

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The Authority of Scripture

Patrick Zuckeran

There are many books today that claim to be the Word of God. The Koran—the Islam holy book—claims to be the Word of God. The Book of Mormon claims to be the Word of God. The Hindus believe the Bhagavad Gita is the source of eternal truth. Karl Marx, with an atheistic world view, claimed his writing, *The Communist Manifesto*, was the ultimate truth.

We Christians believe the Bible to be the Word of God and the eternal source of truth we live by. How do we know the Bible is the Word of God? Can we actually prove that the Bible is truly the Word of God? The answer is “yes.”

Before I begin this discussion of the authority of the Bible, let me first quote the words of Jesus found in John 15:18. Jesus warns His disciples about the attitude the world will have toward those who follow Him. Jesus says, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” 1 Peter 5:8 states, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

What is vital to understand from these passages is the attitude of the world toward God. The world is in rebellion against God, and worldly people, under the influence of Satan, seek to destroy your faith. In the light of the times we live in, it is important that Christians not only know what they believe, but also why they believe what they believe.

I once heard an astounding statistic. It indicated that 80 percent of the college-bound students who profess to be Christians, leave for school and return home no longer believing in Christ. One of the reasons is this: when a student sits in class and hears the professor discredit the Bible, the student doesn't have a defense and is easily deceived into believing the Bible is no longer credible. This happens too often, because Christians know what they believe, but not why they believe it.

In my experience, there is no book that is criticized and attacked more than the Bible. Many intelligent scholars have written books that attempt to discredit the authority of the Bible. This is one of Satan's goals: to get man to doubt the Word of God.

To counter this attack we will study some of the evidence in the case proving the authority and divine origin of the Bible. This knowledge will enable us to make a solid defense of the faith when we are attacked.

There has not been in the history of man a book that has rocked the world as has the Bible. The impact it has made is phenomenal. Some hail the Bible as the Word of God; others criticize and condemn it. With the Bible

facing such great opposition today, and with many other works claiming to be the “Word of God,” how do we know the Bible is the true Word of God?

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

The evidence for the authority of the Bible falls into two major categories: internal evidence and external evidence. I mean by internal evidence, the evidence that is found within the Bible itself. By external evidence, I mean evidence that is found outside the Bible, such as archaeology, science, philosophy, and ancient manuscripts. Let us first consider the former, the internal evidences.

SELF-PROCLAMATION

The first fact is that the Bible claims to be the Word of God. The authors knew they were writing the words of God, even though they often did not fully understand what they were writing. 2 Timothy 3:16 states, “All Scripture is inspired by God.” 2 Peter 1:21 states, “No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” Jesus Himself viewed the Old Testament as authoritative and quoted from it throughout His ministry.

HOLY SPIRIT

Second, the Holy Spirit confirms to us that the Bible is the Word of God. John 16:13 states, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth.” The Holy Spirit who convicts the world of sin also assures the believer that the Bible is God’s Word.

TRANSFORMING ABILITY

Third, we have evidence concerning the transforming ability of the Bible. Hebrews 4:12 says, “The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit.” Romans 12:2 says, “And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The Word of God and the Spirit of God actually transform the lives of people. The Bible has changed the lives of murderers, drug addicts, top government officials, business people, and students, to name just a few people from every walk of life who have been transformed. No other book can make such a claim. This is because the Bible is not a mere book on good living, but is literally packed with power. It is the Word of God with the power to change lives.

These are only three internal evidences supporting the authority of the Bible. These, of course, are not the best arguments to use in a debate, but they are evidence. In the next section, we will study what I believe is the best internal argument.

UNITY

We have studied three internal evidences that support the authority and divine inspiration of the Bible. In this section, we will study the fourth internal evidence: the unity of the Bible.

The Bible covers hundreds of topics, yet it does not contradict itself. It remains united in its theme. “Well, what’s so amazing about that?” you may ask. Consider these facts. First, the Bible was written over a span of fifteen hundred years. Second, it was written by more than forty men from every walk of life. For example, Moses was educated in Egypt and became a prophet over Israel. Peter was a simple fisherman, Solomon was a king, Luke was a doctor, Amos was a shepherd, and Matthew was a tax collector. All the writers were of vastly different occupations and backgrounds.

Third, it was written in many different places. The Bible was written on three different continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. Moses wrote in the desert of Sinai, Paul wrote in a prison in Rome, Daniel wrote in exile in Babylon, and Ezra wrote in the ruined city of Jerusalem.

Fourth, it was written under many different circumstances. David wrote during a time of war, Jeremiah wrote at the sorrowful time of Israel's downfall, Peter wrote while Israel was under Roman domination, and Joshua wrote while invading the land of Canaan.

Fifth, the writers had different purposes for writing. Isaiah wrote to warn Israel of God's coming judgment on their sin, Matthew wrote to prove to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, Zechariah wrote to encourage a disheartened Israel who had returned from Babylonian exile, and Paul wrote addressing problems in different Asian and European churches.

If we put all these factors together—the Bible was written over fifteen hundred years, by forty different authors, at different places, under various circumstances, and addressing a multitude of issues— it is amazing that with such diversity, there is such unity in the Bible. That unity is organized around one theme: God's redemption of man and all of creation. Hundreds of controversial subjects are addressed, and yet the writers do not contradict each other. The Bible is an incredible document.

Let me offer you a good illustration from apologist Josh McDowell. Take ten contemporary authors and ask them to write their viewpoints on one controversial subject. Would they all agree? No, we would have disagreements from one author to another. Now look at the authorship of the Bible. All these authors, from a span of fifteen hundred years, wrote on many controversial subjects, and they do not contradict one another.¹ It seems one author guided these writers through the whole process: the Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 1:21 states, "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." The unity of the Bible is just one more amazing proof of the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible.

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

In our study on the authority of the Bible, we have studied the internal evidences, which are found within the Bible itself. Except for the unity of the Bible, most of these arguments are subjective in nature. Now we will study the external evidences of the Bible, that is, evidences found outside the Bible.

INDESTRUCTIBILITY

The first external evidence is the indestructibility of the Bible. The Bible is the most well-known book in the history of the world, and no book has been attacked more. Skeptics have tried to destroy the authority of the Bible for the last eighteen hundred years. It has undergone every kind of scrutiny possible from archaeology, science, philosophy, and computers. Yet, despite all these attacks, the Bible proves itself to be true again and again. Each time the skeptics have been wrong, and the Bible has proven itself true. Just the fact that the Bible has remained steadfast in its authority after two thousand years is another piece of evidence supporting its divine origin.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The second source of external evidence comes from archaeology. Middle Eastern archaeological investigations have proven the Bible to be true and unerringly accurate in its historical descriptions. Nelson

Glueck, a renowned Jewish archaeologist, states, “No archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”²

Dr. William Albright, who was not a friend of Christianity, and was probably the foremost authority in Middle East archaeology in his time, said this about the Bible: “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament.”³

Here are a couple of examples of the historical accuracy of the Bible. A good example is found in Genesis 14. The Bible speaks of Abraham’s victory over Kedorlaomer and five Mesopotamian kings. For years, the critics stated that these accounts were fictitious and many people discredited the Bible. In the 1960’s, however, the Ebla tablets were discovered in northern Syria. The Ebla kingdom was a powerful kingdom in the twentieth century B.C. The Ebla tablets are records of its history. Thousands of tablets have been discovered. What is important is that many of these tablets make a reference to all five cities of the plain, proving the Genesis 14 account to be accurate.⁴

Another example is the story of Jericho recorded in the book of Joshua. For years skeptics thought the story of the falling walls of Jericho was a myth. However, in the 1930’s, Dr. John Garstang made a remarkable discovery. He states, “As to the main fact, then, there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely, the attackers would be able to clamber up and over the ruins of the city.” This is remarkable because city walls fall inward, not outward.⁵

The March 5, 1990 issue of Time magazine featured an article called, “Score One For the Bible.” In it, archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon claimed Jericho’s walls had fallen suddenly. Many scholars feel this was caused by an earthquake which may also explain the damming of the Jordan. Additionally, grain was discovered, which shows the city was conquered quickly. This find adds credence to the biblical account. Further study by Brian Wood found the date of the fall of Jericho to match the Bible’s date.⁶

Here are just two great examples of archaeology authenticating the historical reliability of the Bible. No book is as ancient, and at the same time, as convincingly accurate as the Bible.

Indestructibility and archaeology are two external evidences for the Bible.

PROPHECY

There are many more external evidences for the Bible, but I’ll just cover one more: evidence from prophecy. The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies which have come to pass. No book in history has ever come close to the Bible when it comes to fulfillment of prophecy.

The prophecies in the Bible are very specific and accurate. Nostradamus claims to have made hundreds of prophecies that have come true, but if you read his prophecies, you will find them to be vague and unclear. His symbols and language can be taken to mean a number of historical events. Unlike many such prophecies, biblical prophecy is very specific.

Here are some examples. In Ezekiel 26, which was written in 587 B.C., Ezekiel prophesies that the mighty city of Tyre would be destroyed. Tyre was made up of two parts, a mainland port city and an island city half a mile off shore. Ezekiel predicted mainland Tyre would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, many nations would fight against her, the debris of the city would be thrown into the ocean, the city would never be found again, and fishermen would come there to lay their nets.

In 573 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the mainland city of Tyre. Many of the refugees of the city sailed to the island and the island city of Tyre remained a powerful city. In 333 B.C., however, Alexander the Great laid siege to Tyre. Using the rubble of mainland Tyre, he built a causeway to the island city of Tyre. He then captured and completely destroyed the city.

Today, Tyre is a small fishing town where fishing boats come to rest and fisherman spread their nets. The great ancient city of Tyre to this day lies buried in ruins exactly as prophesied. If we were to calculate the odds of this event happening by chance, the figures would be astronomical. No, it was not by coincidence.⁷

Here's another example. There are over three hundred prophecies made of Jesus in the Old Testament. Prophecies such as His place of birth, how he would die, His rejection by the nation of Israel, and so on. All these prophecies were made hundreds of years before Jesus ever came to earth. Because of the accuracy of the prophecies, many skeptics have believed that they must have been written after 70 A.D.—after the birth and death of Jesus, and the destruction of Jerusalem. They have thereby tried to deny that they are even prophecies.

However, in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These scrolls contained the book of Isaiah and other prophetic books. When dated, they were found to be written from 120 to 100 B.C.,⁸ well before Jesus was born. It would have been an incredible accomplishment for Jesus to have fulfilled all three hundred prophecies. Some say these prophecies were fulfilled by chance, but the odds for this would be exceptionally large. It would take more faith to believe in that chance happening, than in the fact that Jesus is God and these prophecies are divinely inspired.⁹

No book can match the Bible when it comes to prophecy. Understand that I have only touched the tip of the iceberg. There are hundreds of additional proofs for the Bible, yet I have only mentioned a few. I hope this study has aroused your interest to further study the Word of God.

NOTES

1. Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), 17.
2. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1959), 31.
3. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1953), 176.
4. Merrill Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 330.
5. John Garstang, *The Foundations of Bible History; Joshua, Judges* (London: Constable, 1931), 146.
6. Michael Lemonick, "Score One for the Bible," *Time*, 5 March 1990, 59.
7. Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 869.
8. Unger, 291-292.
9. McDowell, 167.