

Why am I a Bible Student?

Why is such a question even necessary?

Because the closing experiences of the Church in the flesh will impose this question upon us, more often, and more forcefully.

So it was with Elijah, a faithful servant of God.

He successfully passed intense tests of faith, loyalty and devotion, under persecution, for many years.

But he buckled under the pressure of continued opposition and began to question and to doubt himself, and to doubt God's people – Israel.

We find the story in 1 Kings chapters 18 and 19.

Consider in particular the remarkable contest with the priests of Baal and the events that followed.

Here was a powerful manifestation of Jehovah as the one true God, and Elijah as His servant.

But instead of a complete recognition of such an obvious sign of Jehovah's approval, Elijah was threatened with death, and fled into the wilderness.

Elijah was discouraged, panic-stricken, fearful and became mentally unbalanced.

After *fleeing* for his life, he asked God to *take* his life.

The cause of his discouragement was two-fold:

1) Feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness: "I am no better than my fathers."
(1 Kings 19:4)

2) Doubts about Israel as God's covenant people: "I, even I only, am left."
(1 Kings 19:10)

Elijah felt very much alone and without hope.

Others have had similar experiences, including Moses, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, even Jesus.

These faithful men saw that the *majority* of God's professed covenant people did not manifest faithfulness to their covenant.

Their observation, regarding the majority, was a correct one.

However, God told Elijah that there were still: "Seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal." (1 Kings 19:18)

God showed Ezekiel that there were still those who "sighed and cried because of all the abominations" that were done in Jerusalem. (Ezek. 9:4)

God assured Habakkuk that the vision was certain of fulfillment, and that there were still those who had a living faith. (Hab. 2:4)

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. (Luke 19:41)

But he knew there was a faithful "Little Flock" among them. (Luke 12:32)

But even with these faithful few, there were problems.

What about us?

Do you ever feel discouraged like Moses, when he came down from the mount the first time and saw what Aaron and the people were doing?

Do you ever feel all alone like Elijah?

We must remember that we are "no better than our fathers" and we must remember that at best we are "unprofitable servants." (1 Kings 19:4; Luke 17:10)

Those who have a *living* faith will always be in the minority.

Also: There never has been, and never will be, a perfect follower of Christ in the flesh.

Going back to the original premise: “Why is such a question even necessary?”

Why am I a Bible Student? Why are you a Bible Student?

This is a question which each one of us must ask ourselves.

This is a question which must have a Scriptural answer.

The necessity for this question is tied to our standing with God, and the underlying foundation of our faith.

Answering this question is an important and necessary exercise for each one of us.

My reasons may differ from yours, and my reasons may be *different than you might expect*.

In any case, we must know what we believe, and why we believe it.

I have seen, heard or read more than one presentation entitled: “Why I am NOT a Bible Student.”

This discourse is not a rebuttal of those presentations, which fall under the category of fault-finding, are a negative approach, and are merely destructive.

However, most of the stated reasons in those presentations are not doctrinal, but personal.

I suspect that ALL of us have had bad experiences with the Bible Students.

This fact of life has been true from the beginning. Just read the New Testament.

Remember: there never has been, and never will be, a perfect follower of Christ in the flesh.

If we permit the fallen flesh of believers (and *near* believers) to influence what *we* believe, we will at the very least be discouraged, and at the worst we will be led astray.

In brief: I consider myself a Bible Student because of a shared set of beliefs. [REPEAT]

Countless religious groups around the world have a set of beliefs which they consider to be true.

Why *this* set of beliefs?

That is the main question that will be considered in the time before us.

In brief: What we call the Truth is the best candidate based on a comprehensive set of Scriptural standards.

Before considering this list of standards, here are several counterpoints:

My reason for being a Bible Student is NOT because of the *people*, but because of the *beliefs*.

My reason is NOT because Bible Students are better than other people.

There are lots of wonderful Bible Students.

But there are and have been lots of wonderful people in the world, even non-Christians.

Most of the Brethren are those who I get along with rather well, but not all, and not always.

My reason for being a Bible Student is NOT because we all agree on everything.

There is agreement on fundamentals, as there should be, and as there must be.

There is great diversity on other points of doctrine, though we must strive for doctrinal unity even in those areas.

My reason for being a Bible Student is NOT because we have a large or impressive organization.

Again: My reason for being a Bible Student is because of the set of beliefs.

A *set* is an integrated and harmonious package.

Our set of beliefs is so interconnected that you cannot remove or change one of them without affecting the others. This fact is strong supporting evidence that our set is the correct one.

This set was not formulated all at once, but over a period of years during the ministry of Brother Russell.

Some would argue that the process of fine-tuning is not yet complete.

Another important question, then, is whether there are Scriptural grounds for further changes; that is another question that will be considered later.

One more introductory point remains: What we believe matters. Our set of beliefs determines our actions, and defines our character. There is a tendency today to compromise our set of shared beliefs, and to dilute or replace various components, or to minimize the importance of a set of beliefs altogether. In this, history repeats itself, for so it has happened many times during the Gospel Age, even within the past century, and even within our lifetimes.

The Adversary has successfully used the same tactic with virtually every generation. We all know, or should know, what happened with the Watch Tower after Brother Russell died. Their set of beliefs today has no resemblance to what Bible Students held to a century ago, and still hold to today. But those changes took place relatively gradually.

We must not allow the Truth to be diluted, or minimized, or set aside. But what are the points of Truth which are fundamental to our harmonious set, and which therefore cannot be compromised? Each one must decide for themselves regarding their personal list, and whether the following candidates belong on that list. The very fact that we have the liberty to perform this exercise is another significant reason as to why I am a Bible Student.

OVERVIEW: the Bible Students' Set of Beliefs

Which doctrine would you put first on your list?

Many would probably say the Ransom.

The number one distinguishing doctrine on my list is something I believe to be even more fundamental: the Character of God.

It was the Character of God which created, developed and is implementing the entire Plan of the Ages, including the Ransom.

This doctrine is a touchstone for all others.

If there is any other religious belief that better portrays the character of God than Present Truth, I would like to know what it is.

I have studied many religions, both Christian and non-Christian, before I found the Bible Students and in the 50 years since. There is no other set of religious beliefs *which even comes close* on this doctrine.

If any other proposed package fails on this point, it fails totally.

Details of this and other doctrines will be considered momentarily.

Additional Doctrines include, but are not limited to the following:

The *Nature* of God
The *Nature* of Jesus Christ
The Ransom for all
The doctrine of the Atonement and At-one-ment,
The Bible as the inspired Word of God,
The Permission of Evil,
The State of the Dead,
The Resurrection of the Dead
The Object and Manner of our Lord's return,
The Restoration of Israel,
Election and Free Grace,
The New Creation,
The Two Salvations,
The True Kingdom of God, and
The false Kingdom of God: Antichrist, Babylon the Great

Obviously time will not permit a detailed consideration of all these points of Truth. A number of other doctrines could no doubt be added to the list.

Now for a More Detailed Consideration of Selected Key Doctrines

The Character of God

We all know the basics of this doctrine: Wisdom, Justice, Power and Love in perfect balance and harmony.

All other doctrines are *related* to this one, including the Ransom.

All other doctrines *reveal* the Character of God, especially the Ransom.

The flyleaf of Volume One contains a succinct statement of this concept:

The Plan of the Ages

***A VINDICATION OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER and Government:
Showing, by a Recognition and Harmonizing
of all the Scriptures, that the Permission of
Evil, Past and Present, is Educational and Preparatory
to the Ushering of Mankind Into
THE GOLDEN AGE OF PROPHECY...***

The purpose of God's Plan is to educate all His intelligent creatures regarding His character.
“*Who will have all men...come to an accurate knowledge of the Truth...*” (1 Tim. 2:4)
The scope of this education is for the benefit of all His creatures.
The means employed is the Permission of Evil.
The result of this education will be a desire to copy God's character.
Possessing this character is the only way to have a pleasing and profitable existence.

For homework, think of each doctrine that is important to you, and consider how each one is related to and reveals the Character of God.

This doctrine is a **unique** and key component of the set of beliefs of Bible Students and is the “glue” which holds all the pieces together.

A careful study of Present Truth is necessary to appreciate and understand this point.

Even if this was the only item on my list, it would be convincing. We could stop right here.

As stated before, no other set of beliefs **even comes close** to what we have in Present Truth.

Any other package which does not accurately portray the Character of God is not valid.

The Nature of God and Jesus

All are familiar with Deut. 6:4 and Mark 12:29 — “Jehovah, our God, Jehovah, is one.”

Jesus identifies himself to Laodicea as: “the beginning of the creation of God.” (Rev. 3:14)

The word “beginning” is Strong's G746: “the initial starting point” or “what came first.”

This verse shows that Jesus was created. He had a starting point.

This truth was important in the past, but is especially important for Laodicea.

You all know the Scriptural arguments regarding the nature of God and Jesus.

A correct understanding of these two doctrines is another key component of our set of beliefs.

Though not unique to Bible Students, there are only a handful of religious groups that have a *correct* understanding of this doctrine, and even with that handful there are some subtle differences.

The Ransom for all, Atonement and At-one-ment

As stated before, the Ransom reveals the four components of the Character of God:

Justice:

We usually rank this attribute first, and properly so.

A careful examination of the Ransom method of Atonement exhibits perfect Justice.

The key element here is the satisfaction of Justice by means of an equal corresponding price. (Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6)

Justice requires that the Ransom be for ALL. This is another key component.

This combination of a Ransom and benefits for ALL is unique to Bible Students.

Some Christians believe in a Ransom, but it's not for ALL.

For example: Jehovah's Witnesses no longer believe in a Ransom for ALL.

Some Christians believe in Universal Salvation, but without a Ransom.

The vast majority of Christians do not truly believe in either concept.

Wisdom:

The Ransom method of At-one-ment is the wisest and most practical method.

It is the wisest because it is the best method for exhibiting the Character of God.

It not only demonstrates that God is Wise.

It also demonstrates that God is Just, Powerful and Loving.

It is the most practical because it not only satisfies Justice, but provides the mechanism for reforming the human race and “bringing many sons to glory.”

All other systems of belief fail to explain the beautiful logic behind At-one-ment.

Power:

The Ransom method of Atonement is not an easy method.

The Ransom method of At-one-ment takes a lot of time and effort on God's part.

The Ransom method best demonstrates the Power of God.

“Think of the power and skill which can harness even every opposing element, animate or inanimate, and make them all work together for the accomplishment of His grand designs.” (July 5th Songs in the Night)

Think of the mighty power that was required to raise Jesus to the Divine nature.

Think of how much power was required to raise the sleeping saints to that nature.

Think of how much power will be required to restore the human race and this planet.

Love:

The Ransom method of At-one-ment is Loving.

Justice set the boundaries.

Wisdom surveyed the field.

Power executes the Plan.

But Love was the motive behind it all.

Each one of these four attributes is a study in its own right. The Harvest Message, and Volume 5 in particular, are a unique and Scriptural presentation of the doctrines of the Ransom, the Atonement, and the At-one-ment. There are approximately one thousand Scripture citations in Volume 5 alone.

The three doctrinal positions mentioned so far, present a compelling case for our set of beliefs as being uniquely correct. That being so, they also demonstrate that the 7th Messenger was a special tool for presenting them. Arguably, you could pick and choose a few good points from other religions, but none of them have *a complete, harmonious package*. And all of them fall far short in a majority of their views.

The Bible as the inspired Word of God

Many Christians claim that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. A growing number do not.

This is an essential component, but not one unique to Bible Students as a concept.

Here is a link to a brief paper on the subject:

<http://www.agsconsulting.com/docs/Authenticity.pdf>

This component of our set of beliefs is more challenging, because it involves a specific interpretation of the Bible.

That challenge is overcome if we make certain that our interpretation conforms to the Character of God, the nature of God, the Ransom, the Atonement, etc..

The topical approach to Bible Study and interpretation is a key element which is unique in some respects to Bible Students.

The *Studies in the Scriptures* series is the best tool available for such a systematic study.

We must “prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.” (1 Thess. 5:21)

We must “rightly divide the Word of Truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15)

We must get rid of all self-will, and pursue the Will of God alone. (Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 16:24; etc.)

The Chart of the Ages is a special visual aid that helps us to quickly see if an interpretation of Scripture is part of the complete and harmonious package. But like any tool, skillful use requires familiarity and training.

What does this Truth (that the Bible is inspired) mean on a practical level?

If the Bible is inspired, it is obviously *correct*.

If the Bible is inspired, it is *superior* to all other sources outside the Bible.

One source, the Bible, negates all the thousands of other sources that teach Evolution.

One source, the Bible, negates all the thousands of other sources that support a “revised history” or an “alternate chronology” based on “proofs” outside the Bible.

*“If they speak not according to **this** word, it is because there is no light in them.”* (Isa. 8:20)

“Let God be true, though it prove every man a liar.” (Rom. 3:4)

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” (Gal. 1:8,9)

External sources are only admissible if they support and harmonize with the Bible.

External sources are only admissible if they support and harmonize with the foundation doctrines already considered.

Here is a brief quote from the Concluding Thoughts chapter of Volume 1, page 348:

“And be it known that no other system of theology even claims, or has ever attempted, to harmonize in itself every statement of the Bible; yet nothing short of this we can claim for these views.”

You have to prove this point for yourself. And that requires effort. Not many are willing to put forth the required effort.

Bible Students have a unique interpretation of the Bible.

It is not perfect. (Neither are any other systems of interpretation.)

You can “poke holes in it” if that’s how you want to spend your time.

Or, you can carefully examine it to see how the pieces fit together.

It is superior to all other interpretations I have ever examined.

It is a complete, harmonious package.

It is a compelling reason why I am a Bible Student.

The Permission of Evil

Though not first on my list, this one is my favorite.

This explanation changed me from an agnostic to a believer.

This explanation showcases the sterling Character of God as no other.

This explanation beautifully and uniquely details the philosophy of the Atonement and At-one-ment.

This explanation harmonizes the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

This explanation is *unique* to Bible Students. (Sadly, the JW’s lost this gem of Truth.)

One relatively small chapter in Volume One, only 20 pages, contains the crucial answer that is missing from every other system of belief.

We must be able to prove what we believe; to give an answer for the hope within us.

The Permission of Evil is a vital, crucial and Scriptural basis for our hope which harmonizes perfectly with the other doctrines on the “master list.”

Every one must prove this affirmation for themselves.

Few are willing to do that.

It’s much easier to either “go with the flow” or to find fault at a superficial level.

The Resurrection of the Dead and the State of the Dead

How prominent is the doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead in the Bible?

How many religions teach this doctrine as it is presented in the Bible?

Both questions are important and must be considered *together* in order to answer the question of: “Why am I a Bible Student?”

There are few doctrines in the New Testament that are so prominent in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles.

Jesus not only taught it, but foreshadowed it in many of his miracles.

The Apostles did likewise.

The Apostle Paul put special emphasis on this doctrine in 1 Cor. 15 and other places such as Acts 23:6 and Acts 24:21.

We would naturally expect other religions to give a prominent place to this doctrine.

They do not, with but few exceptions.

Those that do teach it give a warped, inconsistent and incomplete portrayal.

Heathen religions present *Ransom-denying* concepts such as reincarnation, the transmigration of souls, etc.

Christian religions may teach it, but they do not give a rational, or Scriptural, *reason* for a resurrection from the dead, and rely on the immortal soul doctrine, and eternal torment, as key components.

The Jewish religion has a more accurate concept of the resurrection, but it is *incomplete*, embracing only the earthly Kingdom.

Only Present Truth presents the doctrine of the Resurrection and gives a Scriptural explanation for its scope and purpose, and presents the fact that the dead are dead.

The Object and Manner of our Lord's Return

This doctrine ties together a number of the other ones on the “master” list.

The object is the restitution of all things, beginning in Israel. (Acts 3:19-21)

The 1st Advent was to provide the Ransom price.

The 2nd Advent is to make use of that price to purchase and restore Planet Earth and all of Adam's race.

The manner is secret and invisible.

The Wisdom of God is clearly manifest in this method when rightly understood.

The nature of Jesus and his exalted office as a Divine spirit being require it.

The doctrines of Election and Free Grace; the Two Salvations; the True Kingdom of God; and others, are related to and harmonious with this doctrine.

All the virgins – both wise and foolish – of Matthew 25:1-12 recognize the 2nd Presence.

Nearly a hundred individuals in the mid-to-late 19th Century expected the imminent return of our Lord, and gave Scriptural reasons for that hope.

Only one of that number made a worldwide proclamation not only of the expectation of that hope, but of its realization.

The title page of every Watch Tower prominently displayed the words: “the Herald of Christ's Presence.”

No one else initiated such a widespread public proclamation, not even Nelson Barbour.

The Restoration of Israel **Volume 3, Study VIII**

This doctrine is not unique to Bible Students, but Pastor Russell saw the related prophecies and proclaimed them worldwide, and promoted a return of the Jewish people to their homeland even before their leaders, such as Theodore Herzl, embraced it.

A unique aspect of the Bible Students' view of this doctrine is the "dual covenant" concept, which encourages Jews to be faithful to their (earthly) Covenant.

Now is *not* the time for a wholesale conversion of Jews to Christ. (Romans 11:25,26)

Other Christian groups either insist that Jews must become Christians now, or remove them from the Plan of God entirely via "replacement theology."

Additionally, this doctrine provides a strong proof of the accuracy of Bible Chronology.

It is a fact of Bible history that Israel was cast off from favor in 33 A.D.

It is a fact of secular history that favor began to return to Israel in 1878 A.D.

The 1845 year Jewish Double spans a period of 3,690 years, confirming and cementing seven of the nine major periods of the True Bible Chronology.

See: Volume 2, chapter VII; Jer. 16:18; Zech. 9:12; Isa. 40:2.

There is a wealth of detail associated with each one of these doctrines that is outside the scope of this presentation.

Election and Free Grace, the New Creation, the Two Salvations

Each of these deserves separate consideration, but they are very much related one to the other.

The vast majority of Christian groups accept either Election or Free Grace.

They tend to view these two doctrines as contradictory and mutually exclusive.

Their confusion results from not understanding the Two Salvations.

We are blessed to know that Election applies to the New Creation, while Free Grace applies to the world of mankind.

The beautiful harmonization of these three doctrines is unique to Bible Students.

Election and Free Grace are another way of describing the Two Salvations.

The doctrine of the New Creation presents a practical reason for the Two Salvations.

The Elect New Creation is to be the Blesser Seed, as the stars of heaven.

The non-elect world of mankind is to receive the blessings, as the sand of the sea.

Israel, under the guidance of the Ancient Worthies, is to be the blesser nation on the earthly plane.

God's character is thoroughly represented and vindicated in the harmonization of these three doctrines.

A heavenly, spiritual reward is not the only opportunity, though it is only for a few.

ALL will have an opportunity to be saved.

This negates the God-dishonoring doctrine of eternal torment.

The Great Company are a "mercy class" on the spiritual plane. (The JW's lost this also.)

Much more could be said, but that is practical "homework" for all of us.

The True Kingdom of God

This doctrine is closely related to the previous three.

Unless someone has a clear Scriptural view of Election and Free Grace, the New Creation, and the Two Salvations, they cannot understand the doctrine of the Kingdom.

The vast majority of Christian religions only see a Heavenly Kingdom.

The Jews only see an Earthly Kingdom.

Many Christian religions make participation in the Kingdom exclusive to their members.

Their only choices are Heaven or Hell. (Catholics also have purgatory.)

Contrary to their written creeds, a majority believe the Heavenly Kingdom can be obtained by ignorance. (This belief has its roots in Arminianism.)

Universalists include *all*, but without a Ransom or Atonement.

JWs believe in "a ransom for all *kinds* of people."

The Scriptural view incorporates all the features of both the Heavenly and the Earthly.

The Heavenly rules over the Earthly.

The purpose of the Elect is to bless the non-elect.

Volume 4, chapter XIII gives a concise overview:

It is the Kingdom of God – He is the author.

It is the Kingdom of Christ – he is the Father's chief representative.

It is the Kingdom of the Saints – they constitute the "royal priesthood."

It is the Kingdom of "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the holy prophets" – they will be "princes in all the earth" and the Kingdom's visible representatives.

The view of the Kingdom, held by Bible Students, is an integral part of our system of beliefs, and is both Scriptural and unique.

The false Kingdom of God: Antichrist, Babylon the Great

Protesting against the Papacy was a prominent part of the *Protestant* Reformation.

Unlike other doctrines on the list, this one has been widely understood, and correctly so.

Every major Reformer believed that the Papacy was the Antichrist.

The KJV Bible, in the original dedication, identified the Papacy as the "Man of Sin."

Sadly, the correct Scriptural view on the Antichrist has been largely lost sight of. Though not unique to Bible Students, the treatment of this subject in the Harvest Message is the most balanced and comprehensive I have ever found.

The reason most Protestants lost the correct view is due to historical revisionism, prompted by unscriptural compromise and worldly thinking.

Babylon means mixture or confusion.

We must always remember an important lesson: Don't dilute the Truth.

And another important lesson: Don't mix worldly [secular] views with Bible Truths.

In summary and in conclusion:

Why were the foregoing doctrines briefly considered?

The overall purpose was to answer the question: “Why am I a Bible Student?”

The method pursued was first to present the set of beliefs held by most Bible Students, and then to show that:

- a) This set of beliefs is a complete, consistent and harmonious package.
- b) This set of beliefs is the best candidate for ***The Truth***.
- c) This set of beliefs is unique to Bible Students.

There are two possibilities:

1) This is the right package.

2) This is the wrong package.

You have to decide for yourself.

As for me, I am convinced that this package is correct.

As stated numerous times: I have never found another package which even comes close.

One question remains: Are there Scriptural grounds for further changes?

Some say yes.

I say no.

Any *fine-tuning* which is done, must be done within the structure of this time-proven system of beliefs provided to us by our returned Lord.

What has been properly and helpfully done in the past 105 years is to see how current events have fulfilled the prophetic expectations presented in this package.

Regardless: IF you decide to change something, be aware that there is a great danger of destroying the harmony and consistency of the package.

As stated before: There are no perfect humans beings at this time. This package should not be judged by the imperfect attempts of believers to put it into practice. However, to the extent that we are able to do so, to that extent this set of beliefs will have a positive and transforming effect in our lives.

For any who might be on the other side of this question: Why are you not a Bible Student?

The decision is yours. I respect the conscience of others. But conscience needs to be educated.

Be sure that your reasons are Scriptural and not based on some personal negative experience with fallen human beings.

For the majority who are listening: Why are you a Bible Student?

You have to answer that question for yourself.

Just be sure that your reasons are Scriptural.

Why am I a Bible Student?

Because of the harmonious and beautiful set of beliefs that we hold so dear.

Because I know – in the words of Hymn 116: “*It’s true! It satisfies my longings as nothing else would do!*”

Amen!