

Be Astonished At What God Has Said, Part 1

Psalm 19:7-11

Our English word “astonish” can be traced back to Latin words that mean “to thunder out,” or “to leave someone thunderstruck.” It carries the idea of surprise, or awe, or sudden amazement. When we pay attention, there are so many things about our God which are astonishing, things which cause amazement, even surprise, and certainly awe for the careful, worshipful heart.

We could name many aspects of our God which fall into this category. His creation would be one of them for sure. Think about His faithful love, His abounding grace, and His overflowing mercy. There are so many others that go far beyond the scope of this message. So let’s focus: **We should be astonished at what God has said.**

We are astonished when we consider the power of the Bible. That the Bible is an amazing, astonishing Book is a fact that we too often overlook. We talk about it in many different ways. We describe it as the very Word of God. It is light for our paths, food for our souls, a flame which devours, a power which saves, a sword which cuts, and a Word which lives. Someone has written:

The Bible is a rock of diamonds, a chain of pearls, the sword of the Spirit, a chart by which the Christian sails to eternity, the map by which he daily walks, the sundial by which he sets his daily life, the balance by which he weighs his actions.

T. DeWitt Talmage said it very well:

It seems as if to the feet of the sacred writers searching the mountains had brought all their gems, and the sea all its pearls, and the gardens all their frankincense, and the spring all its blossoms, and the harvests all their wealth, and heaven all its glory, and eternity all its stupendous realities; and that since then poets and orators and painters had been drinking from an exhausted fountain and searching for diamonds amid realms utterly rifled and ransacked.

Oh! This book is the hive of all sweetness, the armory of all well-tempered weapons, the tower containing the crown jewels of the universe, the lamp that kindles all other lights, the home of all majesties and splendors, the stepping-stone on which heaven stoops to kiss the earth with its glories, the marriage ring that unites the celestial and the terrestrial, while all the clustering, white-robed multitudes of the sky stand round to rejoice at the nuptials. This book is the wreath into which are twisted all garlands, the song into which hath struck all harmonies, the river of light into which hath poured all the great tide of

hallelujahs, the firmament in which all suns and moons and stars and constellations and galaxies and immensities and universes and eternities wheel and blaze and triumph....

In the latter part of the Psalms, we see David gathering together a great choir, standing in galleries above each other; beasts and men in the first gallery; above them hills and mountains; above them fire and hail and tempest; above them sun and moon and stars of light; until on the highest round he arrays the host of angels. And there, standing before this vast multitude, reaching from the depths of earth to the heights of heaven, like the leader of a great orchestra, he lifts his hands, crying, "Praise ye the Lord. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

And all earthly creatures in their song, and mountains with their waving cedars, and tempests in their thunder and rattling hail, and stars on all their trembling harps of light, and angels on their thrones respond in magnificent acclaim, "Praise ye the Lord. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

One unknown author has written:

The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of life, the doom of sinners, the happiness of believers. Read it to be wise. Believe it to be safe. Practice it to be holy. It gives light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you.

It is the traveler's map, the soldier's sword, the Christian's chart. Here Paradise is restored, heaven is opened, and the gates of hell described. Christ is its theme, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet.

Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, a river of pleasure, and a garden of flowers. It is given us in life, will open in judgment and remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, rewards the greatest labor, and condemns all who trifle with it.

Judith Hayes is one who trifles with it. In an article published in *The Skeptical Review* (May/June 1997), Ms. Hayes claimed in her article that no one really knows who wrote the Bible. She wrote:

Not for the faint of heart, the Bible is a very long read. Almost 1,300 pages of tiny print, it is a mixture of fierce, bloody battles, scores of twenty-generations-long, mind-numbing genealogies, and quite a bit of indecipherable, symbolic secret code of some sort. There is also a pinch of poetry thrown in for flavor. All in all, though, it is for the most part boring, too often frightfully violent, and at all times very confusing. It passeth human understanding.

I was unable to track down the actual author(s) of the book. Some of the sections have titles like "Mark" and "Joshua," but nowhere could I find who these people were or where or when they had lived. This is why authorship must remain anonymous.

In the 1700s, when he was just seventeen years of age, Voltaire, who later became a famous French philosopher, stood in a crowded auditorium and said of Christ's first disciples, "It took twelve ignorant fishermen to build Christianity, but I will show you how one Frenchman can destroy it." He spent a lifetime trying to do just that. He once stated that a hundred years from his day the Bible would have passed into the mists of history as people became more liberated and enlightened. Yet today Voltaire is dead, the Bible is still loved, read, studied and lived by millions of people. And only 50 years after Voltaire died, the Geneva Bible Society used his own house and his printing press to produce stacks and stacks of Bibles for distribution.

At one time on the island of Zanzibar, just off the coast of Tanzania in the Indian Ocean, 30,000 people were sold as slaves every year. Sidney Collett in *All About the Bible*, says that *"the English Cathedral in Zanzibar is built on the site of the Old Slave Market, and the Communion Table stands on the very spot where the whipping-post once stood! The world abounds with such instances ... As one has truly said, 'We might as well put our shoulder to the burning wheel of the sun, and try to stop it on its flaming course, as attempt to stop the circulation of the Bible.'"*

Here is how the Bible responds to Ms. Hayes and Voltaire: *You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you (Psalm 50:17). To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it (Jeremiah 6:10).*

Bernard Ramm notes: *"A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow, the corpse never stays put. No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible, with such venom and skepticism, with such thoroughness and erudition upon every chapter, line and tenet? The Bible is still loved by millions, read by millions, and studied by millions."*

Here's why. These are the very words of God Himself! In the pages of the Bible are found immeasurable hope and comfort. Ask any believer who has been through tragedy or grief. *How sweet are your promises to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* the psalmist declared (119:103). Jeremiah declared, *When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty (15:16).*

The words found in this Book touch people of every age, in every situation, from all backgrounds and nationalities. Children are awed by its stories, and aged saints are encouraged by its promises. The simplest of statements can be found inside its pages, while some of the deepest philosophical and theological questions have been launched because of it. Life and death and meaning and purpose and conviction and challenge—they're all inside! We learn that life is more than just a meaningless trip through time, that God does have a purpose behind all of it, and that there is a place prepared for us in eternity.

In fact, here is just some of what the Bible says about its permanence:

Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens (Psalm 119:89).

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8)

I tell you the truth, Jesus said, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:18).

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

Steve Kumar, in *Christianity for Skeptics: An Understandable Examination of Christian Belief* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), has written:

The Bible was written over a period of 1,500 years by more than forty different authors from different walks of life, and over forty generations: Moses, a political leader; Amos, a herdsman; Solomon, a king; Luke, a physician; Matthew, a tax collector; Peter, a fisherman. It was written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. It was written in different places: Moses in the wilderness; Daniel in a palace; Jeremiah in a dungeon; Paul in a Roman prison; Luke while traveling. It was written at different times: David wrote in times of war; Solomon in times of peace. It was written in different moods: some authors wrote from the heights of joy and others in the depths of sorrow.

It has had an astounding impact on society, on civilization, on architecture, on government, on medicine, on education, and on the laws of our land. Chief Justice Earl Warren once wrote, "I believe the entire Bill of Rights came into being because of the knowledge our forefathers had of the Bible and their belief in it." Christopher Columbus once declared that the Lord was the source of his idea to find a better route

to the Indies. He recalled that everyone who heard of his project laughed him to ridicule. But this was his response: "There is no question that the inspiration was from the Holy Spirit, because He comforted me with rays of marvelous inspiration from the Holy Scriptures."

And President Ronald Reagan, in speaking about the Word of God, said, "I'm accused of being simplistic at times with some of the problems that confront us. But I've often wondered: all the problems that face us today, if we'd only look there. 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever.' I hope Americans will read and study the Bible....It's my firm belief that the enduring values...present in its pages have a great meaning for each of us and for our nation. The Bible can touch our hearts, order our minds, refresh our souls."

Yes, it has comforted, encouraged, strengthened, challenged and guided countless millions of people through the ages. It has changed lives and hearts for centuries, and it can do the same for you.

We think of Augustine, a brilliant scholar of the fourth and fifth centuries. His godly mother's name was Monica, and she prayed every day for him for many years. But Augustine wasted his intelligence and his time chasing after pleasure. Yet he could not find peace. So he began a long period of searching and intense self-examination. In agony of spirit, he finally turned to the Bible, where he read these words: "*Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts*" (Romans 13:13-14).

Augustine later wrote about his response to this passage: "No further would I read; nor needed I. For instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away." Though we may not agree with every aspect, in his classic work entitled *Confessions*, Augustine, a former drunkard, influenced much of Christian thought by his brilliant writing.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon searched for peace in his heart and life until he heard this verse quoted by a country preacher: "*Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other*" (Isaiah 45:22).

Dennis Prager is a nationally syndicated radio talk show host, columnist and author. In a debate with Oxford atheist philosopher Jonathan Glover, Prager asked a question:

If you, Professor Glover, were stranded at the midnight hour in a desolate Los Angeles street, and if, as you stepped out of your car with fear and trembling, you were suddenly to hear the weight of pounding footsteps behind you, and you saw ten burly young men who had just stepped out of a dwelling coming toward you, would it or would it not make a difference to you to know they were coming from a Bible study?

Stories like that could be repeated hundreds of thousands of times by people of all ages and from all walks of life who have had the deepest needs of their lives met by the power of the Bible.

Open your heart and life more fully and more completely to what God says. Be astounded by it, and be changed by it. As John wrote in his gospel, *These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name* (John 20:31).

Edgar Guest wrote a little poem which expresses it well:

*And should my soul be torn with grief
Upon my shelf I find
A little volume, torn and thumbed,
For comfort just designed.
I take my little Bible down
And read its pages o'er
And when I part from it I find
I'm stronger than before.*