Seven Wonders of the Word

A Topical Sermon

by David Roper

Author’s note: Over forty years ago Harry Rimmer wrote a booklet entitled “Seven Wonders of the Wonderful Word,” which no doubt became the basis of many sermons. That volume has been out of print for many years now, but the approach deserves to continue to live. Perhaps my version will inspire some to preach more on “the wonderful Word.”

In my hand I hold the most wonderful book in all the world. That we might better appreciate it, I would like to think with you today about “Seven Wonders of the Word.”

Notice now that I did not say “The Seven Wonders of the Word.” The study of any seven wonders of this book will simply lead to the seventeen wonders of the Word, and so on to the seven hundred wonders of the Word—and beyond. Among other things, it is the multiplicity of these wonders that caused the Psalmist to exclaim: “Thy testimonies are wonderful”! (Psalms 119:129).

In this lesson then we will simply note seven of the many wonders of the Word—to make you appreciate it more and, we hope, to make you turn more frequently to its pages.

I. WONDER NUMBER ONE OF THE WORD: ITS ANTIQUITY

Antiques today are big business. It often seems that the older a thing is, the more valuable it is. If there is any truth in this, then the Bible is an extremely valuable book—for it is one of the oldest books in all the world!

Books generally do not get a chance to get very old. They are so fragile. Fire consumes them and water dissolves them. Insects eat them and careless fingers tear them. Their covers come off and the very elements conspire to turn them to dust. It is a marvel that any of them survive to an extremely old age.

The copy of the Bible that I hold in my hand is only a few years old. But the Bible itself, in completed form, is almost two thousand years old! And parts of it are fully twice that old! There is no old book in the world that can compare with this!

An illustration of its antiquity is the book of Job. Portions of it had to be written at least by the time of Abraham, which was about 2070 B.C.—and possibly parts of it, if not all of it, were written earlier than that! I think it can be safely said that the book of Job is the oldest complete manuscript in the possession of man today!!

Even more marvellous, however, is the fact that the Bible has reached this ancient age in spite of frequent and continued efforts to destroy it! Again and again the most powerful governments that this earth has known have sought to eradicate the book from the earth and wrest it from the possession of men. Men have died on the gallows for reading it and have been burned at the stake for owning it. Tortures too fiendish to describe have been visited upon women and children for looking on its pages. Yet there are more Bibles in the earth today than there are copies of any book ever written by the hand of man!

Let me give you one episode from the history of its survival: The Emperor Diocletian decreed death for any person who owned a copy of the Bible. He also condemned to death the members of a culprit’s household—for not informing on him. Thus the mighty Roman set out to ruthlessly remove the book which condemned his own vicious life and tyranny. After two years, Diocletian boasted, “I have completely exterminated the Christian writings from the face of the earth”—and it looked like he had.

Some years later Constantine was impressed by Christianity and desired to have copies of the New Testament made for all of the churches of his vast empire. Remember that Diocletian had claimed to have destroyed them all. Constantine offered a substantial reward to anyone who could discover and deliver to his officers a copy of the desired book. Within twenty-four hours, fifty copies of God’s Word were offered to the em-
peror—in spite of the fact that Diocletian thought he had destroyed it!

So then, written upon perishable materials in ink that is quick to fade, with every force of nature and man and the ravages of time conspiring to destroy it, the Bible has survived to our present century, challenging every natural explanation that can be advanced to account for its fabulous history.

But the Bible is not simply an ancient book, it is also a modern one in many respects.

II. WONDER NUMBER TWO OF THE WORD: ITS MODERNITY

We do not expect old books to be up-to-date in their contents or current in their teachings. A textbook of science ten years old is obsolete. One a century old is a curiosity. Salmon’s Embryology of the year 1700 would send a modern doctor into hysterical laughter with almost every page. The Pharmacopia Londensis of 1600 is even more fantastic, and if one were to practice medicine in accordance with that famed text, the A.M.A. would have him in jail in forty-eight hours.

To illustrate how even a few years can make such a difference, here is a statement from a textbook on botany 150 years old: “In Italy there groweth an herb . . . which hath a blossom of pure white possessing a rare fragrance, yet withal hath this strange property: the blossoms, placed under damp stones and suffered there to remain, in ten days transform themselves in venomous scorpions, the bite of which is death.”

Of course you may say, “Be fair. After all we have learned a great deal in the last century and a half. You cannot expect old books to be up-to-date.” But that is my point! Moses, for instance, wrote 3500 years ago and yet you never find his writings contradicting modern science and knowledge.

Illustrations of this could be multiplied. There, for instance, is Moses’ description of the ark—with the same general proportions used by ocean-going vessels of today (Genesis 6). Or there are the details of the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-31, 35-40). A tricky engineering problem is how to set a permanent or stable structure on a sand foundation. One engineer devised a type of bunkhouse for construction crews that work in the desert. He applied for a patent for the special type of walls used. They refused to grant the patent on the grounds that since Moses used the idea 3500 years before, it was a little late to patent it!

To me, however, some of the most fascinating illustrations of the modernity of the Bible are in the area of medicine. In a world that knew nothing of modern hygiene and health practices, the law of Moses is filled with instructions about cleanliness, sanitation, quarantine, and the like. Let me give two illustrations.

It has not been that long ago since mankind learned about germs. Having that information, it is standard procedure for a surgeon to wear a mask as he operates. Also when we go into the room of someone especially susceptible to disease, we wear a mask. Why? Because we do not want to spread germs. But over 3000 years before germs were discovered, God had Moses give these instructions to those with certain infectious diseases: “And he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean” (Leviticus 13:45).

Another medical must is the transfusion. A few short years ago, it was considered sound medical practice to bleed people, and many literally bled to death. Today, however, it is understood that the blood is the bloodstream of the body. Turn now to Moses’ statement in Genesis 9:4: “But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat”.

In other words, Moses said: The life of the flesh is in the blood. Is it not an amazing thing? The oldest volume in human keeping—as modern as twentieth century medical concepts.

And this same truth could be illustrated with all of the Bible’s varied subjects. Can any claim that the world has gone beyond the ethical standards of this book? Or that we have left its precepts behind? No, modern man has not begun to pass it—and if the world runs on for another thousand years, the Bible will be just as up-to-date in the thirtieth century as it is in the twentieth!

III. WONDER NUMBER THREE OF THE WORD: ITS DIVERSITY

All that we have said up to this point would be sufficiently amazing if the Bible were just one book, dealing with one subject. “But the astonishment of the thinking person is increased by the application of the law of probability and the
ratio of permutation to the multiplied factors of the scripture’s perfections.” In other words, there is no way to account for the book except to say it is divine!

The Bible is the most diverse book in the world. In the first place, it is in reality two volumes—Old and New Testaments—separated from each other by some four or five centuries. In the second place, each one of these volumes is further divided into a number of books—thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament, making a total of sixty-six. In the third place, these sixty-six books were written by over forty different writers. (I say over forty, because we are not certain how many historians wrote the records of Kings and Chronicles.) In the fourth place, these forty different men lived over a span of almost two thousand years! And finally, these men wrote on every subject known to literature, plus one. Regardless of your favorite kind of literature, you will find it in the Bible.

Once a preacher went with a group of boys on a camping trip. On the second night, around the campfire, one of the boys said, “I wish I had brought something to read.” The preacher said, “I have plenty to read. What do you like?” Rather dubiously the youngster replied: “Oh, I doubt if you would have anything I would like to read. I like adventure, wars, escapes and stuff like that.” The preacher laughed and got to his feet as he said, “Yes, I brought quite a lot of that reading with me. I will get some.” So he went to his knapsack and brought back his Bible. The boy’s face fell so low that, as the old farmer said, he could have drunk buttermilk out of a churn. “I did not mean that,” he said. “You do not know what is in here,” said the preacher. “You do not know what is in here,” said the preacher. “Sit tight for a few minutes and listen.” Then the preacher started. He read with them about the two spies who escaped from Jericho. Then they read about the exciting days of the judges, then about the young prince who had to flee for his life—and on and on through great adventures of the Bible. After an hour or so, one of the boys, his eyes big as saucers, said, “I did not know the Bible was that kind of exciting book.”

Yes, whatever your favorite kind of literature, you will find it in this book—and you will find the finest example of it in the world! Do you like poetry? Read the Psalms. Do you like bland verse? Read Isaiah. If you enjoy history, the Old Testament contains the only infallible, unprejudiced, and authoritative history of olden times that is surviving in our day. And if you like romance, that is not lacking either. Sample the book of Ruth.

But then you will remember, I said these men wrote on every subject known to literature plus one. This “plus one” is a subject no other book can handle: prophecy. In this book are hundreds of prophetic statements that have come to pass perfectly and accurately. This is God’s realm alone!

So then its diversity proves it is from God. But now to look at the other side of the coin.

IV. WONDER NUMBER FOUR OF THE WORD: ITS UNITY

If the Bible were one book, written by a single author on every subject, we would naturally expect all of its parts and sections to harmonize and agree. But if it were one book, written by forty-plus men on one subject, the chances of complete agreement would be very slight. Therefore, to say that forty-plus men wrote sixty-six books on fifty-plus different subjects, and that their words are in complete and perfect agreement, should leave the mind stunned. Then someone says, “But there must have been close collaboration and incessant conference to achieve so remarkable a work!” But History replies: “No, there was no collaboration. Most of these men never saw each other. They were separated by centuries and had no chance to plan or revise their utterances. The coincidence must be explained in some other way!”

The fact cannot be denied: There is complete unity between all the parts and writers of the Scripture. Men have tried very hard to find a single contradiction of consequence but have failed. This book is one book, a whole.

Take for instance, its two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Though they represent two separate covenants or agreements, for two separate groups of people, they are tied beautifully together. As someone has said: “The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.” The Old Testament is the root and the New Testament is the fruit.
It is almost impossible to fully understand some parts of this book without knowing the rest of it. If you want to know what Isaiah was talking about when he mentions a *virgin* being with child and a *man of sorrows*, you have to go to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. How could you ever understand the book of Hebrews without ever studying Leviticus and the other books of the law? And a study of the Old Testament will help your understanding of the symbols in the book of Revelation. And how could you possibly know what Paul is talking about when he refers to Christ as “our Passover” (1 Corinthians 5:7) unless you are familiar with Exodus 12? Yes, the different parts of this book represent a great whole with a single theme running throughout.

To illustrate this briefly, note a few contrasts between the *first* book of the Bible and the *last* book of the Bible:

1. Genesis begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth; Revelation ends with the creation of the *new* heavens and the new earth.
2. Genesis relates the coming of light and the creation of the sun and moon; Revelation tells of the end of their service to man as in the New City, where God and the Lamb are the light thereof.
3. In Genesis, man meets Satan and suffers defeat; in Revelation another “round is fought” and *this* time, Satan loses and, through Jesus, man is the victor.
4. In Genesis, man is cast out of the Garden; in Revelation he is reinstated with God.
5. Finally, Genesis tells how man loses the privilege of eating of the Tree of Life—lest sin be made immortal, but in Revelation, sin is done away and man is *invited* to eat of the Tree of Life so that he *may* live forever!

Yes, the *unity* of the book is a marvellous thing, but now let me carry this thought a little bit farther.

**V. WONDER NUMBER FIVE OF THE WORD: ITS WONDERFUL THEME**

I think you will agree with me when I say that the unity of the Bible is possible only if *one Mind* supervised the compilation of its contents. Since no human author could have lived over the fifteen-plus centuries which elapsed during this period of literary activity, only *God* can properly be called the Author of the book. This was what Peter had in mind when he said: “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost [or Spirit]” (2 Peter 1:21).

But again, to have unity, not only was one Author necessary, but also *one theme*—in order that the whole might be drawn together. It is in the appreciation of the one theme of this book that we can come to understand it and see its beauty.

And what is the theme of this book? It is not “The Story of Mankind” although mankind provides the *reason* for the theme. It is not “The Story of the Jews” although they figure prominently in the working-out of the theme. The theme of the book is “The Story of a Man”—one Man—Jesus Christ.

It has been well said that the Bible centers around The Coming One. The message of the Old Testament is “He is coming.” The message of the gospel accounts is “He is here.” And the message of the rest of the New Testament is “He is coming again.”

An interesting study can be made of every book of the Bible from the standpoint of how it reveals Jesus. Books could be written on “Jesus in Genesis,” “Jesus in Exodus,” “Jesus in Leviticus,” etc. For instance:

- Jesus is in Genesis 1, for “All things were made by him” (John 1:3).
- Jesus is in Genesis 3 for it is He who would later be “the seed of woman” and bruise the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15).
- Jesus is in Genesis 4, as He is foreshadowed in the sacrifice of Abel’s lamb (see Hebrews 12:24).
- Jesus is in Genesis 6, for the salvation in the ark is a type of the salvation to be found in and through Him. And on and on we could go.

This then is the theme that makes the Word a wonderful unity: *Jesus Christ*. The Redeemer who was to come, the Savior who did come, and the King who will come again binds the words and sentences of the sixty-six books into one complex and unified document.

But *because* Jesus is the theme of the book, we have the next wonder.

**VI. WONDER NUMBER SIX OF THE WORD: ITS TREMENDOUS POWER**

The Bible is the most potent influence ever exerted in human annals. It has changed the flow
of history, erected empires, cast down conquerors and kings, and has brought blessing and success to those who obeyed its precepts, and death and oblivion to those who fought against it. Its powers are many and varied, but I would like to notice especially its power to change lives and uplift men.

Once upon a time, there was a savage race living on an island. They were the wildest and most barbaric of all savage races. When the wisdom of Greece and the arts of Rome had made of the Mediterranean world the very center of learning and the hub of the world, these islands were peopled by tribesmen more savage than any others ever known. The annals of Caesar’s Tenth Legion convey a graphic picture of those rude days when these barbarians went into battle naked and celebrated a victory by drinking the blood of a slain enemy out of an empty skull. They painted their nude bodies in strange designs in “magic blue colors” and at the altars of the Druids, human sacrifices were common. But then something happened. Missionaries risked their lives and took the Word of God to these wild tribes. The natives accepted it and after a time became rulers of an empire even greater than that of Alexander the Great! For these islands were the British Isles and many of these savages were even our own ancestors.

To give a more recent illustration: A man by the name of John G. Paton wanted to go to the New Hebrides Islands. At first the British government refused him permission to go. They said the tribesmen were the wildest and most savage known. They were confirmed cannibals and ate friends as well as enemies. But Paton persisted and finally they gave in. A British ship landed Mr. and Mrs. Paton on the island under armed guard and stood by while the crew built the missionaries a house in which to dwell. Then they sailed away, convinced they would never see the couple again.

The people with whom they worked were brutal and cruel almost beyond hope. Shortly after they began their work, Mrs. Paton died of a tropical disease, and was buried. John Paton had to lie upon her grave for ten days and nights, musket in hand to keep the natives from digging up her body and eating it. But he stayed and taught them the Word. For thirty years he stayed. At the end of the time, the British government published an official document saying that the former cannibals of the New Hebrides had become the most advanced and cultured of all the native tribes that lived under the British flag! The power of the Book!

There are many other wonders of the Word, but we want to notice one more—another illustration of its power.

**VII. WONDER NUMBER SEVEN OF THE WORD: ITS BLESSED COMFORT**

Here as in every other field of service to man the Bible is unique, unprecedented, and unparalleled! There has never been and never will be any other trustworthy light that can enable man to see beyond the grave and find hope and assurance for himself and comfort for his heart when loved ones are taken from his home.

In my brief ministry, I have worked in a lot of different areas. When I first started preaching, I thought that the principal thing a preacher did was preach. To my surprise, I found that a preacher is also a visiter, a student, a teacher, a trainer, a writer, an editor, a printer, a counselor, a planner, a pusher, an officiator, and a multiplicity of other things. But by and large I have enjoyed every bit of it, and has made my life fuller than I believe it could have been in any other work. But there is one thing I have to do I just do not like.

I do not like funerals.

Death is an enemy and all the poetry and philosophy of man’s devising can never change that grim and somber fact. Of course to the Christian, it is an enemy whose defeat has been pre-determined, and an enemy that by the power of Christ is forced to serve as an usher to introduce the redeemed into the presence of the Lord. But nevertheless it is an enemy!!

It enters castle and cottage alike. It separates husband and wife. It tears the little baby from its mother’s arms. It turns sweet happiness into darkest despair. I do not like death; I do not like funerals.

But someone comes to me and says, “Say some words that will comfort us.” Where shall those words come from? From literature? From the poets? From the philosopher? Search all your great books through and there is not a line or sentence penned by mortal man that will bring lasting comfort and hope when death strikes.
your home. There is just one source of words of strength and comfort: the Bible. I may not have the words that are needed to comfort the bereaved, but I can read words like these from God’s book:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me (Psalms 23:4).

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept . . . . So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:20-54).

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:17, 18).

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelation 21:4).

Through the ages, these words—and others like them in the Bible—have dried tears, dispensed hope, and brought comfort to literally millions. Indeed it is a wonderful book!

CONCLUSION

Today we have briefly spoken on seven wonders of the Word: its antiquity, its modernity, its diversity, its unity, its wonderful theme, its tremendous power, and its blessed comfort. I have probably presented little that was new to you. My purpose was not to bring that which was new, but to reaffirm these things in your mind, and to encourage you to act upon that faith. Until you accept the One spoken of in the Bible by trust and obedience and until you allow the Bible to have its effect on your life, as far as you are concerned, it will remain a dusty old volume with no power at all.

FOOTNOTES

1Hold up the Bible.
2In Australia my books had to be kept in garages and basements. The mildew about finished them off. A few years after I returned to the U.S. what was left of my library was damaged by a fire. Books are easily destroyed!
3My daughter, Debbie, is a sales representative for a company that publishes college textbooks. The major factor in most of her sales is the fact that textbooks are quickly outdated.

This sentence is to be said quickly, in one breath—followed by a smile and the next sentence as an explanation.

One was named “Red Spear.” From Anglo-Saxon speech to English, that became “Roper.” This was my ancestor.

ILLUSTRATION

Concerning the Year

A little girl was tacking up a new wall calendar. “It is going to be a beautiful year,” she exclaimed.

A friend, who heard the girl’s prediction, asked, “How do you know it is going to be a beautiful year? A year is a long time, and you never know what will happen.”

“Yes,” she answered, “but a day is not a long time. I am going to take a day at a time, and make it beautiful. Years are only days put together, and I am going to see that every day in the new year gets something beautiful into it.”

“If you really do that,” replied the friend, “it will surely be a beautiful year.”