

## Be Astonished at What God Has Said, Part 2

*Psalm 119:18, 27, 72, 89*

**D**r. W. R. White pastored several churches in Texas and Oklahoma in the early half of the twentieth century, and also served as the President of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, from 1948 to 1961. He once told of a brilliant Chinese man who attended a series of services held by Dr. White. The young man asked for a copy of the New Testament, and he was given one. Later, he returned, declared his faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, and gave this testimony:

*I took the New Testament home with me. I sat down on the floor and read it through before I did anything else. I have read the great writings of Confucius. I wanted to satisfy my hungry heart there. I knocked at the door but no answer came for Confucius was dead. I read the message of Buddhism seeking that for which my soul so profoundly longed. I knocked at the door of Buddha but no answer came for Buddha was dead. I read the Koran. My soul longed to find peace there. I knocked at the door but no answer came for Muhammad was dead. I read the writings of the greatest patriots and religious leaders of the past. I knocked but no answer came. While reading this New Testament, I found that it claimed its Author to be alive. I knocked at that door. I found the living Christ. He came into my soul. Here my hungry heart found peace, a peace for which it has longed.*

(As told in *Why I Preach that the Bible is Literally True*, by W. A. Criswell, p. 167)

That young Chinese man found the Bible to be astonishing, in that it did for him what nothing else had been able to do. That the Bible is an astonishing Book is a fact that very few of us here today would dispute. However, we may not recognize that the Bible is far more astonishing than we know. Today, we're going to explore just a few, relatively unknown facts about the Bible that will demonstrate how amazing the Scriptures really are.

### **1 It is amazing because of the accuracy of the ancient manuscripts**

When I worked in the Christian bookstore, I frequently heard customers exclaim that they never knew there were so many options when it comes to picking out a Bible! They would say something like "I thought I would just run in here and pick out one, but there are so many options that I'm just confused!" The translations, study Bible options, colors, bindings, age groupings, etc., cause even those of us who worked with them every day to sometimes get bewildered.

It is important for us to understand how we came to have our own copies of the Bible today. In ancient Israel there were men whose life work it was to make copies of the manuscripts which eventually formed our Bibles. They were committed to make exact copies of the scrolls, and this is how they did it. They counted the exact number of letters, and knew precisely how many letters should fit on one line—no more, no less.

When a scribe completed his copy, a master examiner would sit down with it and count every individual letter to make absolutely certain that no mistakes had been made. The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is called “aleph,” and they knew exactly how many “alephs” there should be in a scroll. The last letter of the Hebrew alphabet is called “taw,” and they knew how many “taws” there should be in a scroll—and they painstakingly counted each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet all the way through every scroll. If they discovered an error, the entire copy was destroyed to prevent it from ever being used as a master copy in the future.

Take one page from one of Shakespeare’s plays, or from a medical dictionary, or from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, or the *New York Times*. Can you imagine any editor or proofreader spending that much time poring over not only every word, but every letter to make sure that it was correct? Can you imagine an editor saying “In this book the letter “J” should occur 1437 times, but I only count 1436. Destroy it, and don’t let it be published”? Yet that was the meticulous care given to every scroll copied by hand by the ancient scribes.

Herodotus was a famous Greek historian. More than two thousand years after he wrote his history there are only eight copies of it which could be found. More than two thousand years after the philosopher Plato wrote his books there are only seven copies. Of Aristotle’s work there are only five copies still in existence. Yet of the Bible we have literally thousands of the ancient manuscripts which were carefully preserved through the providence of God and the careful attention to detail given by the scribes.

## **2 It is amazing because of the unity of its themes.**

The Bible tells one complete, utterly amazing story. It was written over a period of more than 1,500 years by more than forty different authors, and yet they all agree, and they all tell the same story. Let’s illustrate it this way. Suppose we decided that we were going to construct a hospital, and I were to tell you that we were to each show up at a certain time on a certain day, with a separate

piece of that hospital, and when we all arrived, we would put our building together. But suppose further that I told you that a further stipulation was that none of us communicated with each other or anyone else, and none of us knew what the others were going to bring, what size, shape or material, and yet when we put them all together, they were going to fit perfectly. Not only would they fit together perfectly, but we would also have all the equipment necessary to operate a hospital and care for all its patients. That sounds impossible, doesn't it? Yet that is exactly what is represented between the pages of your Bible.

A primary example of that can be found in the Psalms. The Psalms tell us that the Messiah would speak in parables, that He would be impaled on a cross, that He would be mocked and ridiculed, that He would be thirsty and given wine mixed with gall, that His enemies would gamble for His clothes, and that not one bone of His would be broken. We are told in the Psalms that the Messiah would rise from the dead, that He would ascend into heaven, that He would sit at the right hand of God, that He is our high priest, that He will judge the nations, and that He would come in glory in the last days. All of those things are there in the Psalms.

When you read Psalm 22, it sounds as though the one speaking was being crucified. Look with me at that psalm, at verses 7-8:

*All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.*

That is exactly what happened while Jesus was hanging on the cross. Next, focus on verses 14-18:

*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*

When you realize that David never experienced anything like that, it sounds pretty amazing. But when you further realize that this was written seven hundred years before crucifixion was even invented, you have to bow your knees in adoration of the Great God who masterminded all of this. From beginning to end, there is perfect harmony. Genesis agrees with Revelation. Scripture agrees with Scripture.

### **3 It is amazing because of the explicit attention to detail.**

The details begin in the very first verse in the very first book of the entire Bible. Most of us know it by heart: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* That’s what it says, but most of us do not realize that that is not *all* that it says. In the Hebrew language, it looks like this:

בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ  
the earth and the heavens God created in the  
beginning

Notice that for the word in the middle there is no corresponding English word. That is because the Hebrew there is untranslatable. So with all of the attention the ancient scribes gave to accuracy and correctness when they were copying the scrolls, why has this little two-letter word survived all these thousands of years? Let me tell you that I believe that every word, every detail in Scripture is there for a purpose and by divine blueprint. So why this?

Remember that I said just minutes ago that Scripture agrees with Scripture, that Genesis agrees with Revelation? Revelation 1:8 tells us that Jesus said about Himself, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega.”* The New Testament was written in Greek, and “Alpha” and “Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In Genesis 1:1, those two little letters are “Aleph” and “Taw”—we mentioned them earlier. They are the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. So right there, right in the exact middle of the first verse of the Bible, we find the Son of God, Beginning and End, First and Last! Amazing!

Genesis 5 contains an astonishing message hidden in the names of the genealogy. We won’t read the entire passage, but begin with verse 3:

*When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died. When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh.*

Then verse 9 reads, *When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan.* Then verse 12: *When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel.* On it goes, all the way through v. 32, where we are introduced to Noah. So what’s the astonishing message?

It's found in the root meanings of these Hebrew names:

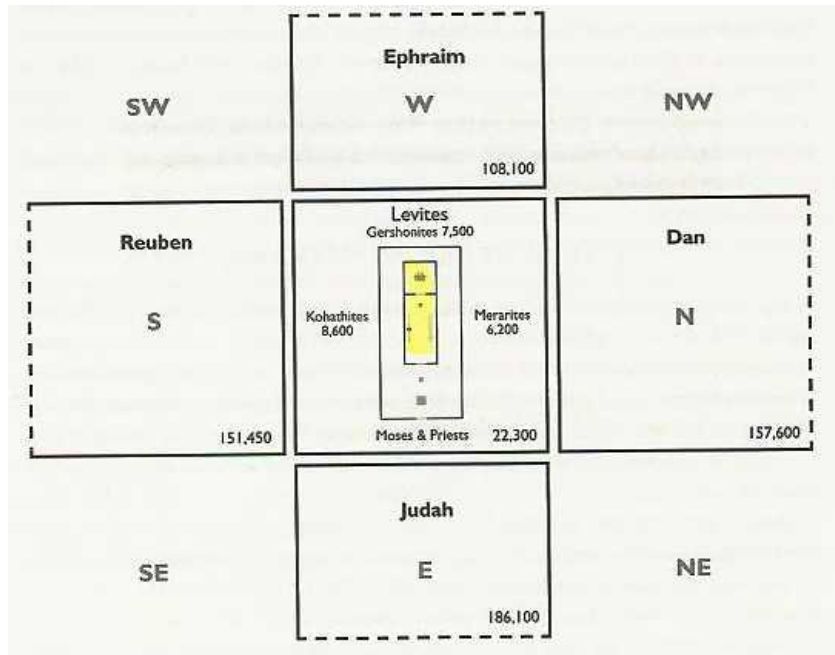
Adam:	“man”
Seth:	“appointed”
Enosh:	“mortal”
Kenan:	“sorrow”
Mahalalel:	“the blessed God”
Jared:	“shall come down”
Enoch:	“teaching”
Methusaleh:	“his death shall bring”
Lamech:	“despairing”
Noah:	“comfort” or “rest”

Now that passage of what child belonged to which man makes much more sense! When you put all those names together, and read them as a sentence, this is what you get:

*Man [is] appointed mortal sorrow. The blessed God shall come down teaching. His death shall bring the despairing comfort and rest.*

This is a summary of the New Testament hidden in the opening pages of the book of Genesis! Why would God hide it? Remember that those ancient Hebrews could actually *read* Hebrew, and they knew exactly what it said, even if they didn't understand it.

In Numbers God gave Moses and Aaron precise directions on how to set up camp while the Israelites were wandering around in the wilderness. Numbers 1 gives the detail of how many people were in each tribe. Number 2 tells us where each of those tribes was to pitch camp whenever they stopped. The Tent of Meeting was to be in the very center of the camp. It tells us that *on the east, toward the sunrise*, that the tribe of Judah was to camp under the standard (or banner) for the tribe of Judah, joined by the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun. We are told in precise detail which tribes were to camp where, in relation to the Tent of Meeting, or the Tabernacle. Each of them was to camp under the banner of the lead tribe for that division. To the south was the tribe of Reuben, joined by Simeon and Gad. To the west was Ephraim, and they were joined by Manasseh and Benjamin. To the north was Dan, joined by Asher and Naphtali.



This is how it would look from above. If allowances are made for the number of people in each camp (those details are also given in chapter 2), and assuming that more people would need more space, we must elongate the camp for the tribe of Judah. This means that the Israelites, every time they stopped in the wilderness to camp during that entire forty year period, camped in the shape of a cross, with the cross facing east!

There's even more symbolism in the standards, or banners, for each of the main divisions. Each tribe had a banner under which they marched. Jewish tradition says that the colors of the twelve banners corresponded in color to the 12 stones in the breastplate of the high priest. Jewish tradition also says that Judah's standard was the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Reuben was that of a man, Ephraim was the ox, and Dan was the eagle. These four symbols are seen in Ezekiel chapter 1 in the cherubim around the throne of God:

*I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces.... Their faces looked like this: each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. (Ezekiel 1:4-6a, 10)*

Then turn all the way over to Revelation 4:6-7, where we read

*Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had the face of a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.*

Even though written thousands of years apart, Numbers agrees with Ezekiel agrees with Revelation. Scripture agrees with Scripture!

But wait! There's more! Numbers 2, in specifying where each of the tribes was to camp whenever they stopped, also told how they were to march whenever they began moving. Numbers 2:9 tells us that when they began to march, that Judah would lead the way. Remember that the twelve tribes came from the twelve sons of Jacob, but Judah was not the first-born, so it is a little surprising to see God telling them that they would lead the way. However, Genesis 49 tells us that because of the moral failure of Reuben, who was the oldest, that someone else would take the place of honor. It also tells us that the one who would take the place of honor would be Judah. Years and years later, it would be from the tribe of Judah that the Messiah would come—of course, he would lead the way!

In Scripture, numbers symbolize other things. For example, the number three symbolizes Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The number four symbolizes the earth. The number six symbolizes man, while the number seven is the symbol for perfection. The number seven occurs in more than six hundred passages in the Bible—some are right out in plain sight, some are structural, and some are hidden.

Suppose I ask you to write out a genealogy, a family tree. You can make it up as fiction, but there are some rules you must follow:

The number of words you use must be an exact multiple of seven.

The number of letters must also be divisible by seven.

The number of vowels is to be divisible by seven.

The number of words that begin with a vowel must be divisible by seven.

The number of words that occur more than once must be divisible by seven.

The number of words that occur in more than one form must be divisible by seven.

The number of nouns must be divisible by seven.

The number of names shall be divisible by seven and only seven other kinds of nouns will be permitted.

The number of male names shall be divisible by seven.

The number of generations shall be divisible by seven.

Could you write something like that? The first eleven verses in the Gospel of Matthew, in Greek, describe the genealogy of Jesus in just that way. But hang on—it gets better. Matthew uses 42 words that are not used anywhere else in the New Testament. Those 42 words (7 times 6) have 126 letters, which is also an exact multiple of seven. So if Matthew set out to do this deliberately, how would he do it? The only characteristic that these words would share would be that no one else used them. How would you make sure no one else used them? Either you would have to get prior agreement with the other authors, assuming you could predict who they were going to be, or you would have to write your book after everyone else. So you might say Matthew did this deliberately, and that he wrote his last, after every other book of the New Testament had been written, and after Matthew had studied every one of them to make certain that none of these words was used in any of those.

Except that the same thing is true of the Gospel of Mark! It also has a unique vocabulary that is an exact multiple of seven. So how did he do that? The same thing is true of Luke. The same thing is true of John! So let's assume that the four gospel writers got together in a conference room, and assigned the words which would be unique to them, and were not to be found anywhere else in the New Testament. If you did that, you would have to include in that meeting James and Peter and Jude and Paul. Each of them uses words which are unique to their writings, which are an exact multiple of seven! (as delineated in Chuck Missler, *Learn the Bible in 24 Hours*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002.)

Charles Spurgeon, pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was once visiting in a home in Scotland. He picked up a very old and well-worn Bible, holding it reverently in his hands, turning it over and over as he looked at it. Then he noticed a small hole where a worm had eaten its way through the Book from cover to cover. When he saw that, Spurgeon prayed, "O Lord, make me a bookworm like that. From Genesis to Revelation it has gone clear through the Bible."

"When we read the last chapters of the Revelation, we find ourselves mysteriously touching the first chapters of Genesis. As you survey the whole circle of the Bible, you find you have been following the perimeter of a golden ring" (W. A. Criswell). The Bible is perfect; it is complete. Every number, every word, every letter, every detail, is there by a very precise, deliberate design. All this is interesting—it's fascinating—it's astounding. But the Bible is much more than an item of curiosity. It is much more than a book to be studied for its hidden secrets. Those things are



there to prove to us that God's Word is a coherent whole, that it has One Divine Author, one major theme, and we can trust it for our daily lives.

Henry Ward Beecher, a preacher of another generation, once said, *The truths of the Bible are like gold in the soil. Whole generations walk over it, and know not what treasures are hidden beneath. So centuries of men pass over the Scriptures, and know not what riches lie under the feet of their interpretation. Sometimes when they discover them, they call them new truths. One might as well call gold, newly dug, new gold.*

*The Bible, without a spiritual life to interpret it, is like a trellis on which no vine grows—bare, angular, and in the way. The Bible with a spiritual life, is like a trellis covered with a luxuriant vine—beautiful, odorous and heavy, with purple clusters shining through the leaves.*

*“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever.”*  
(Isaiah 40:8)