and synods made these pronouncements would be like saying, "Let's get several academies of musicians to make a pronouncement that the music of Bach and Beethoven is wonderful." I would say, "Thank you for nothing! We knew that before the pronouncement was made." We know it because of sensitivity to what is good music and what is not. The same with the canon.[14]

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

For evangelical Christians, the 66 books of the Bible are scriptural and fully authoritative; no other writings are considered canonical.[15] Let's consider the three *I*'s of scripture: Inspired, Inerrant, and Infallible.

First, *inspired* refers to how the authors of the Bible wrote according to the way God intended them to communicate with humanity.

This idea was recognized during the lifetime of the apostles, including Paul. First Thessalonians 2:13 explains, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers." Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God [KJV says "given by inspiration of God"] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

When we say God inspired the Bible, this does not mean that He somehow took the hand of each author and forced them to write. Rather, each author's individuality and style are evident. R.C. Sproul explains, "God made it possible for His truth to be communicated in an inspired way while making use of the backgrounds, personalities, and literary styles of these various writers. What was overcome or overridden by inspiration was not human personalities, styles, or literary methods, but human tendencies to distortion, falsehood, and error."[16]As Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks state,

> The net result is that we have the Word of God written by men of God, inspired not only in its concepts, but in the very words used to express those concepts. The human writers are not mere secretaries, but active agents who express their own experiences, thoughts, and feelings in what they have written. It is not simply a record of revelation, but a revelation itself. It is God's message in written form.[17]

The apostle Peter described how the Old Testament prophets wrote with the power of the *Holy Spirit*, the Bible's ultimate author (Hebrews 3:7). Second Peter 1:19-21 states:

> And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning

star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no
prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own inter-
pretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will
of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried
along by the Holy Spirit.

Although 2 Timothy 3 and 2 Peter 1 refer primarily to the Old Tes-
tament, the New Testament is also considered authoritative. For exam-
ple, Peter said that Paul wrote "according to the wisdom given him"
(2 Peter 3:15). While Paul's theological instruction may have been dif-
ficult for some to understand, Peter added in verse 16 that these writ-
ings should be considered as authoritative as the "other Scriptures."
According to Grudem,

> It is primarily the apostles who are given the ability from
> the Holy Spirit to recall accurately the words and deeds of
> Jesus and to interpret them rightly for subsequent genera-
> tions…The apostles, then, have authority to write words
> that are God's own words, equal in truth status and author-
> ity to the words of the Old Testament Scriptures. They do
> this to record, interpret, and apply to the lives of believ-
> ers the great truths about the life, death, and resurrection
> of Christ.[18]

Second, the Bible is considered the *inerrant* Word of God. Gleason
L. Archer stated, "Throughout the history of the Christian church, it
has been clearly understood that the Bible as originally given by God
was free from error. Except for heretical groups that broke away from
the church, it was always assumed that Scripture was *completely author-
itative and trustworthy* in all that it asserts as factual."[19]

Jesus had a high view of Scripture, as a tenth of His words in the
four Gospels are direct citations from the Old Testament. When He was
tempted in Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus referenced the book of Deuteronomy
(6:13,16; 8:3) and simply stated that "it is written." He provided historical
support for stories in the Old Testament, including the creation of Adam
and Eve (Mark 10:6-8), the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew

22:32), and events with Moses, including the burning bush (Mark 12:26), heavenly manna (John 6:31), and the bronze serpent (John 3:14). Jesus even quoted from the Psalms twice while He was on the cross.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, His apostles continued to accept the authority of the Old Testament as well as the words of their Messiah. Claiming in Romans 3:2 that "the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God," Paul also wrote in 1 Timothy 5:18, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'" His first citation of "Scripture" comes from Deuteronomy 25:4 while the second references what Jesus said in Luke 10:7.[20]

Finally, the Bible is considered *infallible*. This means that what the Bible teaches about matters of faith and Christian practice is exactly the way God intended. When the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation took place, the phrase *Sola Scriptura* ("scripture alone") was coined to designate how God's Word trumps human tradition; this idea has been a rallying cry for Protestant Christians ever since. Led by Martin Luther who made a careful study of the books of Romans and Galatians, these Reformers "protested" against the Catholic religious tradition that typically superseded the Bible. Before Johannes Gutenberg's printing press initialized the printing revolution in 1450, many Christians throughout the centuries spent valuable time and resources physically copying and recopying the individual books that were distributed throughout the world. It should be noted that inerrancy and infallibility refer only to the original writings and *not* the copies. As Geisler accurately points out,

> Genuine mistakes have been found—in copies of Bible text made hundreds of years after the autographs. God only uttered the original text of Scripture, not the copies. Therefore, only the original text is without error. Inspiration does not guarantee that every copy is without error, especially in copies made from copies made from copies made from copies. Therefore, we are to expect that minor errors are to be found in manuscript copies.[21]

Critics complain that Christians utilize circular reasoning in their appeal to the authority of the Bible. ("The Bible is true because the Bible says it is true.") What these *skeptics* do not realize is that they are required to argue in a similar fashion when they believe their position is reasonable or logical. According to their position, "My reason is my ultimate authority because it seems reasonable to me." Or, "Logical consistency is my ultimate authority because it is logical." Even Latter-day Saints find themselves in a similar precarious situation when they say, in effect, "Praying about the Book of Mormon or the religion of Mormonism and receiving a personal revelation through prayer is my ultimate authority because my testimony must be true."

While evangelical Christians believe the Bible is true, they have reasons to believe in its authority, including its amazing prophetical accuracy (which we will discuss in chapter 6) as well as its abundant manuscript history. While Christians do appeal to the Bible to support why they believe the way they do, blind faith in God's Word is not required to come to this conclusion.

I told Dave that I wanted to provide him with manuscript evidence for why it is sensible to believe in the Bible, so I decided to describe the amazing twentieth-century discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS
AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

"Have you ever heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls?" I asked.

"Sure," Dave replied.

When I inquired about how much he understood about this discovery, he replied, "Very little."

"Would it be OK if I explained this important discovery to you?" I asked.

He agreed, so I began by pointing out how approximately 900 different ancient texts were discovered in 11 different caves in the hills along the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea in Israel between 1947 and 1954. About a quarter of the texts were copies of Old Testament books.

The story begins in either late 1946 or early 1947 featuring a Bedouin teen who claimed that he was looking for a lost goat on the side of a hill. Because there was no ground-level entrance, he threw a rock into the hole of a cave seven feet off the ground. Hearing the smashing of pottery, the teen climbed inside and found several 2000-year-old clay jars containing seven ancient manuscripts. This is known as Cave 1.[22]

Over the next decade, copies of approximately 230 texts were discovered, including thousands of fragmentary pieces from all but one of the 39 Old Testament books.[23] The biblical texts dating between the second century BC and the first century AD were written on parchment (untanned sheepskin) as well as papyrus (a paperlike material made from Nile River reeds from Egypt). The original scribes belonged to a Jewish sect known as the Essenes, who lived in that area.

While several of the scrolls found in the caves were stored in pottery jars and wrapped in leather, most of the documents were damaged because they were left exposed to the physical elements. For instance, more than 500 texts discovered in Cave 4 had disintegrated into approximately 15,000 fragments. This cave was first discovered in 1952 by nomadic Bedouin who pirated many of the pieces. Fortunately, the Bedouin never found the bottom level that was later uncovered by archaeologists. Grant money from the Rockefeller Institute was used to reward those who returned their tiny fragments, which were often returned in matchboxes. Over many decades, scholars have worked tirelessly to piece these scrolls back together.
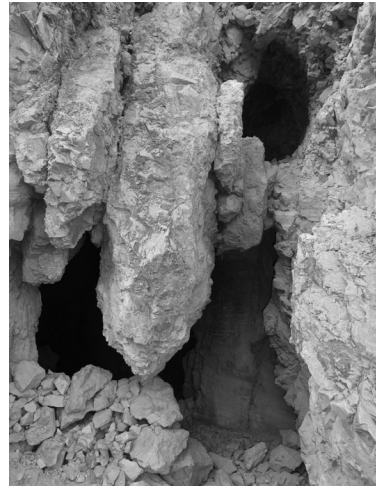
Cave 1 of the Dead Sea Scrolls as seen today in the hills near Qumran in Israel. A Bedouin shepherd threw a rock into the upper hole and heard the smashing of pottery jars containing two Old Testament scrolls of Isaiah. The entrance at the bottom was opened later by archaeologists. Photo by Eric Johnson.

As far as the 230 biblical scrolls found in the caves at Qumran, more than a third were copies of the first five books (Pentateuch, Torah, or Law). Deuteronomy (33 copies) was the largest, followed by Genesis (24), Exodus and Leviticus (18 each), and Numbers (11). This makes sense because these books are the most important for orthodox Jews. Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, the earliest manuscripts of the Old Testament dated no earlier than the tenth century AD.

This means that the scrolls dating from the second century BC to the first century AD bridge the gap by more than a millennium! Other popular biblical books were the Psalms (39), Isaiah (22), the minor prophets (10), and Daniel (8), all of which contained important eschatological (end-times) passages. The Essenes had developed a specific end-time theology and believed they would overthrow the Jerusalem temple controlled by the Sadducees, another Jewish sect.

The initial discovery in Cave 1 included two complete copies of the book of Isaiah, one of which was a pristine copy known as the Great Scroll of Isaiah. The biblical prophet included many prophesies of the Messiah along with a clear description of God's nature in chapters 43–45. When the Great Scroll of Isaiah (dated 125 BC) is compared to the earliest available text (Aleppo Codex from AD 900), the two are about 95 percent the same! Archaeologist Randall Price explains that "it was evident that, except for minor details (such as spelling) that do not affect the meaning of the text, the two documents were almost identical."[24]

Since most of the discrepancies (called "variants") involve obvious slips of the pen, spelling alterations, and accent marks that had worked their way into the Hebrew language during the 1000-year interim, most scholars do not see a problem with the 5 percent differential. Explaining how textual variants take place in the different biblical manuscripts, Price states,

> Yet we *can* say—and say with greater confidence than ever based on the witness of the Scrolls—that our present text is accurate and reliable, and that nothing affecting the doctrine of the original has been compromised or changed in

any way in the manuscript copies…Those who expected the Scrolls to produce a radical revision of the Bible have been disappointed, for these texts have only verified the reliability of the Old Testament as it appears in our modern translations.[25]

Biblical scholar Gleason Archer adds,

> A careful study of the variants of the various earliest manuscripts reveals that *none of them affects a single doctrine of Scripture.* The system of spiritual truth contained in the standard Hebrew text of the Old Testament is not in the slightest altered or compromised by any of the variant readings found in the Hebrew manuscripts…It is very evident that the vast majority of them are so inconsequential as to leave the meaning of each clause doctrinally unaffected.[26]

One scroll containing the Psalms was found in the Cave of the Letters near the Dead Sea Scroll caves and was excavated by archaeologists between 1960 and 1961. Previously, the earliest text of Psalm 22:16 dated about AD 900 can be translated as "like a *lion* are my hands and my feet." However, the Cave of the Letters' scroll shows a slight difference. Even though the words are remarkably close in spelling, the earliest text has the Hebrew verb for "pierced," not the Hebrew noun for "lion." "Lion" makes no sense in that context, while "pierced" is a prophetical reference to the crucifixion of Jesus.

THE EVIDENCE OF ADDITIONAL BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

After I explained to Dave the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, I wanted to introduce other archaeological discoveries that shed light on the Bible's history.

"Have you heard that there are archaeologists working in countries such as Israel, Turkey, and Italy who research the sites mentioned in the Bible?" I asked.

"I think I have. What exactly do they do?"

"They uncover biblical sites, including those that are being found regularly. Typically, the archaeologists can accurately determine the dates of what they find through such items as pottery and coins."

I pointed out how tells—artificial hills containing multiple civilizations built one on top of the other—are located throughout Israel. These are generally found near transportation (ancient roads) and water sources throughout Israel, both of which were important for a culture to survive. For instance, Bet She'an in northern Israel is where Saul's body was hanged on the city wall (1 Samuel 31:10-12). It was later known as Scythopolis, one of the ten Decapolis cities in the New Testament, and contains several dozen different civilizations going back at least 5000 years. Excavations in dozens of tells found throughout biblical lands have uncovered city walls, buildings, and artifacts—including utensils, arrowheads, and dishes—have made it possible for archaeologists to better comprehend what transpired at these sites.
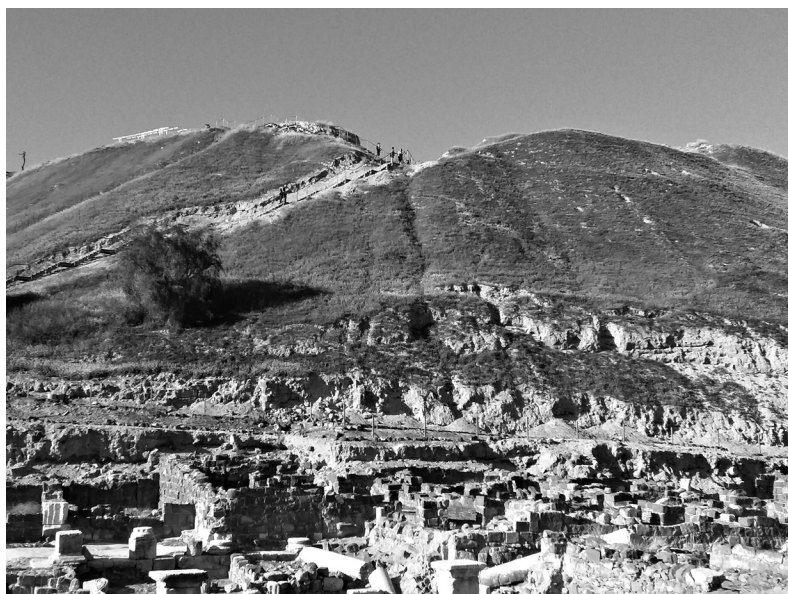
This tell (artificial hill) at Bet She'an in northern Israel contains more than 20 layers of ancient civilizations. Photo by Eric Johnson.

"Are you saying that archaeology proves the Bible?" Dave asked.

"It's impossible to empirically *prove* the Bible. For instance, it cannot be proven that Jesus fed 5000 people near the Sea of Galilee or that the resurrection of Jesus took place. But the probability of these events increases when we can ascertain the places and people described in the Bible."

Archaeologist John D. Currid says that "the purpose of archaeology (and related fields) is not to prove the Bible. The Bible doesn't need to be proved. It stands well enough on its own…Biblical archaeology serves to confirm, illuminate, and give 'earthiness' to the Scriptures. It helps to demonstrate that the events related in the biblical accounts took place in history."[27] Thus, archaeology is a tool to help document the people, places, and events described in the pages of God's Holy Word.[28]

Archaeologist Joel Kramer provides an excellent illustration of the importance of archeology to understanding the Bible:

> To better grasp the working relationship between the Bible and archaeology, consider the following analogy. A five-hundred-piece jigsaw puzzle box is found with only five pieces inside: one percent of the jigsaw puzzle remains, the rest of the pieces are lost. Those few pieces are important evidence supporting the reality that at one time, the whole puzzle existed. But what can be done with only five pieces out of a five-hundred-piece puzzle? Practically nothing. There is one help, however. The box lid is still intact, and it shows a picture of the whole puzzle. Equipped with this bigger picture, we can now see where the five pieces fit in to their larger context. In biblical archaeology, the five puzzle pieces represent the archaeology—what comes up out of the ground—while the picture on the front of the box represents the role of the Bible.[29]

While many archaeologists in Israel are not believers in God or Christianity, these trained professionals typically use the Bible as their primary source to understand what they are excavating. They realize that this is the best available source to interpret their discoveries.[30] Even though only

a small fraction of the possible biblical sites have been fully excavated in countries such as Israel, Turkey, Jordan, Greece, and Italy, the amount of information uncovered throughout the biblical lands is impressive.

I pointed out to Dave my favorite biblical discoveries, including artifacts, uncovered in the twentieth century:

The Pilate Stone. Discovered in 1961 under the theatre at Caesarea Maritima on the western coast of Israel, this first century AD stone inscription contains the name and title of the biblical figure Pontius Pilate who condemned Jesus to the cross (Matthew 27:2; Luke 3:1). Along with a ring owned by Pilate found at Herodium in 1968 and identified in 2018, these are the only two archaeological artifacts uncovered from this otherwise insignificant Roman ruler.

Hezekiah's Tunnel. A 1750-foot tunnel in the City of David in Jerusalem was chiseled out of bedrock by workers who dug from opposite ends during the reign of King Hezekiah. This underground tunnel was built about 700 BC before an expected Assyrian assault, allowing water from a spring located outside the city walls to secretly flow to the city of Jerusalem (2 Kings 20:20). A descriptive marker chiseled in the stone wall at the southern end of the tunnel was discovered more than a century ago. Known as the Siloam Inscription, it was removed and is housed today in the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul, Turkey. Adventurous tourists visiting the City of David can slosh their way through this water tunnel while feeling the chisel marks made on the walls more than 2700 years ago.
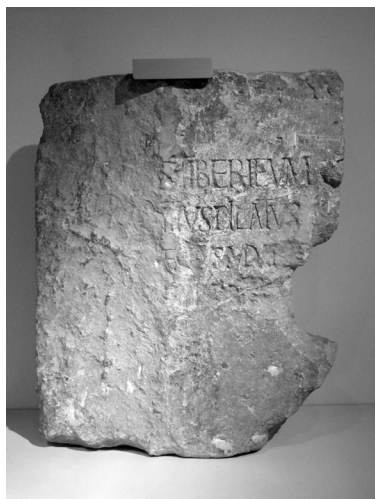
The Pilate Stone is displayed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and dates about 2000 years ago. This is the first archaeological evidence for the historical figure Pontius Pilate, the procurator who judged Jesus. Photo by Eric Johnson.

The Tel Dan Stele. Discovered in the mid-1990s in northern Israel,

this stone contains a triumphal inscription written in Aramaic by Hazael of Aram-Damascus, an important regional figure in the late ninth century BC. The king boasted of his victories over the king of the "House of David." It was the first time David's name was found in any archaeological find, showing that both Israel and Judah were important kingdoms at this time. The artifact is housed at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Pool of Bethesda. This site in the old city of Jerusalem is where Jesus healed a paralyzed man (John 5:2-17). Located a short distance from the Sheep Gate, the pool was excavated in 1956.

Jacob's Well. Originally dug by the patriarch Jacob (Genesis 33:18-19; 48:22), this well in the West Bank of Israel is where Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman in John 4. It still produces fresh water and can be visited today in the basement of a modern Greek Orthodox church located in the modern city of Nablus.

Magdala. An ancient town near the shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel, just north of the city of Tiberias, was the hometown of Mary Magdalene, a good friend of Jesus (Luke 8:1-3; John 19:25; 20:11-18). In 2009, the Roman Catholic Church prepared to build a retreat center at this beautiful location. Before builders are allowed to dig in Israel, archaeologists are legally required to search the site. To everyone's surprise, a Jewish town from 2000 years ago was discovered below the ground along with a synagogue that, scholars insist, Jesus would have known. Archaeological discoveries in Israel happen regularly and confirm the history of the Bible!

Names can be another indicator that real people and places are talked about in the Bible. Consider Luke, the author of Luke and Acts who provided many details in his writing. Some antagonists have pointed to Luke 2:1-2 as a historical contradiction. It says, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria." This is the only place the Bible mentions Quirinius. Jewish historian Josephus said that Quirinius ruled from AD 5 to AD 6, a decade after the birth of Jesus.

Was Luke wrong? Archaeological evidence, including information

from one ancient coin, shows how a "Quirinius" served as governor from 11 BC until the time of Herod. Scholars debate if this was a second man named Quirinius or the same man who served as the governor at two different times. Regardless, Quirinius was the governor at that time, so Luke was correct and his report is accurate.

One more example to support the historicity of Luke's account is found in Acts 18:12-17 when Paul appeared before Gallio, the proconsul of the region of Achaia about AD 51. In the early twentieth century, archaeologists discovered nine fragments of a letter at the temple of Apollo in Delphi, Greece, that was written by the Roman emperor Claudius dated AD 52. Known as the Delphi or Gallio Inscription, one fragment written in Koine Greek mentions the proconsul Gallio, thus fitting the timeline of Acts 18 to a tee! Instead of being shown to be a fraud, Luke accurately described the historical situation of his day.[31]

DID THE EXODUS HAPPEN?

Skeptics often bring up the lack of evidence for the 40-year wandering of more than a million people during the time of the Exodus.

The Magdala synagogue first discovered near the Sea of Galilee in 2009. Photo by Eric Johnson.

Would it even be reasonable to think that any evidence could have survived? A total of 3400 years of desert sand makes it impossible to do archaeology. Besides, the Israelites were a nomadic people during that time and never stayed in any one place long enough to build or leave behind evidence.

Still, archaeology can be used to show how there was an exodus during the second half of the fifteenth century BC. Consider just four discoveries from Egypt as detailed by biblical archaeologist Titus Kennedy:

The Papyrus Brooklyn: A papyrus manuscript discovered in Egypt from the seventeenth century BC—a century or two before the Exodus—contained Hebrew servant names. The list showed how Hebrews lived in Egypt before the Exodus.

Tomb of Rekmire: A mural from the time of the Exodus in 1450 BC discovered in Egypt depicts bricks made with mud and straw. Another text known as the Louvre Leather Roll shows how a certain number of bricks were required to be manufactured even with a lack of materials or the slaves were punished.

Nomads of YHWH: Hieroglyphic inscriptions date to 1400 BC and describe the "land of the nomads of YHWH," the earliest evidence

The Gallio Inscription in the museum at Delphi, Greece. Photo by Loren Pankratz.

of Yahweh, the most intimate name for God. These were written on the walls of two different Egyptian temples as well as a temple pillar and showed how the only people who worshiped Yahweh were the Israelites.

Merneptah Stele: Dated 1219 BC, this is a ten-foot-high Egyptian stone monument with 28 lines of hieroglyphics describing military campaigns by Pharaoh Merneptah. There is a section on the stele that spells "Israel" in Egyptian hieroglyphs referring to a group of people, not a country. According to Kennedy, the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan after the wilderness wandering just as Joshua and Judges detail.[32]

It is realistic to believe that a 40-year exodus of God's people did take place. Of course, faith is required for some biblical events (such as stories involving miracles), but there is so much evidence to make belief in the biblical people and the places reasonable. All things considered, the Book of Mormon has nothing close to the historical attestation so abundantly found to support the historicity of the Bible.

I enjoy leading annual tours to the lands of the Bible, as I have taken more than 500 pilgrims to sites throughout Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, and Italy on more than a dozen trips since 2009. As one traveler told me, "I used to read the Bible in black and white, but now I read it in living color!"

In the next chapter, we continue the discussion with Dave as we consider the New Testament copies, the changes made in the Bible, and possible biblical contradictions. We will also have a chance to talk about the "telephone game" illustration often used to criticize the composition of the Bible. Understanding the accuracy of God's Word is vital for the case of Christianity to be made.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS*

1. The eighth Article of Faith says that the Bible is true "as far as it is translated correctly." Why is the word *transmitted* more precise than *translated* when describing how the text was passed down through the centuries? Why does making this distinction matter?

2. What is the difference between inerrancy and infallibility?

3. What are the Dead Sea Scrolls? How have these proven to be so valuable to scholars in determining the accuracy of the Old Testament?

4. How can biblical archaeology support the case of the people, places, and events described in the Bible? Do you have a favorite archaeological discovery or two? (It doesn't have to be listed in the chapter.) Why do you think that particular discovery is significant?

5. A critic might say there is no evidence for the Exodus led by Moses. Is that true?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Entry-Level Resources

> Josh and Sean McDowell, *Inspired: Experience the Power of God's Word* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011).

> Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

Middle-Level Resources

> Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries that Bring the Bible to Life* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2020).

> Randall Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996).

> Joel P. Kramer, *Where God Came Down: The Archaeological Evidence* (Brigham City, UT: Expedition Bible, 2020).

Advanced Resource

> Craig L. Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible? An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013).