



# Born to Win

## An Honest Answer

by Ronald L. Dart

I had a call a few days ago from a lady who was very complimentary of one of my programs. It seemed what she appreciated most was my honesty with the Scriptures. Now, I was flattered by that, but I couldn't help wondering if honesty with the Scriptures was all that unusual. I don't want to sit in judgment of anyone, but if there's any cause to be less than honest with the Bible it probably grows out of church or denomination affiliation. I don't attend any criticism of any church membership or affiliation; but when a church publishes a creed, a statement of beliefs, a doctrinal statement, then they have a serious need to defend that creed. And since these creeds are never word for word from the Bible, there is almost always going to be a problem with some passages of Scripture that, at first blush, don't seem to fit. Now, they may not fit at *second* blush either, and there may be no small amount of explaining to do which some unsophisticated soul may declare to be less than honest with the Scriptures. Now, I think this was the problem with the lady who called me. When she had asked about a given passage, she got her denomination's pat answer. What she heard of my program was, to her thinking, more honest. However, what I think it really was more *independent*. Because, not having any denominational affiliation, I just tried to tell it like it was—as I see the entire Bible as a whole and tried to make everything fit.

Now, the Bible is an ancient book; it has stood the test of time. It's even survived a few attempts to suppress it—some attempts, even, to get rid of it *entirely*. The book deserves to be approached with *respect*, even by people who don't believe it. So how much more should it be approached with respect by the people who say they do? Now, if indeed my honesty with the Scriptures is anything at all to remark on, it probably has less to do with relative character than with organizational relationships. I don't work for or head up a denomination, church, or organization, so I have no brief to explain the Bible according to this or that creedal expression. I know I'm not always right (because I can look back over my path and see mistakes there and things I've had to correct) but because I don't insist that you see things my way, I don't think I'm doing an awful lot of harm in teaching the Bible the way I do. What I want to do is present the evidence and see if I can find a way to get *you* to take a fresh look at it and to consider what *you* think about the Scripture.

Now when you think about it, if you are organizationally or professionally connected there are sometimes reasons why you tell the truth *in a certain way*. It's not so much that a person lies, but even the truth can be told in a way that *deceives*. In politics, they call that spin. In court, they call it perjury. In church, well, they call it doctrine. If you're a Roman Catholic theologian, you can't help but be biased. I would never suggest that I have *no* bias, but mine is personal not organizational. If you're a Methodist, you can't help but see things from a Methodist point of view. Now, that may sound like you can never really know where you are (and there is some truth to that) but it may be more important to know *who* you are rather than where you are. It's just a lot easier to be honest with the Scriptures when you have no axe to grind.

And this is true across the whole spectrum of things we face. My wife and I have a little game we play when we're watching news shows on television. They bring on a talking head. They ask him a question. Within one or two sentences, we declare him to be a Democrat or Republican and then we don't have to listen any longer. I don't mean we don't listen because we disagree. We don't need to listen because we *already know* what he's going to say. He's going to say what the last talking head from his party said. And after a while, you know, I could almost give their answers *for them*. There are a few exceptions to this on

television. And when you find them, generally speaking, you want to hear what they have to say. I remember I used to enjoy Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan because of his directness, his honesty. An interviewer would ask him a question that could be answered “yes” or “no”, and he would answer it “yes” or “no”. Who is there today, anywhere on television or doing television interviews, who does that? You ask him a question and he says, “Yes.” You ask him a different question and he says, “No.” You just don’t get it. If there is such a man out there, be sure and try to find him. He might be somebody he would want to vote for.

And, for most people, it’s the same way with preachers. If he is a Baptist, you know where you are and you know what it’s all about. (Well, sort of. There are several different kinds of Baptists.) If he’s an Episcopalian, well, you probably better ask because there are some very deep differences between Episcopalians these days.

Now, it’s really important, when you pick up the Bible, to treat it honestly and respectfully. When you hold that handsome, old, leather-bound book in your hands, what is it that you hold? No, don’t give me your pat answers. Don’t tell me what your pastor says it is. What is it to you? One of the first things you’ll notice as you turn the pages is that the Bible is not *one* book, it’s many. And some of the books themselves are collection. The Psalms and the Proverbs come to mind where someone has actually pulled together stuff from, who knows, all over history. But one of the most helpful things to know about the Bible, and something that may have to claw its way through the all the preconceptions about the books, is that the Bible is the collected testimony of the witnesses of God. Here we have *real human beings* who had a close encounter with God and lived to tell their story. They wrote it down so generations to come would know what they had experienced and would be able to respond to it.

Now, how do we know they are telling the truth? How do you know any witness is telling the truth? Well, the first thing you have to do is *listen to the testimony*. If all you had was one book of the Bible, you might well wonder. It’s the weight of all the testimony that the Bible speaks to *this* generation as it has to generations before. It’s in that weight—not just one book, not just one witness. Because the Bible makes the point repeatedly:

## 2 Corinthians 13

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> [...] In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

## Deuteronomy 19

AKJV

<sup>15</sup> One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sins: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

And here we have *clouds* of witnesses—all of them testifying to their experience with God, a message from God, explanation of what God has done in their lives, what God did to whole nations. All that is there for us to read. You can’t judge the Bible now by what people say about it without *actually reading the book*. And it’s very evident that a lot of people do. You see this again when you get a talking head on television or somebody writing an article about the Bible. It seems plain, in some cases, they have not read very much of it, at all. And when you do read it, you have to let the Bible say what it says—even when you don’t *like* what it says. And if you’re honest, there are going to be times when you really don’t like what the Bible says.

If you really want to understand the Bible. You’ve got to let it be what it is. And you have to be honest about your own response to it. If you don’t like, you need to own up to that. In a crisis in his own life, King David came *painfully* to understand this. Writing to God after he’d been challenged on the terrible sin that he had committed, putting down a psalm to speak to God about it—a prayer. He said:

**Psalm 51**

AKJV

<sup>6</sup> Behold you desire truth in the inward parts and in the hidden part. You shall make me to know wisdom.

David was repenting of his terrible sin and he says, “I understand this. What you want from me, o Lord, is truth *inside*.” Down through the ages, men have weighed the Bible in the balances again and again and have found it true. They have examined all the pretenders and they have found them false. And what you can hold in your hand today is a *reliable witness*. Your problem is to read the books, as a jury of one, and to decide if you believe what the witnesses are telling you. There are two very strong concepts found throughout the Bible. One of these ideas is that of testimony and witnesses. The other is the idea of belief. And that’s something you’ve heard a lot about. You’ve probably sung songs in church about it. “Believe, only believe.” But to believe, *you have to hear the witnesses*.

Jesus made a significant point about this in one of his parables. It’s easy to get lost in the parable if you attempt to over-explain it, because it’s a little bit long and there’s a lot in it. But if you just have the patience in this parable to make it all the way to the end, what Jesus is saying becomes *very clear*. Jesus was teaching his disciples and there was a group of Pharisees standing by, and Jesus made one of his well-known sayings. I’m sure you’ve heard it.

**Luke 16**

NIV '84

<sup>13</sup> “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

<sup>14</sup> The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

Now, that line, “you are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men”, it goes to the heart of what we’re talking about. Simple honesty instead of self-justification—instead of having to defend your position no matter what comes down. The Pharisees were part of a significant political party, and they had to defend the position of that party. Then Jesus said this:

**Luke 16**

NIV

<sup>17</sup> It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.

Why’d he say that? Because he was talking to Pharisees. This was deliberately provocative. The Pharisees believed strongly in tradition. The Sadducees, on the other hand, believed only in the *written* law. The traditions of the elders (sometimes called the oral law) were sometimes in direct contradiction to the written law. And so, consequently, the Pharisees, who would follow their traditions sometimes contrary to the written law, were vulnerable to this particular criticism. Now, at this point in the discussion Jesus launches into a parable. And the point at the end of this parable is just what I’ve been talking about. You’ll find all this in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke.

**Luke 16**

NIV

<sup>19</sup> “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

<sup>20</sup> At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores

<sup>21</sup> and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. [*All he got was the table scraps.*] Even

the dogs came and licked his sores.

<sup>22</sup> The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.

<sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side."

Bear in mind, this is a parable—not a description of reality.

**Luke 16**

*NIV*

<sup>24</sup> "So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

<sup>25</sup> But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.'"

I don't know what Jesus meant by all this, but it seems like things are expected to even out.

**Luke 16**

*NIV*

<sup>26</sup> "And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'"

It's a real sobering picture he's drawing here—one of *utter finality*—but now we're getting to the point. The rich man said:

**Luke 16**

*NIV*

<sup>27</sup> "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family,

<sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

<sup>29</sup> Abraham replied [*catch this, now*], 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'"

Now, it's what I've been talking to you about up to this point: what you need to do is *read the testimony of the witnesses*. The Old Testament, in this case, is what he's talking about. They've got Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

**Luke 16**

*NIV*

<sup>30</sup> "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

<sup>31</sup> He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Every variety of religious experience, every creed, every dogma, every ghost from the dead, is *trumped* by Moses and the prophets. And if you won't hear them, you won't hear even if someone rises from the dead and comes to tell you. What's Jesus' point? You have to *read the written testimony*. If you can't believe that, you might as well forget the whole thing. And that's what we have. Here we sit. We have the Bible—that leather book that you may have right there in your home. You gotta read it. If you can't believe it, what's the point in trying to show you anything else? Because all of the information, all the

testimony, the truth, is contained right there. And since the written testimony is vital, it's just as vital that we be honest in the presentation and the dealing of that written testimony. And sometimes the proper way of dealing with that testimony is simply to say, "I don't know." Because it's the person who will admit that he doesn't know who is suddenly positioned to *find out*. Now, here's what one of those witnesses—a prophet, one of those people we're supposed to listen to—here's what he has to say about what we're talking about today. You'll find this in Jeremiah 23. He said:

### Jeremiah 23

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> Woe be to the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! said the LORD.

<sup>2</sup> Therefore thus said the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; You have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit on you the evil of your doings, said the LORD.

Now, this is a *very old* prophecy about another place and another time, but some of the same things that were going on then are going on now. It's not that there was no message from God in those days; there was. It wasn't that there were no preachers; there were. But there was a fundamental disconnect between what the preachers were saying and the message from God. How could that be? How could people do something like that? Well, the answer is: in almost any day, any time, any place, there will become established a religious political structure. In Jeremiah's day, there was a religious establishment, and that religious establishment protected its power; they protected themselves against people who disagreed; they protected the way of life for the people who supported them. And, of course, they did so *contrary* to the *clear* statements that God had revealed in the law. So said God through Jeremiah, "Since you pastors will not take care of my sheep; since you won't visit them; since you have scattered them; I have to do this myself." He said:

### Jeremiah 23

AKJV

<sup>3</sup> And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. [*We'll have a good, strong herd.*]

<sup>4</sup> And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, said the LORD.

You guys won't take care of them? I'll have to take care of them myself and I'll find somebody who *will*.

### Jeremiah 23

AKJV

<sup>5</sup> Behold, the days come, said the LORD, that I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

<sup>6</sup> In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Now, this sounds *very much* like something well out into our future, doesn't it? Indeed, it does.

Jeremiah goes on to tell us that there is, some time in the future, a *second* Exodus—different from the first one. And then there is this lament that seems to come from Jeremiah himself. It's Jeremiah 23, verse nine:

**Jeremiah 23**

AKJV

<sup>9</sup> My heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness. *[I am staggering with this.]*

<sup>10</sup> For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourns; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right. *[They use their power unjustly.]*

You know, it's a funny thing about it: any time you have the the creation of an establishment (Wherever it may be—in a church, in a country, in a university, or even around the temple of God itself) it creates power; power tends to corrupt; and, oftentimes, the explanation of the Scriptures becomes corrupted in the protection of the power. Jeremiah said:

**Jeremiah 23**

AKJV

<sup>11</sup> For both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in my house have I found their wickedness, said the LORD.

<sup>12</sup> Why their way shall be to them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil on them, even the year of their visitation, said the LORD.

This is a *tragic* thing. Right at the very *heart and core* of religion in Israel, men were corrupt and there were no longer speaking the truth from the Scriptures.

**Jeremiah 23**

AKJV

<sup>13</sup> And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err.

<sup>14</sup> I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none does return from his wickedness; they are all of them to me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

Now, mind you, he is talking about *preachers*. In the Old Testament, a man who is called a prophet is basically what we today would call a preacher—men right at God's sanctuary, whose conduct God describes as a *horrible* thing. There are people who are given over to sexual sin. Well, what sort of biblical interpretation could you expect from a prophet who commits the sins of Sodom? What's he going to do when he comes to those passages of Scripture that deal with that? Is he going to treat them fairly, honestly, and condemn himself in the process? Here is conduct, not only *explicitly condemned* by God, but punished in the *most dramatic* form imaginable in Sodom, and yet men can stand to speak for God and attempt to justify this conduct. What makes this so bad is that, once they start down this road, the corruption infiltrates *everything they say*.

**Jeremiah 23**

AKJV

<sup>15</sup> Therefore thus said the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land.

They have corrupted the entirety of their society.

**Jeremiah 23**

AKJV

<sup>16</sup> Thus said the LORD of hosts, Listen not to the words of the prophets that prophesy to you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.  
<sup>17</sup> They say still to them that despise me, The LORD has said, You shall have peace; and they say to every one that walks after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come on you.  
<sup>18</sup> For who has stood in the counsel of the LORD, and has perceived and heard his word? who has marked his word, and heard it?

He says, “Well, we’re going to have to go to the latter days before you understand all this stuff.”

**Jeremiah 23**

AKJV

<sup>21</sup> I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

And then here comes something *really fascinating*. “Even these prophets I never sent, even these people I never spoke to”:

**Jeremiah 23**

AKJV

<sup>22</sup> But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

Oh, I lean heavily on that. I don’t even claim to be a prophet in the first place, but I understand that if I cause people to hear God’s Word, *even I* can turn them away from their evil way and the evil of their doings. Later, he will talk about this and say:

**Jeremiah 23**

AKJV

<sup>28</sup> The prophet that has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that has my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? said the LORD.

And, I’m sorry, there is just an awful lot of chaff out there, because there are so many people who will give you a canned answer—who will give you the “in” answer in their particular organization, and they don’t tell you what the word *says*. I think that’s what the woman was driving at when she called me on the phone and said, “Hey, I really appreciate your honesty with the Scriptures.” It wasn’t just a question of character; it was a question of *independence* and the fact that there was no one telling me what I had to say.

**Jeremiah 23**

AKJV

<sup>29</sup> Is not my word like as a fire? said the LORD; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?

Until next time, I’m Ronald Dart.

*Christian Educational Ministries*

P.O. Box 560 ❖ Whitehouse, Texas 75791  
Phone: 1-888-BIBLE-44 ❖ Fax: (903) 839-9311  
❖ [www.borntowin.net](http://www.borntowin.net) ❖

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