

Sermon Transcript from January 31st, 2016 Where On Earth Did the Bible Come From? Pastor Tim Mackie, Bridgetown Church

Where did the Bible come from and why should you care about anything it has to say? For me to talk about that, I have to begin to at least frame it within my own story, because it's significant for me how I've come to end up being a Bible nerd and that kind of thing. So, I grew up here in Portland just over actually at 22nd and Hawthorne. Anybody? That's where some of you go to breakfast on Saturday mornings at a place called Jam's that, when I was growing up, I could throw rocks at it. But, I never would because it was a biker bar. Literally, it was just a stack of Harleys the whole block long in front of that building that's Jam's now.

The police were there all of the time, bar brawls, and I lived half a block away. I thought it was really entertaining. Anyway, I grew up here in Portland and was never good at sports, but skateboarding. Skateboard culture in Portland is incredible. It's super different than California skateboard culture which is like, you know, you have to dress cool and it's all about performance. But, in Portland, it's nerds and artists, right, and the odd people who couldn't make the football team and that kind of thing.

So, that's Portland skateboard culture. So, I grew up and that was my identity, that was my life all through junior high and high school and even on into my 20s. And my parents were Christians. They're really really remarkable people. The Bible didn't play a huge role in our home growing up. I don't know what your story is, but it just wasn't a big deal and we didn't really read or talk about it very much. I was not interested in Jesus at all. I thought it was all pretty stupid. And, by the time I learned the art of sneaking out of the house on Saturday nights so I could avoid going to church, that's what I did.

"Tim's just gone from his bedroom every Saturday night. It's incredible."

So, I'd never go to church. So, here was my journey to Jesus. There's a ministry on upper Northeast off 88th and Glisan called "Skatechurch." Anybody? Have you heard of Skatechurch before? Yeah. So, they have a skateboard park. It's an amazing skateboard park. You can skate for a while, and then they shut it down and somebody gives a Jesus talk and, to skate the second half of the night, you have to sit through the Jesus talk. That's kind of the deal that you make when you go in.

So, I started going when I was 16 and for years, I mean years, I'd sit in the back and it was kind of interesting. But, as the years went on and the just dozens and dozens of Jesus talks, I really became interested and compelled by Jesus. The stories about Him, how He treated people was amazing. His teachings, they were always profound and kind of bothered me and stuck with me as I went through the rest of my week and so on.

So, the years go by and, to make a short story boring, a whole bunch of stuff in my life came together and Jesus became unavoidable to me; the person of Jesus. I have to make a decision about what I'm going to do with this guy. Am I going to consider Him a figment of my imagination, is He real? And I have to make a decision. I made a decision to follow Jesus, and it was the most life-shaping event of my life. So, that was in August of 1995. I was almost 20 years old.

So, here's the career arch of a Portland skateboarder, I guess. There was none. It was just skateboarding and graffiti or whatever, and then I started participating in Skatechurch. I ended up giving the Jesus talk once. That didn't go well my first time. That's okay. Hopefully I got a little better. You're hoping I got a lot better, right? Right now you're hoping that. So, I started to do that and I realized like, other than what I feel about Jesus and what I'm trying to learn about Him as I read the stories about Him, I don't really know what to talk about or whatever. I didn't have any school aspirations.

But, it just so happened that across the street from the Skatechurch warehouse was a Christian college called Multnomah University, or Multnomah College of the Bible. So, I was like, "Okay. I guess I'll sign up for Bible classes so I can know what to tell these junior-highers about."

So, I'm in my early 20s and, you know, I'm going to school, which I was never very good at. But then, the Bible. Like, I'm just reading the Bible, you guys. I was reading the stories about Jesus and He was so compelling to me. But, He's constantly quoting from the Bible, right? Like He has it memorized or something. He's always talking about it and

interacting with it, defining who He is in relationship to the Scriptures. And so I'm like, "Okay, I need to develop a relationship with the whole book, not just the parts that I like."

So, I'm taking these classes, I'm reading the whole Bible and it's a foreign, strange, new world to me. There's a talking snake on page 3 and so on. There's just so many bizarre, strange things about the Bible. So first, just the content of the Bible was new and foreign to me, and then the historical questions started to come to me. Like, "Where did this thing come from? Did it drop out of heaven? Where did it come from? Why should I care about this?"

So, it went skateboarding, Skatechurch, sign up for ancient Greek and then sign up for ancient Hebrew. I don't have anything better going on in my life, but this is really interesting and I'm having a blast. So, I don't know what to tell you guys. I just became immersed. Absolutely immersed. And I couldn't get enough and I just fell in love with the strangeness and the kind of like, "Sometimes I'm repulsed by it, but I'm also drawn to it at the same time."

I think most of us have a relationship to the Bible that I would jokingly describe as your relationship to your weird uncle at Christmas, right? Which is like, "He's in the family, so you're supposed to like him."

Or at least you're supposed to interact with him, you know? Sometimes he's cool and he says interesting things and he has interesting stories to tell you. But, most of the time he creeps you out, you know? There you go. But, you're around him, and I think that's how most of us, if we're honest, feel about the Bible. Anybody? Can I get an "amen?"

That's good. Alright. This is a church full of people who are honest, right? This is a safe place. Many churches, you would get in trouble for saying whatever. You get my point.

So, here's where it landed me. I couldn't get enough, and so, 14 years, 4 educational institutions later, I got to study the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament with a host of different scholars and I became really really engaged and interested in the Dead Sea Scrolls. So, I went to school in Jerusalem for a year so I could see them and do research on them. So, there you go. I'm confessing. Confessions of an absolute Bible freak. Right? Like, it's just been my life.

But, for me, this has always been about Jesus. Jesus defined who He was, what He said and what He did in relationship to this strange book. So, the questions about where it comes from, it actually really matters, I think. So, here's what's interesting is I'm immersed for over a decade in the complex, wonderful, fascinating history of the making of the Bible and its languages and culture and geography and how it all happened.

So, I'm sitting there and having a blast and I have colleagues, other students at different schools that I'm at, and they were raised in church and raised around the Bible. So, we're learning the same history and the same language and all of this kind of thing, and I'm watching their faith totally get shattered. Like, they're scandalized by this history of the Bible that they're learning. It really was puzzling to me, because I loved the complexity. I thought it was so amazing. I'm like, "This is so wonderful. There's so many layers to this and how all of it points to who Jesus is and how it finds its fulfillment in Him. And He's not a figment of my imagination. He's a real figure in history and He's speaking to us through these Scriptures.

And I have friends who are drawing the exact opposite conclusions from the same exact history. Are you guys with me here? Does anybody know this tension here? So, maybe it's you. Maybe it's a friend that you have or something and they took Intro to Biblical Literature in college or something like that or they watched some self-proclaimed expert on YouTube and they learned the publicly accessible, complex history of the making of the Bible and they are scandalized.

And their conclusion is it's so thoroughly human, how can you say that this is God's Word? And for me, it was, "This is so thoroughly human and it's amazing. Isn't this wonderful how it speaks God's Word? It's just the same facts with two completely different interpretations. I became convinced there's a glitch in the system. There's something wrong with the culture of the churches where these people are growing up where they learn this publicly accessible history and they walk away thinking that the Bible is just merely a human document.

So, what's the glitch? I think the root issue is this, and I'll use a drawing. It's an M.C. Escher drawing. Any Escher fans? Anybody? Yes. Great. M.C. Escher. Also, another part

of growing up on Hawthorne – this is so typical, you guys. My dad was a painter. I grew up on Hawthorne, my dad's a painter. Right. So, anyways, he had a studio in the garage in the back of our house off 22nd. So, I grew up all around paint and butcher paper everywhere and lots of art books and Escher books were everywhere in our living room growing up and I had an early obsession.

So, Escher's work, it's all about exploring optical illusion and visual paradoxes. This is one of his most famous drawings called "Drawing Hands," as you can see. It's exploring something that is one, yet two. So, it's something that is made up of two distinct entities, yet they exist as one. It's like the chicken and the egg. Which came first? Which hand is drawing the other one? Exactly. That's exactly right.

So to me, this image has been helpful to visually depict what the orthodox Christian tradition and the orthodox Jewish tradition has always claimed and had a conviction about through history about the Bible. And that is that it is a divine word and a human word at the same time. This is not an either/or, it's not like it's a divine word and so not so much like a human book or that it's a human book, therefore it can't be – it's just a different set of categories all together.

It's a divine word and a human word. It's a book with publicly accessible human origins through which God speaks to His people. That's just the classic Christian and Jewish conviction about the nature of the Bible. And something has happened in the last couple hundred years where, if I was good at Photoshop – the people I work with at The Bible Project are, but I'm not really – I would erase one of the hands and I would erase the human hand and just leave the divine hand.

I would say, "That's the vision of the Bible that most people who grow up in a Bible Christian church here in America, that's the view that they have. Namely that the – I call it the golden-tablets-falling-from-heaven view of the Bible that, "Okay, yes. If humans were involved, their role was incidental. On 66 different occasions, they were zapped with God's presence or something and then they write out the books and, you know, virtually falling from heaven at least, and then they're there bound in pleather and you go buy it at Barnes and Nobles or something like that."

That's vision. Tell me I'm wrong. I mean, that's the vision. And the golden-tablets-falling-from-heaven view of the Bible goes along with an assumption about what the purpose of the Bible is, and the purpose of the Bible in that view is that it's a divine behavior manual, right? It's a divine list of rules and commands about how God wants you to behave and doesn't want you to behave, and if you have the correct beliefs and do the correct behaviors, you'll get to the good place and not the bad place after you die.

Tell me I'm wrong. I mean, tell that that this isn't what most people believe. Tell me this isn't what your neighbor thinks you believe and why they think you're stupid and crazy when you tell them you drink Kool-Aid and read through the Bible with a whole group. You know what I'm saying here? Like, that's the default view of what Christians believe, and that actually is what many Christians believe. The only problem with it is when you actually begin to read the Bible, and when it tells you about where it came from, it's not that story at all. And when it tells you the story of what it's for, why it came into existence and what its purpose is, it's just not that story at all either.

So, here's what I'd like to do. This is super brief. I'm trying to condense into the next 30 minutes what I've done in a number of other places. So, I have a four-hour version of what I'm about to do in the next 30 minutes. And it's up – I have a website where I collect sermons and teachings and classes that I do and so on. Just my name. TimMackie.com. Feel free to go geek out on the four-hour version of what I'm about to condense into 30 minutes, totally inadequately. Everything I'm about to say is completely inadequate because every sentence needs a footnote with a stack of 10 books behind it. But, there you go.

So, how did we get the right or wrong version and, more importantly, what is the publicly accessible story of how the Bible came into existence? So, pop quiz. I'm a professor, too. So, pop quiz. There's no consequences for failing this quiz, but act like there are. Act like you care or whatever. So, pop quiz. In the Bible, what is the first mention of the writing of the Bible? What's the first mention of the writing of the Bible as you're reading through into the story of the Bible? It's a wonderful fact to know and forget, I suppose. But, maybe you won't forget it, because I think it's really interesting.

It's not where you might think it is. The book of Exodus. Some of you are feeling vindicated right now. The book of Exodus, chapter 17. It's an odd story. You'll see it up

here on the screen. So, here we are in the story. You've seen the movie, right? The 10 plagues? Pharaoh and Moses. All that kind of stuff, right? So, the Israelites were enslaved and brutally being destroyed and Moses rises. "Let my people go." And God rescues them out of slavery in Egypt.

After that, they're wandering through the desert – the Israelites, these escaped slaves are. And so, think of a huge group of spaced slaves and refugees wandering through the desert just ripe for plunder, or at least this group of people thought so. So, the Amalekites came. They attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

Now, some of you, just hearing that bad, do some of you know this story? It's a very interesting story. So, what happens is that Moses goes up on this hill and he can see the battle happening and, when he raises his staff like this, the Israelites are winning. But, he's an old man and so he gets tired. You know? So his arms start going down and then they start losing. It's very strange. So then, he gets these two guys to come hold his arms up and they win the battle. After the battle's over, this is what happens: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered.'"

That's the first mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible. I mean, you read right over it, right? It's not that remarkable. But, it is. It's very significant. Stop and think about this. This is the first mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible, which means this tells us something important about what the Bible is, why it came into existence and what it's for. Like, what you're supposed to do with this thing, the Bible.

So, "Write this on a scroll." Write what? What is "this?"

Yes. Right? The story. This really remarkable event just took place. God saved the Israelites in this really incredible way. "Write it down." Why? To remember. So, there's something identity-shaping that just happened, right? There's a history, a foundation story, that's being written here about who God is, and His character is revealed in this story, and about who these people are. So, what's happening here? This is about writing a story. It doesn't say Moses got zapped or anything like that.

It's like, "Hey, Moses. Go write that down."

"Oh, wow. That was pretty incredible. Okay. Alright. Let's make sure."

I mean, it's a very human – are you with me here? There's no scandal here. It's just he wrote down the story of the battle. And that's the first mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible. So, here's what at least what we can conclude. What at least one of the purposes of the Bible is: to tell the story.

To tell the story of what God has done to rescue and form a people. Now, this is interesting. Is this the first time that God has rescued and saved these people? Well, it's not, because you saw the movie about Pharaoh and the 10 plagues and all that kind of stuff, right? And so that was a really really incredible act that broke everybody's categories, Egyptians and Israelites included, and they were narrowly rescued through the waters of the sea and so on.

And, were the Israelites to remember that story too? Were they supposed to remember that story? Yes. How? How were they told to remember that story? Through text? Writing text? Well, you could read through and there's nothing like this. How do they remember it? Through a meal. Through a meal that has been celebrated since that day and the thousands and thousands of years ever since then. Every single year.

What's it called? It's called Passover. Passover. So, this is fascinating. God is in the business of saving and rescuing from the unjust nations. He's rescuing out a people, just out of His own sheer grace, keeping His promises to Abraham. He's rescuing a people and delivering them in remarkable ways. The most primary way, the first way they're told to remember and retell the story is to eat the story every year through this meal. Right? They eat the symbolic meal and every piece at the table tells something about what took place there in that event.

But, that's not the last time that God rescues His people. You have the meal and then you begin to have texts. Texts that are recording this foundation story of who we are and who God is.

That's the first mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible. Second mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible is just a few pages later, and it's equally significant, I think. So, here's where the story goes. When that story ends, the people end up camped out at the foot of a mountain. What's that mountain called? It's called Mount Sinai. And, on that mountain, God's presence descends, again, in a very remarkable, strange way. Cloud and storm and all that kind of thing.

And God says, "Here's why I rescued you out from among all the nations: to become my own people." And God invites them into what the Biblical authors call a "covenant relationship."

It's like two people get together and they make out, together, the terms of this relationship. "Here's what I'm going to do; here's what you're going to do."

We call it a contract in our culture. In the Biblical world, they called it a covenant; a binding of two whole people to each other and their devotion and their allegiance to the terms. And then, God gives them the terms of this relationship; what He wants them to fulfill. And the first 10 items of the terms of the covenant have become quite famous in our culture. In fact, quite a debatable topic, haven't they? People love to debate about if they should be inscribed in courthouses and so on.

But, there you go. What am I talking about? We call them the Ten Commandments. They're actually never called that in the Bible. They're called "The Ten Words" in the Hebrew Bible. And then, after that, come 52 more, and then a total of 613 in the first 5 books. So, ease them into it, right?

So, the whole point is this is a covenant relationship and the laws are giving us the terms of this covenant. And God says why He's inviting them into this relationship. He says He wants to make them into a kingdom of priests, right? Because all they know is Egypt, where people are dehumanized, where the laws have been written so that it's good to kill babies and erase people from existence so that we can build bigger buildings and so on.

So, that's their world. So, God rescues these people and He wants to retrain them to become new and different kinds of human beings so they can be priests, so that they come into proximity to God through this relationship and they become reshaped and become this example, this representative, of God's character out to all of the nations. And then the terms of the covenant are given.

Then, here's where the story comes in. Moses went and he told all of the people the Lord's words and laws. This is after the 10 plus the 52 are given. Then the people, they all respond with one voice. "Oh, yeah. Everything the Lord has said, we're going to do that."

If you know how this story goes, that's why some of you are laughing.

Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. Then he took the scroll of the covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We'll do everything the Lord has said. We'll obey."

This is the second mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible. Is this different than the first time? It is. So, what's Moses writing the first time? The story. What's he writing down this time? The terms of the covenant. And this text is now called "The Scroll of the Covenant."

This text represents the story of what God has done to rescue us and now how He's inviting us into a relationship. The laws, here, are a part of this mission that God is on to call human beings to become something that He called and made them to be but that they failed to be. But, "I'll rescue these people and will make them into this community of priests to all of the nations."

And so, there you go, you guys. This is the first two mentions of the writing of the Bible in the Bible. "Tell the story" and "terms of the covenant." How are you doing?

So, it seems to me that we should pay attention to this. This is the account that the Bible gives of its own origins. It was written by people. Scandal. No. It's written by people and it's written by people like Moses, right? He's the first figure here. He's clearly someone who has a strong awareness and sense of the divine presence and of the divine call on his life. Clearly. And, as he's writing out of these events, remarkable events that are taking place, his human words become the vehicle of God's words to His people throughout the

generations, including that one.

This is very very different than golden tablets falling from heaven. Do you see the difference? I hope you can sense the difference. So, golden tablets falling from heaven is typically about this divine rule book falling down. So, what do the rules represent? The rules have to do with the author of the universe and He thinks everybody ought to behave a certain way and He's pretty uptight and so, if you don't follow the rules, to Hell with you. Right? At least that's what your neighbor thinks you believe and that is probably what most Christians believe, too. I don't think I'm wrong about that.

But, do you see how this is just totally different? Do you see how this is different? What's the first purpose of the writing of the Bible? To tell the story of how God, because He's incredibly compassionate, because He won't tolerate evil, but He's given humans incredible dignity to rule and to steward His world. There are moments when He intervenes and He confronts human evil and, just out of sheer grace and compassion, He rescues and forms a people who will become part of the solution.

That's the first purpose, to just tell that remarkable story. And then what God does with those rescued people is call them to become the humans that He made us to be. And the laws are a part of a covenant. I mean, what's happening here – we actually only use the word "covenant" in our culture anymore to describe one thing, and hardly even that anymore. What am I talking about? Marriage. And that's exactly what's happening here on the foot of the mountain.

When I got married to my wife, Jessica, I got up in front of family and friends, and we spoke these covenant vows to each other. "Till death do us part" and "richer and poorer" and "to care for each other and be devoted only to each other alone. What was I doing there? I was accepting these terms of the covenant as authoritative and as binding over my life. Not because my wife's a tyrant. Actually, I am a better human because of my covenant with this woman. I've had to rise to the occasion and no more Cheetos until midnight with video games, right? So, no more of that. But actually like grow up, and that is a subtle diss to those of you who eat Cheetos until midnight and video games.

But like, to grow up and become responsible. And it's challenging and it's hard. There are times when those covenant vows are extremely inconvenient to me. But, I don't view them as dropped out of a tyrant from heaven, right? I view them as a gift to me, because these covenant terms were spoken eye to eye with my wife as a covenant of love and, in this relationship, we both become more of the people that we're made to be. That's precisely the story the Bible is trying to tell us here, that the laws given to Israel for their time in the land were doing precisely this and pulling God's people along.

Okay. How are you guys doing? So, the origins of the Bible don't stop here, but the meaning and purpose of the Bible is all right here. Do you see that? Does that make sense? The purpose of the Bible is to tell the story. It's about a covenant people who come under the loving authority of the one that they're entering a covenant with.

So, here's why some of you laughed. Because what does Israel go on to do after they make this covenant? I mean, they just break it a million times over. Right? They just are so faithless and they don't adhere to the covenant. So, God continues to raise up Moses-like figures. These are figures called the Prophets. They're figures in history, sometimes eccentric, not always though. These are people who, like Moses, had a strong awareness of the divine presence. And they see the people of Israel totally bailing and failing – I'm a poet and I didn't know it. Bailing on the covenant and failing to fulfill the terms of the covenant.

So, a Jeremiah or an Isaiah, they watch this happening and they're like, "No. God saved these people, but they're acting just like all the other nations. And the poor suffer and there's all this injustice and corruption."

It's like, what did He even rescue them for? They're not even doing what they said that they would do. So, these Prophets begin to speak and you get a Jeremiah who's like on the street corner being like, "You guys, stop it. No."

And he writes poems and sermons and essays and he's out there preaching on the corner. And then, one by one, at some point for all of these Moses-like prophet figures, there was a point at which they began to collect all of their words. And the prophet Jeremiah gives us a wonderful window into how this process worked here. This is so fascinating.

"In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now.'"

So, a handful of Bible nerds, you're doing math right now. You're like, "From the reign of Josiah to the year of Jehoiakim. What's that?"

Twenty-five years. Spoiler alert. Twenty-five years. So, just stop. Stop. Think about this. This is the stuff you just read right over. Don't. What's Jeremiah being asked to do right here? For 25 years he's been out there on the street corners, he's been writing poems, he's been writing essays, he's been preaching sermons in the temple courts. Twenty-five years, and then he has an awareness that God's calling him to collect it all together. Like, just imagine the daunting task that would be. Right? You're a poet. "Twenty-five years of your poetry, can you just kind of collect all that and put it together in a nice volume?"

That's an enormous amount of work. Are you with me here? Just imagine the workload involved. So, what does Jeremiah do? So, he called his friend Baruch son of Neriah who, as you read through the story, he's a professional scribe. So, while Jeremiah dictated all the words the Lord has spoken to him. He reads, "Here's this poem I read on this day and here's this message I gave on that day," and so on. I mean, just hours and hours, days and days. And Baruch's down there, he's a professional scribe, he's writing it all down onto scroll.

The scandal of the Bible, right? People wrote the Bible. I don't know. It seems to me it says it right there. And it doesn't say that Jeremiah's zapped or anything. It seems like, "Whoa, God used this man's intellect and recollection and Baruch's ability to make sense and to edit and put it all together."

Now, this is fascinating. As you read through this story, what happens is the scroll's put together and Baruch goes to start reading it aloud to the king of Jerusalem. And the king of Jerusalem is a jerk and he hates Jeremiah and he doesn't want to hear it. So, he seizes the scroll and he starts reading it aloud, and then, as soon as he finished reading a section, he cuts it off and throws it into the fire. Baruch's like, "Dang it. We have to do it all over again."

Right? You read through it and that's what they do. They go through this whole process again. So, the book of Jeremiah is telling you it went through multiple editions. What's fascinating – I'll show you a picture of the Dead Sea Scrolls in just a few minutes here – is the textual history of the book of Jeremiah shows evidence of these multiple editions. The book of Jeremiah has an extremely complex story of origins, and the book itself is telling you that. Are you with me here? There's no scandal, there's no secret that's now being revealed through the History Channel. Oh my gosh. Don't get me started on the History Channel, right?

Okay, so, here's the vision of the Bible on the History Channel. It says, "So, actually, this was all produced by a small circle of very old men with long beards and they have this religious, ideological power-play and they want to dupe the masses to give them their money or something. And that's the real story of the origins of the Bible."

Right? Have you seen that up on the History Channel? So, the problem with that story is like... history. Right? Like, actual history. And not just history within the Bible. All of the publicly accessible history around the Bible about how scribes worked and what they did. So, it's all available to us, and the History Channel gets the fringe scholars who don't represent the voice of scholarship, and they get them to represent the assured results of historical – are you with me here? I mean, that's just for the Bible. Who knows what they did with World War I or whatever on the History Channel.

But anyway, sorry. I'm really starting to rail here. So, here's my point. Okay. No, this is cool. About 15 years ago, there's always archeological work happening in the city of Jerusalem. Really exciting discovers and so on. One thing that they often find are what are called "bullae," or "ancient seals." So, think like on a scroll. You've seen this in a movie or something. There's a scroll and you want to protect the contents, so they would pour some wax on the overlapped roll and then, you know, they have a ring and put a ring. And what do you call this thing? A signet ring. There's an impression there.

So, they find these little, tiny seals all over in the dirt and signet pieces and so on. So, they found one in the early 2000s and the inscription of it, it just tells you right there. I mean, there he is. "Baruch, son of Neriah, the scribe." And this is what's remarkable: do

you see on the upper left there these horizontal ridges there? This was clearly a necklace piece and it was one of these jobs where he like rolled it with his thumb right over. Do you see that right there? That's the thumbprint of a Biblical author, you guys.

I mean, there it is for the whole world to see, you know? So, that one definitely didn't fall out of heaven because we're looking at the guy's thumbprint right there. Isn't that rad? It's really remarkable, I think. So, there you guy. That's Jeremiah. Jeremiah's efforts are in vain, however, and so his words are rejected, the scroll is rejected and Israel comes to its doom not long after Jeremiah.

That cycle just keeps repeating itself. So, the Bible comes into existence telling the story of what God has done to save a people, about inviting those people into a covenant relationship and now, the rest of the Hebrew Bible is telling us the minority report of all of the voices who weren't paid attention to until it was too late. That's the Hebrew Bible. So, Jesus of Nazareth comes onto the scene and He's a Jewish rabbi, He's connected to the family of David, and He comes onto the scene with an electric message of the Kingdom of God. This God, who's been rescuing people and trying to reach all nations and form a covenant people that Israel has failed to become, He says, "God is finally coming. He's here through me and what I'm doing. He's going to take back the place and He's going to form that people and bring His reign over the world."

And Jesus said it was happening through Himself. And that message, it attracted lots of people because He was so compelling. Everybody who met this man and had encounters with Him, they walked away from these encounters transformed. And, the very things that draw all of us here, how remarkable Jesus is, His sayings, His teachings, how He treated people, it was clearly an unparalleled event in history that still shapes history today.

But, it threatened a lot of people, especially those who were in power. Like the kings who like to burn scrolls of the Prophets are the same types of rulers who wanted to get rid of Jesus. So, it all leads forward to this final night before Jesus was killed. And what night is it? The night of what? This is Passover week. His Passover. And here's what Jesus does: we're told that while they're eating this Passover meal, Jesus took bread and, when He gave thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples saying, "Take and eat, this is my body."

Then He took a cup and, when He had given thanks, He gave it to them saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

So, Jesus is portraying what's about to happen here in His life and in His death and in His resurrection. It's a new exodus story. It's a new act of liberation. God's going to, yet again, save His people from the clutches of evil and injustice. But, who's the tyrant this time? Right? Because it's not Pharaoh, but it's also not Caesar and it's not the Herods. It's not. What does Jesus think that He's doing and how is He liberating people?

Jesus sees Himself as forming a new people, inviting a new covenant family and bringing it into existence through His death that's for the sins of many so they can be forgiven. Jesus sees Himself as taking into Himself the train wreck of human history. You and I have all contributed to why this world is the way that it is and Jesus believes that that's what He's taking into Himself in His death that's for others.

And as a statement of this God's incredible love, His unbreakable, covenant love for this world and screwed up humans like ourselves, He conquers our sin and our death and its consequences in His resurrection from the dead.

How are you guys doing? That's the story. And then what does He do? The final scene of this account of Jesus' life – this the final sentences of the Gospel of Matthew – we're told, "**Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'**"

So, lets' just pause right there. Another pop quiz. The answer isn't yellow, alright? So, if you're a follower of Jesus, who or what is your authority if you're a follower of Jesus? Jesus. I know you guys worked through this passage, right? A couple of weeks ago. This is crucial important, right? So, if I'm a follower of Jesus, my allegiance and devotion isn't to a book that fell out of heaven, it's to Jesus of Nazareth, who lived for me, who died for me, who was raised for me so that, not just my sin and evil could be dealt with, but He was the human that I am made to be but everyday that I fail to be. And he was that on my behalf.

And now the risen Jesus is calling me and He's calling you to follow Him and to embrace what He did as being done for you and that my own sins and failures are right there – that's what He's taking into Himself – and that His resurrected life is now His gift to me.

So, this is the same moment as what happened at the mountain, right? Jesus is inviting and bringing into existence a new covenant family. And it's people who will come under His authority. Now, how does the Bible play into this? Just watch. So, who's He talking to? He's talking His closest circle of His disciples. They're going to be called the Apostles. He says, "Okay, now you go. Go out to all of the nations and make disciples. Grow and invite everybody into this covenant family, baptizing them, initiating them into the covenant family in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

So, did Jesus ever write anything? What did He give us as a way to remember the story of what He did for us? He gave us a meal, didn't He? It's a Passover meal, right? He gave us a new Passover meal to tell the story of what He did to rescue and liberate us from ourselves and our own selfishness and sin. And then what He's doing is He's inviting into that covenant family everybody now.

And Jesus didn't write anything that we know of. But, He taught a lot and He did a lot. So, here's what's happening in this scene. This is crucially important for the origins of the Bible. What He's doing right here is He's passing His authority as the gracious, risen king, He's passing – it's like Dukes of Hazard. Like the Sheriff. Deputies. He's creating deputies right here. He's deputizing this closest circle of His followers to go teach on His behalf and in their writings and in their speaking to point people back to Jesus, to obey and follow everything that He's commanded.

What you're looking at in that sentence is the origins of what we call the New Testament. They're four documents connected to that closest circle of apostles that tell the story of what God has done to rescue a people. We call them the four Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And then there's the whole collection of letters written by that closest circle of people who are guiding the early communities of Jesus-followers with how to resolve their conflicts, how to deal with all of the complex cultural issues that arise when you try to follow the way of Jesus in ancient Corinth and in ancient Rome and in Portland.

How are you guys doing? This is the New Testament, and it tells you right there that it comes from these people. But yet, the writings that come from these people are precisely an expression of the authority of Jesus. And they're an expression of Jesus' living presence that's with His people always.

So, what do we mean when we say the Bible is God's authority over me? What I mean when I say that is that Jesus is my authority and it's not a golden rule book dropped out of heaven. It's a book that emerged out of this incredibly beautiful story that all points to Jesus who loved me and gave Himself for me and He is the only kind of authority I would ever want to be under. Amen?

I mean, come on. Beware of people who claim that they have golden tablets dropped out of heaven. You know what I'm saying? Like, really. And especially if they ask for your credit card number. Right? How do you know where it came from? How do you prove that? How do you test it? Do you see that? The Bible is not that. It's just very very different. There's a whole history that is accessible to us, and I haven't even shown you the Dead Sea Scrolls yet. Let's change that right now.

So, here's where the story goes from here. You have the writings of the Hebrew Bible, you have the writings of the apostles in the New Testament, and they're churning and they're spreading as the Jesus movement spreads. So, you know, you turn on your phone or whatever and you have a version of the Bible and you have some version of Isaiah. And then you go look up another English translation and it's different wording. Or you look at what Paul wrote to the Romans or something and then you're like, "Oh, what does it say in this other translation? Oh, it's different."

And then, go show that to your coworker tomorrow morning, right? And they'll be like, "See, I knew it. Tampering with the Bible. It's that group of old men again in the room, isn't it? They're trying to dupe us all."

Right? You guys know what I'm talking about? So, how do the Bibles that we have connect to the texts that came into existence as a divine, human word through this

story? There's no scandal here. Let me just show you some pictures. It's all totally available.

So, this is a manuscript, the crown jewel, of the Hebrew Bible text tradition from the Medieval period. It's called the "Leningrad Codex" because it was kept there in a library in Leningrad for a long time. Do you see the date there? It's 1000 years old from today. And you can see the central text there in the three columns right there, and then do you see all that little stuff around it? That's called the "Masorah." The "Masorah." And what those are, those are little footnotes for the scribes. It's this complex code language and there'll be little signs over a word in the main text and then that sends you out to the outer column.

And then it'll say, my paraphrase, like, "Hey. Dear, next scribe. When you're going to copy this to another text, this word is spelled really funny. Did you know this word appears only two others times in the whole Hebrew Bible? Here's a list of where they are. Don't misspell it right here. Thank you very much."

It's just constantly. These are all little notes about odd features of spelling and wording, all aimed at protecting and preserving it. I've always joked like, "Of course. How introverted do you have to be to produce something like this."

Like, goodness. Right? But this was people's whole careers and lifework, all these Jewish scholars and so on. So, here's what was so amazing about what happened almost 70 years ago now with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. And I'll show you one of the pictures of the oldest fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls of a Biblical text that's of the book of Exodus. Just a remarkable, remarkable, thousands of pieces of Biblical scrolls from this community out by the Dead Sea.

So, here's what this allowed us to do: all of a sudden, we could look a version of the Bible from 1000 A.D. and then just time-warp back over 1000 years to all of these Hebrew texts of the Bible in a totally different time period and culture and so on and you can compare them.

All of the work has been mostly done. So, what do scholars find? Are there differences between these two over the course of 1000 years? Are there differences? Yes. Totally. And that shouldn't bother you one bit. I would love to walk you through all of them, because they are so fascinating. Right? Most of them are insignificant. Just mistakes. I mean, you try copying out a whole page of things. And imagine, these guys, their brains aren't melted by TV and Twitter. You know what I'm saying? This is all they do for their living. They are focused. They make way less errors than you would, but even they would still make errors.

Are some of them significant differences? Yes. Totally. In fact, the most interesting ones are the ones that give us a window into the final compilation and editing of the collection of books called the Hebrew Bible.

Oh, did it come up? Did it come up earlier? Oh, I'm so sorry. The whole time I thought it was sitting up there. So, there it is. Oh, yeah. Get me talking about the Dead Sea Scrolls. There's a million fascinating things to say. But, this was just unprecedented, the window into the story of the Bible that they gave us. And what they don't show is golden tablets falling from heaven. What they show is a book that's a divine word telling a story about a divine and human word.

Are you guys – do I need to do it again? Hand motions. Right? The covenant and so on. But, here's the thing: the Bible was the biggest, and still has been the biggest literary event in human history. It was like a boulder thrown into a pond, and the ripple effects are all over the world through all these different periods of time, and it's all public. So, if any changes or errors happen here, we have 500 different other examples to compare it against over here.

And it's the same exact thing for the New Testament. I could skip a slide. Do you want me to? Okay. Sorry. Just go to the next one here just so you know. So, here you go. All your English translations, all of their differences, they're all rooted in this one Hebrew text, and you're looking at it. There's one Hebrew Bible that all of our modern versions are based on, and there it is. I'm showing it to you. People haven't tampered with the Bible. It's right there, actually. You can see it.

What is all of this stuff underneath? Bible geekery, right? It's all this code representing hundreds of years of work of bringing together all of these manuscripts of the Bible across the centuries and comparing. It's all comparing their differences and it's so interesting. It's like learning computer code. There you go. If you want to have at it, go for it. It's really an amazing journey.

Have I made my point? Should you be scandalized by any of this? No. You shouldn't be scandalized at all. What this means is that how the Bible came into existence is an expression of God's character and God's mission. He's committed to our world, He's committed to redeeming it and He's been committed through history to reveal who He is through these events, to rescue and to form a covenant people. And it all points to Jesus, and Jesus said this whole story points to Him. Retrospectively leading up to Him and then, as He sends out those apostles, leading from Him. And that's what we have in the New Testament. Story's about Him and then the writings of that circle.

So really, what this comes down to, I can't prove to you that the Bible is God's Word. What I can tell you is that there's no scandal. We can tell each other how it came into existence and that it all revolves around Jesus. The question is whether you're going to acknowledge Him and whether, once He becomes unavoidable to you, you make a decision either for Him or against Him. You don't really have another choice. Like, He forces this issue on you and you can sit at the back and you can make fun of Him for three years just like I did, alright? But, at some point, you have to make a decision about whose authority you want to live under.

I can live under my own authority. Go for it. See how that goes for you. To define what it means to be human on your own terms. Or, you can come under the loving, gracious, Jesus-style authority of the covenant people of God, and I accept as an authority over me the story and the covenant terms of the Apostles and the Prophets. And just like when two people get married, this isn't about tyranny and rules and a divine behavior manual, this is about God on a mission to rescue and restore broken, failed humans, and to give us a new window into the future. Amen? Amen.

So, that's where I'm going to just close it and leave it right there. Ultimately, this isn't just about an intellectual obstacle. This is about a choice that you and I wake up and we make every day about who's your authority and about who I'm looking to for hope and for a new future. And about what kind of human I want to become and if I'm going to let Jesus be the human that I'm made and called to be and empower me to do that through His love, through His death and through His Spirit. Amen? Let me close in a word of prayer.