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Authentic Christianity, as opposed to cultural (man-made) religion, is based on divine revelation. God did not create man and then leave him to grope around in the dark, trying to discover his Creator. God has always been the aggressor in making Himself known. He has always taken the initiative in revealing Himself to humankind. He does this through revelation.

Revelation makes good sense when you consider that God is our Father. Loving parents would never deliberately keep out of their children’s sight so that the children grew up without knowing of the parents’ existence. That would be the height of cruelty. Likewise, to create us and then not communicate with us would not be in character for a loving heavenly Father.

The word communication brings to mind someone coming to us to tell us about himself—telling us what he knows, opening up his mind to us, asking for our attention, and seeking a response.¹ That
is what divine revelation is all about. God has come to us to tell us about Himself, tell us what He knows, open His mind to us, ask for our attention, and seek a response from us.

God has revealed Himself in two primary ways—through general revelation and special revelation. Let's take a brief look at both of these.

**General Revelation and Special Revelation**

*General revelation* refers to revelation that is available to all persons of all times. For example, God reveals Himself to everyone through the world of nature (Psalm 19).

By observing nature, we can detect something of God's existence and discern something of His divine power and glory. We might say that the whole world is God's kindergarten to teach us the ABCs of the reality of God. And since Jesus Christ is the one who created the physical universe (Colossians 1:16), the revelation of God in the universe is Christ’s doing.

The great French theologian John Calvin wrote about this:

> Men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see God. Upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory. This skillful ordering of the universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible.²

Of course, we can only learn so much from general revelation. For example, general revelation does not tell us anything about God’s cure for man’s sin problem. It doesn’t tell us the gospel message. (These kinds of things require *special* revelation.) But general revelation does give us enough information about God’s existence that if we reject it and refuse to turn to God, God is justified in bringing condemnation against us (Romans 1:20).

*Special revelation* refers to God's specific and clear revelation through His mighty acts in history, the person and work of Jesus
Christ, and His message spoken through Old Testament prophets (like Isaiah and Daniel) and New Testament apostles (like Paul and Peter). Let’s take a brief look at each of these.

**God’s Revelation in History**

If a personal God really did create humankind, then we would naturally expect that He would reveal Himself among us in the outworking of human history. And indeed, God has manifested Himself historically.

God is the *living* God, and He has communicated knowledge of Himself through the ebb and flow of historical experience. The Bible is first and foremost a record of God’s interactions with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel, the apostles Paul, Peter, and John, and many others in biblical times.

God’s greatest revelatory act in the Old Testament was Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt. God, through Moses, inflicted ten plagues on the Egyptians—plagues that showed His awesome power (Exodus 7–12). God’s demonstration of power was all the more impressive because the Egyptians believed their many false gods could protect them from such plagues.

Whenever God performed miracles and orchestrated events, He always talked about them. He never left a miracle or event to speak for itself. Nor did He leave people to infer whatever conclusions they wanted to draw from the event. God made sure that when a significant event occurred, a prophet was on hand to interpret it.

For example, Moses was present to record everything related to the Exodus. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were on hand to record all that happened during Israel’s time of exile. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were present to preserve a record of the Israelites’ return from exile. And the apostles testified about Jesus’ life and death. God has revealed Himself, and He has always made sure His actions were adequately recorded!

Here’s an important fact we should pay close attention to. First
Peter 1:10-11 tells us that the Spirit of Christ was the one who spoke through the mouths of all the prophets who wrote the Bible. This means that the revelation that came through the prophets was Christ's doing! From the very beginning, Christ has been providing revelation about God (John 1:18).

**God’s Ultimate Revelation in Jesus Christ**

The only way for God to be able to fully do and say all that He wanted was to actually leave His eternal residence and enter the arena of humanity. This He did in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was Immanuel—“God with us” (Matthew 1:23). He was God’s ultimate special revelation, God’s show and tell.

Why did Jesus have to come as God’s fullest revelation? Because God is a Spirit. And because He is a Spirit, He is invisible. With our natural senses, we can’t perceive anything about Him except what we can detect in general revelation.

Not only that, but man is also spiritually blind and deaf. Since man’s fall in the Garden of Eden, man has lacked true spiritual perception (1 Corinthians 2:14). So humankind was in need of special revelation from God in the worst sort of way.

Jesus—as eternal God—took on human flesh so He could be God’s fullest revelation to man (Hebrews 1:2-3). Jesus was a revelation of God not just in His person (as God) but in His life and teachings as well. By observing the things Jesus did and the things Jesus said, we learn a great deal about God. Jesus revealed and demonstrated…

- God’s awesome power (John 3:2)
- God’s incredible wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24)
- God’s boundless love (1 John 3:16)
- God’s unfathomable grace (John 1:14,17)

These verses show why Jesus told a group of Pharisees, “When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one
who sent me” (John 12:44). Jesus likewise told His disciple Philip that “anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Jesus was the ultimate revelation of God!

**God’s Revelation in the Bible**

Another key means of special revelation is the Bible. In this one book, God has provided everything He wants us to know about Him and how we can have a relationship with Him.

God is the one who caused the Bible to be written. Through it He speaks to us today just as He spoke to people in ancient times when those words were first given. We are to receive the Bible as God’s words to us and revere and obey it as such. As we submit to the Bible’s authority, we place ourselves under the authority of the living God.

The Scriptures are…

God preaching, God talking, God telling, God instructing, God setting before us the right way to think and speak about him. The Scriptures are God showing us himself: God communicating to us who he is and what he has done so that in the response of faith we may truly know him and live our lives in fellowship with Him.

**The Inspiration of the Bible**

Amazingly, the Bible’s authors were from all walks of life—kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, physicians, statesmen, scholars, poets, and farmers. These individuals lived in different cultures, had vastly different experiences, and often were quite different in character. Yet despite these differences, we can see the Bible’s remarkable continuity from Genesis to Revelation.

How could this be? How did God accomplish this? We call the process inspiration.

When we say the Bible is inspired, we mean that God superintended the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities
(and even their writing styles), they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man. Because of inspiration we can rest assured that what the human authors wrote was precisely what God wanted written.

The Greek word we translate as inspiration literally means “God-breathed.” Because Scripture is breathed out by God, it is true and has no errors. We can put this in the form of a logical argument: The first premise of our argument is that God is true (Romans 3:4). The second premise is that God breathed out the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16). Our conclusion, then, is simple: Therefore, the Scriptures are true (John 17:17).

The Holy Spirit Is the Agent of Inspiration

Second Peter 1:21 tells us that “prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Even though God used people—His prophets and apostles—to write down His Word, they were all literally “borne along” by the Holy Spirit. This means the authors were not the originators of God’s message. God did not permit the will of sinful human beings to misdirect or erroneously record His message. Rather, “God moved and the prophet mouthed these truths; God revealed and man recorded His word.”

The Greek word for “carried along” in 2 Peter 1:21 is used in an interesting way in Acts 27:15-17. In that passage, we read about a group of experienced sailors who could not navigate their ship because the wind was so strong. The ship was being driven, directed, and carried along by the wind. This is similar to the Spirit’s driving, directing, and carrying the human authors of the Bible as He wished. So “carried along” in 2 Peter 1:21 is a strong word, indicating the Spirit’s complete superintendence over the human authors. Yet just as the sailors were active on the ship (though the wind, not the sailors, ultimately
controlled the ship’s movement), so also were the human authors active in writing as the Spirit directed.

As a direct result of the Holy Spirit’s superintendence over the human authors, the Scriptures are inerrant. Bible scholar Edward J. Young, in his book *Thy Word Is Truth*, explains inerrancy this way: “The Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to make mistakes, and are incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with the truth.”

Because the written revelation from God has been recorded under the Spirit’s superintendence and is the very breath of God, the Bible is therefore authoritative—just as authoritative as God Himself. We cannot separate the authority of Scripture from the authority of God. This means that what the Bible affirms (or denies), it affirms (or denies) with the very authority of God. For this reason, theologian John Calvin said, “We owe to Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God.”

**Are All Holy Books the Same?**

Despite the strong evidence for the Bible’s uniqueness, I often encounter people today who espouse the politically correct view that the Bible is not unique because it teaches the same kinds of things that we find in the Muslim Koran and the Hindu Vedas. They suggest that all these holy books are essentially the same and only superficially different. The truth of the matter is that these books are essentially different and only superficially the same.

An honest examination of the contents of these books quickly reveals that the differences between them are so substantive that if one of them is correct, the others must necessarily be wrong. (The evidence is on the Bible’s side.) Consider the doctrine of God, the most fundamental doctrine of any holy book. According to the Christian Bible, Jesus revealed one personal God who is triune in nature (Mark 12:29; John 4:24; 5:18-19). In the Muslim Koran, Muhammad taught that God is one but is not a Trinity. Confucius wrote about
many gods. The Hindu Vedas also point to many gods, though they refer to a single impersonal god that underlies them all. Zoroaster’s writings promote religious dualism—the belief in both a good god and a bad god. Buddha taught that God was essentially irrelevant. Clearly, these various religious leaders and their holy books present completely contradictory views of the nature of God.

We should not ignore the radical and irreconcilable differences between the Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and other so-called holy books. If the Bible truly is God’s Word, as I have sought to demonstrate, then these other holy books cannot be God’s Word.

**Historical Support for the Bible**

One of the big theological movements in the second half of the twentieth century involved “the quest for the historical Jesus.” In this quest, many critics—such as those affiliated with the Jesus Seminar (composed of extremely liberal Christian scholars)—have undermined the Bible as a historical document. They have concluded that we cannot trust what the Bible says about Jesus, especially regarding His identity and His teachings.

The truth is that significant historical support exists for the Bible—the Old and the New Testaments—including archaeological support, manuscript support, and extra-biblical support (that is, support from documents outside the Bible). Let us briefly consider the facts.

**Archaeological Support**

The word *archaeology* literally means “study of ancient things.” Biblical archaeology, then, involves a study of ancient things related to biblical people, places, and events. Archaeological finds produced by both Christian and non-Christian scholars have proved the Bible’s accuracy and reliability over and over again. This includes verification for numerous customs, places, names, and events that the Bible mentions.

*The Hittites.* For many years the existence of the Hittites, a powerful
people who lived during the time of Abraham (Genesis 23:10-20), was questioned because no archaeological digs had uncovered anything about them. Today the critics are silenced. Abundant archaeological evidence for the existence of the Hittites during the time of Abraham has been uncovered. The University of Chicago even offers a doctorate in Hittite Studies.

*Handwriting during the time of Moses.* Critics once claimed that Moses could not have written the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) because handwriting had not yet been invented. However, archaeological discoveries of ancient inscriptions now conclusively prove that handwriting did exist in Moses’ lifetime.

*Sodom and Gomorrah.* Critics once claimed that Genesis 10, 13–14, and 18–19 are full of myth because Sodom and Gomorrah never existed. These critics have now been silenced by abundant archaeological evidence of the existence of these cities.

Many other archaeological evidences support the Bible. Fossil graveyards around the world attest to the universal flood of Noah’s day. Archaeologists have discovered the grave of Abraham’s wife, Sarah, as well as illustrations of Hebrew slaves making bricks for the cities of Pithom and Rameses in Egypt. Plenty of archaeological finds point to David and Solomon and their respective empires. Many people believe the actual house of Joseph (Jesus’ father) has been discovered in Nazareth, as well as the tomb of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. Other discoveries include the grave box of Caiaphas the high priest, the synagogue in Capernaum where Jesus often taught, the Pool of Siloam (John 9:7), and Jacob’s Well (John 4:12). A stone discovered at a Roman theater in Caesarea bears the name of Pontius Pilate.

Bible scholar Donald J. Wiseman is correct in his assessment that “the geography of Bible lands and visible remains of antiquity have been gradually recorded until today more than 25,000 sites within this region and dating to Old Testament times, in their broadest
sense, have been located.” Nelson Glueck, a specialist in ancient literature, did an exhaustive study that led to this conclusion: “It can be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.” Well-known scholar William F. Albright, following a comprehensive study, concluded that “discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition of the value of the Bible as a source of history.”

What About the New Testament Gospels?

In my travels, I often encounter people—influenced by the Jesus Seminar—who claim the New Testament Gospels are man-made documents and therefore contain historical errors. The evidence, however, supports the historical accuracy of the four Gospels. Let’s consider Luke as an example.

Modern archaeologists who have studied the Gospel of Luke say Dr. Luke’s writings are accurate, erudite, and eloquent, approaching classical Greek. At the very outset of his Gospel, Luke is careful to emphasize that he based his work on reliable, firsthand sources (Luke 1:1-4). He wanted to preserve the truth about Jesus in an ordered and accurate way. Archaeologists have occasionally thought Luke might be wrong about a particular issue, but further research has always vindicated Luke.

Sir William Ramsay was a skeptic when he began his 30-year study on Luke. Reversing his initial skepticism, he concluded that “Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy…this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.” Ramsey noted that Luke’s critics are “pre-archaeological.” Luke, who also gave us the book of Acts, wrote about one-fourth of the New Testament—more than any other writer, including Paul!

In support of Luke’s accuracy, classical scholar and historian Cohn Hemer painstakingly identified 84 facts in the final 16 chapters of Luke’s book of Acts that have been archaeologically verified. Since
Luke has a proven track record on these 84 points, he should be given the benefit of the doubt on other issues he speaks of that have not yet been archaeologically verified. Luke’s critics have an uphill battle.

**Manuscript Support**

We also have extensive manuscript evidence that points to the reliability of the Bible. We presently possess 5686 partial and complete manuscript copies of the New Testament. These manuscript copies are very ancient and are available for inspection. Here are a few highlights about them:

- The Chester Beatty papyrus (P45) dates to the third century AD and contains the four Gospels and the book of Acts (chapters 4–17). \( P \) stands for papyrus.
- The Chester Beatty papyrus (P46) dates to about AD 200 and contains ten Pauline epistles (all but the pastorals) and the book of Hebrews.
- The Chester Beatty papyrus (P47) dates to the third century AD and contains Revelation 9:10–17:2.
- The Bodmer papyrus (P66) dates to about AD 200 and contains the Gospel of John.
- The Bodmer papyrus (P75) dates to the early third century and contains Luke and John.
- The Sinaiticus uncial manuscript dates to the fourth century and contains the entire New Testament.
- The Vaticanus uncial manuscript dates to the fourth century and contains most of the New Testament except part of Hebrews (9:14 to the end), the pastoral epistles, Philemon, and Revelation.

If one adds into the mix over 10,000 Latin Vulgate manuscripts and at least 9300 other early versions—including Ethiopic, Slavic, Armenian, and other versions—the total approximates 25,000 manuscripts that cite portions of the New Testament. This far exceeds the
number of manuscripts of other ancient documents, which, in most cases, is fewer than ten.

We also have about 86,000 quotations of the New Testament from the early church fathers and several thousand lectionaries (church-service books containing Scripture quotations used in the early centuries of Christianity). In fact, even if we did not have a single manuscript copy of the Bible, the early church fathers provide enough quotations of the New Testament for scholars to reconstruct all but 11 verses of the entire New Testament from material written within 150 to 200 years of the time of Christ.

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide further evidence. In these scrolls, discovered at Qumran in 1947, we have Old Testament manuscripts dating from 150 BC—about a thousand years earlier than the other Old Testament manuscripts previously in our possession. A comparison of the two sets of manuscripts shows that they are essentially the same, with very few changes. The fact that manuscripts separated by a thousand years are essentially the same indicates the incredible accuracy of the Old Testament’s manuscript transmission.

Extra-biblical Support

Both Christian and secular extra-biblical references that date very close to the time of Christ lend support to the accuracy of the Bible. Christian sources include these:

1. *Clement*. Clement was a leading elder in the church at Rome. In his epistle to the Corinthians (c. AD 95), he cites portions of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and he introduces them as Jesus’ actual words.\(^{13}\)

2. *Papias*. Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia and author of *Exposition of Oracles of the Lord* (c. AD 130), cites all four Gospels. He specifically says that John’s Gospel contains Jesus’ words.\(^{14}\)

3. *Justin Martyr*. Justin Martyr, the foremost apologist of the
second century (AD 140), considered all four Gospels to be Scripture.

4. **The Didache.** The Didache, an ancient manual of Christianity from the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, cites portions of the three synoptic Gospels and refers to them as Jesus’ words. This manual quotes extensively from Matthew’s Gospel.

5. **Polycarp.** Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, quotes portions of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and he refers to them as Jesus’ words (c. AD 150).

6. **Irenaeus.** Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp (c. AD 170), quotes from 23 of the 27 New Testament books, omitting only Philemon, James, 2 Peter, and 3 John.\(^1\)

Secular extra-biblical sources also mention various aspects of Jesus’ life, thus lending support to the Bible. These include ancient historians such as Tacitus, Jewish sources such as Josephus and the Talmud, and government officials such as Pliny the Younger. Let us consider a few details:

**Josephus.** Josephus, a Jewish historian born in AD 37, wrote toward the end of the first century. In *The Antiquities* (book 20, chapter 9; and book 18, chapter 3), Josephus corroborates that Jesus was the leader of Christians, that He did wonderful works, and that He was a martyr (by crucifixion) for the Christian cause.\(^1\)

**The Talmud.** We find some references to Jesus in the Talmud, a collection of ancient rabbinic writings on Jewish law and tradition that constitute the basis of religious authority in Orthodox Judaism. Of course, the Jewish leaders were against Jesus, so the Talmud’s references are understandably unflattering. Keeping Jewish hostility in mind, we see that the Talmudic text indicates that Jesus was born of an adulteress (a Jewish attempt at explaining away the virgin birth), that He practiced sorcery (an attempt to explain away His miracles), and that He was crucified “on the eve of the Passover.”\(^1\)

**Pliny the Younger.** Pliny the Younger (AD 62-113) was a Roman
governor whose personal correspondence to his friend Trajan refers to Christians he arrested. In Pliny’s writings we find extra-biblical corroboration that Christians met for worship on a “certain fixed day” (Sunday), worshipped Jesus, changed their behavior as a result of their commitment to Christ, and celebrated the Lord’s Supper with “food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”

Tacitus. The Roman historian Tacitus (AD 56-117) provides extra-biblical evidence that Christians derived their name from a historical person named Jesus Christ (“Christus”). He “suffered the extreme penalty”—a reference to Roman crucifixion. Tacitus mentions that the crucifixion occurred during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of Pontius Pilatus. Tacitus also makes reference to “a most mischievous superstition,” possibly a reference to the resurrection.

Thallus. In AD 52, Thallus made reference to the darkness that engulfed the land at the time of Christ’s resurrection. We do not possess actual copies of Thallus’ work, but other people’s writings preserve some of his words. In AD 221 Julius Africanus quoted Thallus: “‘On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness, and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down.’ This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.”

Clearly, this extra-biblical evidence provides significant information that corroborates the New Testament record. Taken in conjunction with the archaeological and manuscript evidence, we must conclude that the claim that the New Testament Gospels are not historically reliable is groundless.

My primary goal in this chapter has been to demonstrate that God communicates with His people. Because the Bible, which records God’s revelation to man, is under constant attack in our day, I have provided a strong case for the inspiration of the Bible with substantive historical evidence that supports the Bible’s trustworthiness. This is critically important because throughout the rest of the book, I will build my discussion of Christian doctrines on the foundation of the Bible.
Discussion Questions

1. How has God revealed Himself throughout history? What is significant about these methods of communication?

2. What do you think are the most significant evidences for the trustworthiness of the Bible?

3. How many evidences can you think of that prove that not all holy books are the same?