

The Jesus Story: Are These Writings Really Alive?

The overwhelming evidence that God's Word was historically reliable backed me into a corner. I was out of excuses. As a university student and a skeptic, I could no longer reject the biblical account of Christ and be intellectually honest with myself. In a London library attempting to disprove Christianity, I came face-to-face with the living God.

Thinking back, I realized that the epiphany I had in that library had been set up weeks earlier by my examinations of the ancient fragments of papyrus in the museums and libraries of Europe. Seeing copied manuscripts of the apostles' letters led me to realize that a real person had copied those texts for an important reason. The writer—or, more accurately, the copier—obviously felt that the message in those letters was so valuable that it must be passed on to the next generation.

It was as if the original writings were alive, and each newly copied manuscript preserved and extended that life.

It dawned on me that these handwritten manuscripts had been copied by people who wanted to keep the story of Jesus alive. Behind each ancient manuscript copy of Scripture was a person who had carefully and reverently written down each word, letter for letter. The ink placed on each papyrus seemed to reach out to me and say, "The truth of these words about Jesus Christ has given others new life. They are written for you too. Will you believe in Christ and experience a new life in him?"

Now, over 50 years after I placed my trust in Christ, God had allowed my ministry to acquire seven ancient fragments of Scripture. On that December day in 2013 I watched as specialists carefully extracted fragments of God's Word found

hidden within ancient artifacts. As I looked at and touched the fragment copies of lines that had originally been penned by Mark, John, Matthew and Paul, I realized these words had an alluring power to them. The people who had copied these letters certainly recognized their power.

These fragments dated back as far as A.D. 350, which was before they were officially recognized by a church council as the inspired Word of God. So the copiers would not have been aware that what they were transcribing would eventually be recognized as scripture. The New Testament wasn't canonized by the church until the councils of Hippo in A.D. 393 and Carthage in AD 397.

What made the apostles' writings so compelling that people kept copying them for hundreds of years, even before they were recognized as Scripture? They obviously felt that the truth of the apostles' letters was relevant to them, but why? Why were these particular writings so captivating and so significant?

The answer to that question is simple but no less amazing. God had inspired his apostles to communicate his universal truth in written words and then kept those words alive through the ever-present person of the Holy Spirit. The Word was alive because the Holy Spirit was speaking his eternal truth directly to his people. The ancient fragment of 1 John 2 that we acquired is a prime example of how God's Word was alive to those in the fourth century and is still alive today.

Just prior to the time when this fragment of 1 John 2 was copied, around A.D. 320, a Libyan elder in the Alexandria church in Egypt, named Arius, was causing quite a controversy. He advocated that Jesus was a created being and not eternally coexistent with the Father. Christ's deity was freshly under attack within the Egyptian Christian community, and it caused an uproar.

John warned the church about antichrists—those who claimed

Jesus was not the Christ, the true Son of God. And John explained why what he was writing was so powerfully true:

“I have written these things to you concerning those who deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. For as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and just as it has taught you, remain in Him” (1 John 2:26-27).

The words of John’s message were true and powerful because they were the living words of God, who was, and still is today, declaring that Jesus is the Christ. God wanted the people in the first century to believe that important and eternal truth. And he wants us to believe as well.

This extraordinary truth is presented in an extraordinary writing that was communicated by the Holy Spirit. These words from God were made alive to the people in the first century when they were first penned and in the fourth century when these surviving fragments were copied, because God’s Spirit communicated them. Through the Holy Spirit guiding faithful copyists, he has used those same words to communicate the same truth down through the ages to this very day.

The person who copied 1 John 2 around A.D. 350 no doubt felt the living power of each word. The Egyptian Christians certainly did. They understood these writings were alive through God’s Spirit. They wanted to counter the false teachings that Arius was asserting about Christ and to be certain that their children accepted Jesus as the Son of God who had the power to forgive them and make them his children. The same is true for us today. Those words in 1 John are alive and relevant. There are people within our generation who claim that Jesus was simply a good teacher.

They assert He is not the Son of God or our only means of salvation. They say there are many ways to God and that Jesus

was merely a man with a good message. But we know that isn't true because God's Spirit declares in His Word that Jesus is the Christ, and anyone who says otherwise is wrong. God's Word declares the truth, and the Holy Spirit of God confirms it to those with open minds and hearts.

The writer of Hebrews, along with the apostles, claimed that, "the word of God is alive" (Heb. 4:12). That is true because the truth and message of Scripture belong to the living God, who directly explains His spiritual truths to every generation within every culture of the world.

There is no other book like the Bible. You may read a novel and be touched deeply by it. You may read a book of poetry or an inspiring Christian book and be profoundly moved. But these kinds of books are not the "Word of God." God may certainly use whatever you read to minister to you, but it is His Word and His truth that are uniquely powerful and alive and will remain alive forever. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

Think of it: God's words have been alive and powerful—invigorated by the ever-present Holy Spirit—since Moses penned the first five books, the Pentateuch, more than 3,000 years ago. They will remain alive through the eons of time. God's book is a living document that he wants you and me to read. It contains his vocabulary. They are his eternal words. He is there, wanting to speak his living words directly to you and teach you their transforming meaning.

As amazing as it may seem, God inspired men 2,000 to 3,000 years ago to write living words meant to be relevant for you right now in your life's situation. These words are there to tell you that God will never leave you or forsake you. He has comforting words to heal your hurts; a spirit of encouragement for when you are struggling with disappointments; acceptance to say you are loved for who you are, no matter what; security in times of danger to remove your fear of the future; approval

that says you are his child; and an everlasting love that says, "Cast all your care upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

Recapture the awe, the mystery, the passion and the power of God's Word. The Bible is no ordinary book. Within its pages are the hidden treasures to meet your needs, provide direction for your life, and give practical insight for living a life of fulfillment and joy. That is not merely hype; it is what the author of the book intended from the beginning. It reveals the true heart of a God who loves you and wants you to discover him in his book. He is the greatest treasure you and I could ever find. And he wants to be found. "You shall seek Me and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord" (Jer. 29:13-14).

The preceding was Part 2 of a series and excerpted from Josh McDowell's book, God-Breathed, published by Shiloh Run Press 2015. Click here to read Part 1. For more information and to receive a free download of the God-Breathed booklet, go to .

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