

## Lesson #7

### The Uniqueness of the Bible

Our study of apologetics has a twofold purpose. Our primary reason for making a defense of the Gospel is to help the unbeliever realize that ours is an intelligent faith; it is a faith based on strong evidence. In a highly technological world that deals primarily with tangible, measurable scientific data, the concept of faith in what one cannot see is unreasonable. It is not, of course, since every one of us exercises "faith" to some degree every single day. We readily board an airplane and expect it to carry us safely to our destination even though the concept is quite unreasonable. To suppose a massive metal structure weighing hundreds of tons could somehow soar effortlessly through air is, to many minds, absurd. And no airline can guarantee with 100% certainty that you will arrive at your destination safely. After all, accidents have been known to happen. But, trusting the pilot, the maintenance crew, and the unseen laws of aerodynamics, we board without hesitation. That is faith. And it is no different with Christianity. We trust the eyewitness reports of those who saw the risen Christ. We trust that what we read in the Bible is true. And there is evidence to support such faith. We've already proven that the Bible we hold in our hands today is substantially the same as the original, and that it is also historically accurate on all points on which it is able to be verified. No archaeological evidence contradicts what is written there. There is nothing within its pages to signify that it is untrustworthy. But it requires faith to believe what one cannot see: a God who created the universe, a risen Savior who sits at the right hand of God, and the miracles wrought by them. These are the elements that are beyond our comprehension and understanding. But we cannot dismiss them merely because they are incomprehensible, just as we cannot dismiss the reality of air or space flight simply because we have no comprehensive understanding of aerodynamics or jet propulsion. The evidence speaks for itself. Our goal is to help unbelievers examine that evidence, prompting faith.

But there is another purpose for studying apologetics. It also strengthens our own faith and renews in our hearts the preciousness and uniqueness of what we've been taught. It instills our own doubting minds with confidence and a renewed appreciation for what God has really done.

As important as this chapter and the next are for the unbeliever, they probably hold most value for us as Christians. Here we will be examining the external evidence for the inspiration of the Bible. Aside from being an historical document, the Bible is also a God-breathed document. It is *His* Word, a message from our Creator. Looking at evidence apart from the Bible, we must at the very least acknowledge that the Bible is absolutely unique. No other book even compares to Scripture. John A. Dickson noted,

"A man may be the most devoted student of philosophy, science, history, literature, sociology; but these can never change his nature nor minister to his deep spiritual needs. They can never go to the roots of his being and implant in him the new life. They will never hold before him the higher ideals that lie within the power, and fall within the province, of the word of God. No other religion can produce these effects.... It is because the Bible alone can do this that it is more than a *book*; it is *life*, in the fullest significance of the term."<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will focus on such external evidence for the inspiration of Scripture. In our next chapter, we'll examine some of the internal evidence for claiming the Bible is inspired by God. We'll especially discuss the prophetic nature of God's Word and the pinpoint accuracy with which many prophecies were fulfilled. I wouldn't expect to use many of these arguments with the skeptic, at least at first. As we will see in a few weeks, the verifiability of the resurrection of Christ is the greatest attestation to the inspiration of the Bible and the reality of God. In your witnessing, always start with Christ. Only divert your attention to these other evidences if questions arise that are a stumbling block to belief.

So, let's proceed by examining the uniqueness of the Bible to confirm its inspiration.

## *In what ways is the Bible unique?*

### **1. It is unique in its perspective.**

We often overlook the fact that the Bible (most notably the first five books) was written within the context of a polytheistic pagan culture. Egypt, Babylon and Canaan were all polytheistic in their beliefs. Their multitude of gods were worshipped by everyone, except a small, insignificant band of people known as the children of Israel. Somehow, in the midst of a culture that worshipped a myriad of gods that governed every aspect of nature and life, this band of nomads developed the concept of pure monotheism. Instead of a pantheon of capricious and unpredictable gods, they held to one supreme, holy and righteous God. The paganism of the day consisted of religion that was attainable by those who created it. Their frenzied fertility rites and appeasement of their gods was consistent with their lifestyles. But not so with Israel. Recorded in the pages of Scripture is their continual allurements by the pantheistic gods of heathenism and their punishment for such idolatry. They failed time and again to live up to the religion they proclaimed. Who makes up a religion that is unattainable? How do we account for such a divergent view?

It cannot be accounted for on natural grounds, brought about by the beliefs prevailing in Israel's environment; these were diametrically opposed to the new, lofty, rational concept. It cannot be accounted for on the ground of an evolutionary procedure in religious thinking. It stands alone in the midst of degraded paganism, not as evolving from it as from the lower to the higher in the growing religious consciousness. It is a revelation, not an evolution; and it carries with it... other concepts that could never come through an evolutionary process.

The same could be said for the perspective of the New Testament, which rose in the midst of Judaism. In a severely monotheistic culture steeped in 1500 years of ritual and tradition, arose Christianity, claiming Christ to be both God and the Son of God; equal and of the same nature, yet separate. Where would such a notion come from? Nowhere in any ancient religion is there anything similar, and certainly not within Judaism. A small group of Jews were so convinced of this truth and a set of historical events that accompanied it (i.e. the life, death and resurrection of Christ), that they changed their weekly celebration from the Sabbath to Sunday. They dropped their old traditions and rituals in favor of entirely new ones (e.g. baptism, communion, celebration of the resurrection, etc.). Pious, devoted Jews did this. We cannot adequately comprehend the hold that Judaism had on their lives. They were schooled in the Old Testament, completely immersed in a tradition that governed every aspect of life. Nothing of human origin could cause such a drastic change in so short a time. It, too, was a revelation.

The Bible also has a unique perspective in its record of its chief proponents. It never glosses over the mistakes and shortcomings of its followers. If we were devising our own religion, we would tend to make saints out of all the participants in the story. But the Bible constantly points out the stubbornness and idolatry of the Israelites, the moral failure of their leaders, even the lack of understanding and faith on the part of Jesus' disciples and immorality within the church. And yet, notwithstanding all this criticism, it was still cherished by those it condemned. Everything about the Bible's perspective proves it is not a book of man's religion, but of God's. It was revealed by Him, not produced by men seeking to create a new religion.

### **2. It is unique in its composition.**

The Bible was written over a time span of almost 1600 years by at least 40 different authors, all from various backgrounds. Some were simple shepherds, some were prophets and kings, one was a tax-collector, another was a doctor, yet another a pharisee; some were ignorant fishermen. They wrote from the wilderness of Sinai, the rivers of Babylon, the courts of Persia, the land of Promise, the prisons of Rome. They wrote during times of war and peace, poverty and prosperity, exile and rule. Men with such diverse backgrounds wrote on every conceivable subject, from religion and philosophy to law and ethics. They wrote in historical prose, poetry, parable, apocalypse, prophecy, allegory, biography and personal correspondence.

What are the odds they would all agree with perfect harmony? If today we took five authors, all from the same country in the same century and asked them to write a treatise on even one subject, the probability of agreement would be very slim indeed. The perfect cohesion and harmony of the Old and New Testaments is an attestation to the inspiration of Scripture. No anthology could ever achieve such a feat. And yet the Bible is more than anthology. It is one story woven through its pages, a story that took thousands of years to unfold.

Any part of the human body can only be properly explained in reference to the whole

body. And any part of the Bible can only be properly explained in reference to the whole Bible....

ōThe Bible, at first sight, appears to be a collection of literature ô mainly Jewish....  
[But] the Bible is not simply an anthology; there is a unity which binds the whole together. An anthology is compiled by an anthologist, but no anthologist compiled the Bible.ö³

### 3. It is unique in its transmission.

In the last chapter we briefly discussed the accuracy with which the Old Testament was transmitted from generation to generation. The Talmud (consisting of the Mishna, the actual text in either Babylonian or Palestinian, and the Gemara, commentary on the text) laid down specific rules for the copying of Scripture by the scribes. One scribe was responsible for copying the consonants, another inserted vowels and accents in fainter ink, a third scribe revised the copy and a fourth man wrote in the Masorah (tradition).<sup>4</sup> They were required to test the accuracy of their new manuscripts by counting vowels, words or consonants on a page, finding the middle one, and then comparing it to the original. That way, not one word or letter would be left out or added.

ōJews preserved it as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. With their *massora* (*parva*, *magna*, and *finalis*) they kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word and paragraph. They had special classes of men within their culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity ô scribes, lawyers, massorettes. Who ever counted the letters and syllables and words of Plato or Aristotle? Cicero or Seneca?ö<sup>5</sup>

Such intentional exactness makes the Old Testament unique in its transmission. In chapter four, in which we examined the manuscript evidence for the New Testament, we discovered that it, too, is unique in its transmission. Though it had been copied and recopied for almost 1500 years, it was virtually without corruption. The manuscript evidence is overwhelming, even though papyrus normally disintegrates within only 100 years. No other ancient writing even comes close in its certainty of accuracy of transmission.

### 4. It is unique in its endurance.

The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, has always been the object of attack. Rulers throughout history have tried to burn it and trample it, but to no avail. No other writing has ever been so vehemently attacked, and so miraculously preserved.

In 168 B.C. Antiochus IV Epiphanes took control of the region of Syria and waged an attack on the Jews. He erected a statue of Zeus in their temple, sacrificed a pig on the altar and forced the Jews to eat swine. He ordered all copies of the Torah to be destroyed, he forbid the daily sacrifices and he killed 80,000 of God's people. But he didn't manage to destroy their religion or their Bible. During that time the scribes became a distinct political party. They developed the synagogue service and took upon themselves the express role of preserving and defending the Law and teaching it to their students. They developed the oral law to be passed unwritten from generation to generation to accompany God's written law. The hatred of Antiochus was soon overshadowed by the heroism of the Maccabean Revolt (166-142 B.C.). The Word of God couldn't be eradicated, and neither could His people.

In 303 A.D., the emperor Diocletian issued an edict ordering churches to be razed to the ground, copies of the Scriptures to be burned and those espousing Christianity to lose all their civil rights. Empire-wide persecution ensued. But Christianity wasn't crushed. It flourished under persecution. Instead of cowering under the emperor's decree, Christians responded by copying and distributing manuscripts throughout the empire. Fewer than 25 years later, the emperor Constantine himself became a Christian, and in no time Christianity became the official state religion. Constantine immediately ordered that 50 copies of the Bible be prepared at the expense of the Roman government. God's Word prevailed again.

In 1229, when the Roman Catholic Church was struggling with a growing number of heresies, an ecclesiastical council responded by forbidding the laity to own copies of the Bible, except the Psalms and other short passages. Translations other than the Latin Vulgate were condemned.<sup>6</sup> When John Wycliffe translated the Bible into the English of his day and sent out preachers to teach the masses God's Word, he was condemned by the church. Wycliffe died in 1384, but in 1415 the Council of Constance ordered his writings to be burned. In 1428 the Pope had Wycliffe's bones dug up and burned, and the ashes scattered in a river.<sup>7</sup>

William Tyndale also had a burning desire for a Bible in the English language. Ninety percent of his translation from the original Greek and Hebrew texts was later incorporated into the King James version. But, at the time, in exile from his homeland of England, he was condemned as a heretic and was strangled and burned at the stake in 1536. His dying words were, "Lord! Open the King of England's eyes." Little did Tyndale know that God had already heard his prayers. The Church of England had broken away from Rome two years earlier

and English translations were already in the works. In 1558, Queen Elizabeth required every church to own an English Bible. She was succeeded by King James, who commissioned a new translation of the Bible into English, a version that eventually became the standard version of Protestants around the world.<sup>8</sup>

No writing has been attacked as the Bible has. In spite of imperial decrees and threats of death, God's Word has endured through the centuries. The French infidel Voltaire predicted that within 100 years Christianity would be nonexistent. He died in 1778. Fifty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society moved into his house and used his own presses to produce stacks of Bibles. Such is the irony of those who oppose God's Word.

“Infidels for eighteen hundred years have been refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today as solid as a rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved and cherished and read today than ever before. Infidels, with all their assaults, make about as much impression on this book as a man with a tack hammer would on the Pyramids of Egypt. When the French monarch proposed the persecution of the Christians in his dominion, an old statesman and warrior said to him, ‘Sire, the Church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.’ So the hammers of infidels have been pecking away at this book for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures. If this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers have all tried their hand at it; they die and the book still lives.”<sup>9</sup>

How true are the words of Scripture. Rabbi Gamaliel advised the High Priest and members of the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:38-39, “Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

## 5. It is unique in its message.

No other religious book makes the claims that Scripture does. And no other book answers the deepest needs of the human soul. The Bible not only records the creation of the universe, it also identifies the source of evil in the world and offers a remedy. It offers us a picture of a holy God who desires to have communion with the people He created. That God instituted a plan to atone for the sin of man that separated him from fellowship with Him, first through the Old Testament sacrifices, then through the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. The message proclaimed is that there is freedom from both the punishment and the power of sin. It offers to the one who believes eternal life, not reincarnation or some enhanced mental state.

The message of the Bible is one of redemption. It explains all the ills of mankind, answers all the universal questions of mankind, and offers solutions for all the problems of mankind. No other book is as comprehensive in its scope and application. It involves issues of eternity past as well as eternity future... without losing any relevancy to the needs of the moment. The Bible is unequalled in its teachings. Historian Will Durant noted, “That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels.”<sup>10</sup> No human being could ever have created from his own imagination the words attributed to Christ. Though thousands of books have been written on morality, immortality and religion, none is as pure, simple, and grand as the Bible. It is without equal.

## 6. It is unique in its influence.

No book has influenced culture quite like the Bible. The Old Testament, with its ceremonial laws and dietary regulations influenced every area of the lives of the Israelites. The Bible determined what they could and couldn't eat, what rashes and mildews were clean or unclean, whether or not they could touch a dead animal, and what kinds of offerings they could bring on a daily basis to their God. All of life, for the Jew, had a ceremonial quality to it. They were consumed by obedience to one book. What would influence a group of people to hold so tenaciously to the decrees written within the pages of the Old Testament? And what would cause them to change mid-stream and embrace the New Testament?

With the New Testament, thousands upon thousands of Christians through the ages have lost their lives rather than forsake the truth recorded in the Bible. But the Bible didn't influence only those who embraced it. All of culture has been influenced in part or in whole by Christendom.

“Wherever the Bible has roots and dominates the hearts of the people, or wherever it exercises its influence and leaves its impress, there will be found a community with higher moral standards, a more advanced civilization, a deeper interest in the best things, a more pronounced

altruism, and a better social order.<sup>11</sup>

The Bible influences cultures. It has also influenced a vast field of knowledge and writing.

From the Apostolic Fathers dating from A.D. 95 to the modern times is one great literary river inspired by the Bible — Bible dictionaries, bible encyclopedias, bible lexicons, bible atlases, and bible geographies. These may be taken as a starter. Then at random, we may mention the vast bibliographies around theology, religious education, hymnology, missions, the biblical languages, church history, religious biography, devotional works, commentaries, philosophy of religion, evidences, apologetics, and on and on. There seems to be an endless number.<sup>12</sup>

Any thinking person would consider a book that has had such an impact on such a great number of people through the ages. No other book has had such influence. But the influence isn't just on cultures in general. The greatest influence is on individuals. From every culture in every period of history we can find stories of men and women, old and young, who have experienced a life-changing relationship with the Christ of the Bible. And all the accounts agree.

I have, for me at least, irrefutable evidence of the objective existence of the Person so moving me. When to this personal experience I add that of tens of thousands of living Christians, and an unbroken line of them back to Christ, and when I find in the New Testament a manifold record of like experiences, together with a clear account of the origin and cause of them all, my certainty becomes absolute. One of the most urgent of all duties resting upon modern Christians is to assert with clearness and vigor the certainties of the Christian experience.<sup>13</sup>

[Intellectual interests] have no effect whatever in creating a finer nature, in transforming character, or in exerting a moral or spiritual influence. Any of these intellectual pursuits may make people smarter — but not better — men. They are not life-changing or life-building forces.

But let the philosopher, the scientist, or the historian open his heart and mind to the indwelling and operation of the truths of the Scriptures, and what is the effect? It is the same as with the ignorant, untutored, and less intelligent classes. It is like nourishing food that ministers in the same way to the needs of all, whether ignorant or cultured. The Bible affects all classes in the essential human nature in which they are all alike. It creates the same joy, awakens the same consciousness of union with the divine, makes the same changes in character, satisfies the same spiritual longings, and stimulates the same holy yearnings. The cultured and uncultured may be at opposite poles in matters of intellect and understanding; but in the Scriptures they are one in matters deeper than those of mind and erudition.<sup>14</sup>

## **7. It is unique in its timelessness.**

Critics often contend that the Bible is irrelevant today. Its maxims are old and its message is outdated. But nothing could be further from the truth. Try reading it. The message is timeless because the questions it answers are timeless. The Bible offers hope for the discouraged, encouragement for the weary, the way of salvation for the lost, comfort for the distressed, knowledge of God for the seeker, and the outcome of history for the curious. It covers family relationships, politics, ethics and morality, rights and responsibilities. It paves the way for humanitarian efforts. Many books written within the last 50 years have already outlived their usefulness, but not so with the Bible. You can read it today and find it relevant to your life. You could wait another 50 years and it would be no less relevant. It transcends language, culture, social class, age, maturity and time. The Bible is unique in its timelessness.

### ***So, what does the uniqueness of the Bible prove?***

In some respects, the uniqueness of the Bible proves nothing — except that it is a one-of-a-kind book without equal. As Christians, we look at these facts and are assured that the Bible is inspired by God. The skeptic might not see God's hand in these factors, but he must admit that the Bible is certainly unique. For the skeptic to dismiss the Bible simply because it is a "religious work" is the height of stupidity. The evidence presented so far should be enough to prompt any thinking person sincerely desiring to know truth to consider the Bible. Why wouldn't you read a book with such credentials and such unique characteristics? Unless you really don't want to know the truth.

## *End Notes*

- <sup>1</sup> Dickson, John A. *New Analytical Study Bible* (Iowa Falls: World Wide Publishing, 1973), p. 1711.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1711.
- <sup>3</sup> F.F. Bruce cited by Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Hereø Life Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 17.
- <sup>4</sup> Dickson, p. 5.
- <sup>5</sup> Bernard Ramm quoted in *Evidence*, p. 19.
- <sup>6</sup> Kenneth Scott Lattourette, *A History of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1953, 1975), p. 456..
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 666.
- <sup>8</sup> Tony Lane, "The Crown of English Bibles," *Christian History*, Issue 43, p. 6-11.
- <sup>9</sup> H.L. Hastings, quoted in *Evidence*, p. 21.
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted by Steven Collins, *Championing the Faith: A Layman's Guide to Proving Chritianity's Claims* (Tulsa: Virgil Hensley Publishing Co., 1991), p. 182.
- <sup>11</sup> Dickson, p. 1711.
- <sup>12</sup> Bernard Ramm cited in *Evidence*, p. 24.
- <sup>13</sup> Quoted in *Evidence*, p. 328.
- <sup>14</sup> Dickson, p. 1711.