



The Word Is Alive

Welcome to this new series, The Word Is Alive, which is intended to look at God's written word in a little more depth than we might do when we simply read and mediate on it by ourselves. The series is not intended to be in a format that we might expect on a Sunday morning, when we receive a message based on the Word, and then have it applied to the way we live. However, we often find that simply spending time in the Word, will help us to hear from God, through his Holy Spirit, and therefore to have our lives shaped by what we read and hear.

Key: The following formats are used during the study to help identify the purpose of the text being read.

- **Denotes the start of a major passage or theme in the book**
- Luke 2:1-52 - The birth of Jesus Christ denotes the section to be studied and its title from the bible.
- Luke 2:1 denotes the verse or verses which following comments refer to.
- ¹ Passage of scripture from the book being studied.
- {{³⁶ Passage not found in the original manuscripts and taken from a different translation as indicated, e.g. (KJV)}}}
- Comments on a passage of scripture.
- Words from the scripture passage being specifically commented on.
- As above but indicating commonly used alternatives from other translations.
- <<Passage of scripture used to support the comments being made>>.
- Additional supporting comments or background information.
- Author's personal opinions.

Just over 3,000 years ago King David wrote: <<In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise – in God I trust; I will not be afraid>> (Psalm 56:10-11a). This remains as true today; we can trust in God and we can trust in his Word.

A reflective prayer:

Lord we thank you for your written word. We know that we can trust in it just as we trust in you. We also know that those who read it, or hear it, and then take to heart what is written in it, are indeed truly blessed.

Your very words tell us that if we hold to your teaching, we are really your disciples; then we will know the truth and the truth will set us free.

As the songwriter puts it:

'Freedom from sin, oh wonderful story.
All of its stains washed whiter than snow.
Jesus has come to live in this temple.
Now all of my days, his love I will show'.

Help us, Father, to reflect your love through our words and deeds always.

Help us too, Lord, not just to be readers of your word but to become doers of your word, to live by your word and to live out your word; for your word is truth.

You have stated that you were born to testify to the truth, help us too, to live a life that is the only truth that is found in your word and in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I recommended that you now listen to and reflect on 'The Word Is Alive' by Casting Crowns.

In Genesis 1:1-3 it states: <<*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light" and there was light*>>. Here we see the power of the word of God, right at the beginning of creation, speaking everything into being; right at the very beginning of recorded history.

Elsewhere, we read: <<*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it*>> (John 1:1-5). Some translations say, <<*the darkness has not put it (that is, the light) out*>>. Whichever translation we use it is clear that the Light, the very essence of God, will always prevail.

John continues: <<*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14).

Here, it becomes evident that the word is both 'the unique Son of God' and God's written word; given to us to inform us, teach us, guide us, and as a means to praise God; to help us understand and obey his will for each of us.

The apostle Paul writes: <<*Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*>> (Ephesians 6:17).

For me personally, when I read the word I am often in a place where God will speak to me, instruct me, challenge me and reprimand me. Lord, let me never become one of whom Jeremiah speaks: <<*To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so that they cannot hear. The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it*>> (Jeremiah 6:10).

Moses, the great Hebrew leader, whom God chose to lead the Israelites out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt, once wrote: <<*Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it*

to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it>> (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

But Moses himself fell foul of the power of the word when he was instructed by God to speak to the rock at Kadesh-Meribah in order to produce water from it. Whether he lacked confidence in God's word, or he had not paid attention to what was said, or he was simply angry with the attitude and continual grumbling of the Israelites, we don't know, but instead of speaking to the rock, he struck it twice with his staff and the water poured out. But God was angry at this disobedience as recorded in Deuteronomy Chapter 20 and Psalm 106.

Many commentators and bible teachers agree that the rock that was struck was Jesus, alluded to by Paul, <<*They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert>> (1 Corinthians 10:3-5); the rock was the source of 'living water', and it is this that led God to remove from Moses, the privilege of leading God's people into the Promised Land.*

What this record teaches is the need for all of us to pay heed to the word of God and what is being said to each of us through it.

Matthew Henry, writing in 1706, said, "*It is an honour to us that we have the Bible in reputation and power among us. It is an evidence of a people's being high in the favour of God*". The fact that God wants to speak to us is evidence of his love, grace and mercy for us all.

The Bible was originally written in three languages. The OT was primarily written in Hebrew, with some books written partially or wholly in Aramaic, especially around and after the time of the exile to Babylon. The NT was written primarily in Greek. However, there are a number of Jesus' statements in Aramaic, the language he used. It is not surprising that Greek was the chosen language for NT scripture as it was the most commonly spoken language throughout the region at that time, primarily due to the influence of Alexander The Great, who defeated the great Persian Empire during the 4th Century BC; taking control of Palestine in around 332BC. After Alexander's early death in Babylon, the empire was split, with Palestine coming under the Seleucid Empire and the region was Hellenised.

The NT was written in Greek as it was not just for Jewish converts but for Gentiles too, who would commonly have spoken Greek, at least as a second language. Greek was also the common language of the Roman Empire.

It should also be noted that many of the OT references, made by NT authors, are made to the Greek OT, the Septuagint, or LXX as it is often referred to. LXX are the Roman numerals for 70.

Briefly, the Septuagint is the oldest known complete copy of the OT in existence, although archæological finds, such as the Dead Sea scrolls, do provide valuable testimony to the accuracy of the Hebrew copies of the OT that remain today.

Tradition has it that King Ptolemy II, who lived from 309-246BC, sponsored the first translation of the original Hebrew books of the Law, the Pentateuch, during the 3rd Century BC, for the benefit of Alexandrian Jews who could read Greek but not Hebrew.

Allegedly, he got 70 Jewish scholars to separately write out the contents of the first 5 books of the bible. All Jews learn these by heart from an early age. When they had done so, he was amazed to find that all copies were almost identical. He then had these copies translated into Koine Greek, a common Hellenistic language at that time. Hence the name LXX, from the number of scholars used. Other scriptures were gradually added until the work, comprising the Torah and the Tanach, was completed around 132BC.

As we will see shortly, most of the material in this study comes from thoughts, observations, comments and messages from others. If anyone thinks they detect areas of plagiarism they are mistaken, as I claim no original ownership to the content, other than the comments I clearly identify as my own. The statements are those that I have accepted from the teaching of others and have reused here. Although I rarely acknowledge the source during the narrative, there is a list of people who have influenced the production of this series, which is available on this website.

Any references I make to the original language come directly from trained scholars, as I have no knowledge of these languages. I will only make such references where I believe it is helpful to our understanding of the text.

As already stated, most of the comments I make about the word are drawn from eminent scholars, teachers and bible commentators. When I venture to add my own opinion, I will try to make it clear that it is mine and that it should be treated with caution until you have checked it out for yourself.

Having said that, I will start with some of my own opinions:

I firmly believe that we should always be apologists of the word. Not that we make apologies for it in any way, but that we are *always* prepared to defend its authenticity, its relevance to everyone and its truth.

In 1984, Dr David Jenkins, professor of theology at the University of Leeds and already designated to become ordained as the next Bishop of Durham, shocked many people by stating in a live television interview, that he doubted God would have arranged a Virgin Birth or allowed Jesus to walk on the water. He also allowed people, who did not consider Jesus to be more than a divinely inspired human, to consider themselves to be Christians.

Although David Jenkins went on to do much good work in the role of Bishop, and he had a great ability to shock atheists more than they could shock Christians, I believe it unhelpful, especially for non-believers, when supposed followers of Jesus are not able, or prepared, to defend God's word - although God himself needs no defending, of course.

I also believe that the word of God has but two meanings:

Firstly, the meaning intended, by the Holy Spirit, at the time he guided the original author to record it for us; and secondly, the meaning which the Holy Spirit intends each time that we, either individually or as a group, read it or hear it read to us.

It is my suggestion that we always seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit at such times.

The purpose and structure of these studies:

I get a lot of pleasure in taking my reading of the word to a higher level by studying commentaries, and other works, by eminent Christian scholars. The materials used here are based on those readings and are intended to add enjoyment for others.

At the start of a book, there will be a summary of the book's structure, its purpose and background, (both historic and cultural), its author, date and intended audience.

Each chapter will commence with a summarised overview of its contents. There may be a preview of a block of verses and then each verse or linked group of verses will be read and then followed by a commentary, including a review of other relevant bible passages, which relate to the verses being looked at. There will also be a separate overview summary of the particular book being studied.

The material is based on the NIV 1984 translation. Other translations are used in commentary from time to time, when the words they use are more helpful in understanding a point being reflected upon. It is always advisable to have the bible with you or access to an online resource, such as Biblegateway.com, to compare different translations.

Other key materials, such as cross-references to the bible verses referred to, the meanings of original language words used, the structure of the book, and its chapters, are separately available on the site.