

God's Authentic Word

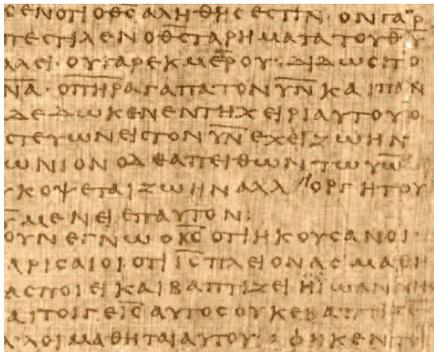
Many of us come to a point in our lives when we face the question of whether the Bible really is the Word of God. If we are going to build our lives upon it, we need to know whether the Bible is a sure foundation. Here are a few pointers which help us acknowledge that it is truly God's living and authentic word.

Its Age

Being ancient is not in itself a proof of being genuine, but if we held in our hands a very old book we would probably treat it with respect. The Bible is a collection of very ancient writings. The first five books were written by Moses some 3,500 years ago; the remainder of the Old Testament books were written (in Hebrew) over 400 years before Christ and were translated into Greek in the 3rd century BC.

Manuscript Evidence

The New Testament, so intricately linked with the Old Testament, exists in manuscripts called the 'Codices Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus', written from about 300–450 AD. Other



ancient texts contain sections of the New Testament, some dating back to the 2nd century AD. In 'The Story of the Bible' 1964, Sir Frederic Kenyon states that the total number of New Testament manuscripts "runs now into the neighbourhood of 5,000". Also, there is evidence of translation into other languages from as early as the 2nd century AD.

In comparison, it is interesting to note that available manuscripts of classical literature are usually accepted without question. However these number from as few as 10 copies, dating between the 10th and 15th centuries AD, many years after their authors' deaths. The earliest Virgil manuscript is dated 350 years after his death; of Livy it is 500 years; Horace is 900 years; Plato, 1,300 years; Herodotus, 1,500 years; and Euripides, 1,600 years.

Early Writings Quoting the New Testament

In addition to the Bible manuscripts themselves, early church leaders wrote about and quoted the New Testament. These include Clement (95–96 AD); Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus (all 2nd century AD); and Origen (3rd century AD). These references prove that the New Testament was in circulation by this time.

The existence of early writings disputing the New Testament is also proof that it existed as a published work and that its claims were understood. The Roman emperor Julian (331–363 AD) referred in detail to things said and recorded in the New Testament. The

philosopher Porphyry (c.233–304 AD) wrote opposing some parts of the Gospels, Acts and Isaiah. Celsus, another philosopher (2nd century AD), quoted Scripture extensively and scorned the New Testament teaching on resurrection.

Christian Suffering

Early Christians suffered terrible persecutions, torture and death because of their faith. They consistently professed the beliefs of the Bible and most refused to deny their faith. This is evidence that the Bible, and the New Testament in particular, was available to them.

The facts of these sufferings are thoroughly recorded by early independent historians like Tacitus (born c.52 AD), Suetonius (75–160 AD), Juvenal (born c.55 AD), Pliny the Younger (born 62 AD), Martial (c.38–104 AD), Epictetus (born c.50 AD) and Marcus Aurelius (121–180 AD).

Unity Despite Diverse Writers

The Bible writers came from many different walks of life. Moses was brought up in Egypt as a prince; David and Solomon were kings; Daniel was minister of state in Babylon; Ezra was a priest and scribe; Amos a herdsman; Matthew a tax collector; Luke a physician; Peter and John were fishermen.

They could not have collaborated, for they lived at widely different times. David wrote about 400 years after Moses; Isaiah about 250 years after David; Matthew more than 700 years after Isaiah and 400 years after Malachi, the last of the Old Testament writers. One feature that unites them is their claim that their message came to them from God.

THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

	Page		Page
Genesis	3	Ecclesiastes	679
Exodus	59	Song of Songs	689
Leviticus	102	Isaiah	695
Numbers	134	Jeremiah	766
Deuteronomy	180	Lamentations	834
Joshua	218	Ezekiel	841
Judges	244	Daniel	896
Ruth	270	Hosea	913
1 Samuel	274	Joel	924
2 Samuel	308	Amos	928
1 Kings	339	Obadiah	937
2 Kings	373	Jonah	939
1 Chronicles	406	Micah	942
2 Chronicles	443	Nahum	949
Ezra	481	Habakkuk	952
Nehemiah	493	Zephaniah	955
Esther	510	Haggai	959
Job	518	Zechariah	961
Psalms	554	Malachi	971
Proverbs	645		

THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

	Page		Page
Matthew	977	1 Timothy	1205
Mark	1014	2 Timothy	1209
Luke	1037	Titus	1212
John	1076	Philemon	1214
Acts	1105	Hebrews	1215
Romans	1141	James	1227
1 Corinthians	1157	1 Peter	1231
2 Corinthians	1172	2 Peter	1236
Galatians	1182	1 John	1239
Ephesians	1187	2 John	1243
Philippians	1192	3 John	1244
Colossians	1196	Jude	1245
1 Thessalonians	1200	Revelation	1247
2 Thessalonians	1203		

Diverse though the writers were, they wrote harmoniously about the most difficult of subjects, such as:

- ❖ Creation
- ❖ the attributes of God
- ❖ the relationship of God with men
- ❖ the great purpose of God with the earth and man
- ❖ the moral condition of man as God sees it
- ❖ the history and destiny of Israel
- ❖ prophecy

The great range of the Book of Psalms alone comprises history, prophecy, worship and moral guidance, these being entirely consistent with all the other Bible writings. And the Psalms is just one of the 66 books which make up the Bible.

The New Testament writers treat the Old Testament with complete confidence. The Oxford University Press '*Helps to the Study of the Bible*' (c.1900) lists 277 directly quoted Old Testament passages in the New Testament, 103 indirect or partial

quotations, and 120 references to Old Testament incidents. Bagster's *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* lists more than 2,000 references back to the Old Testament from the New Testament book of Revelation alone.

The 'Ring of Truth'

Many Bible writers record events or situations which we would naturally prefer not to remember. This provides further evidence that God was the ultimate author.

- ❖ Moses foretold Israel's disobedience to God and he recorded his own sins.
- ❖ The Book of Judges records Israel's corruption, idolatry and stubbornness.
- ❖ The Psalmist describes Israel as stubborn and rebellious.
- ❖ David dwells on his own great sin.
- ❖ Matthew records the apostles' lack of faith and their forsaking of Jesus at his arrest, as well as Peter's denial of Christ.
- ❖ John records Thomas's unbelief.
- ❖ Paul describes how he persecuted the early church, and foretold how the very church he was then trying to build would depart from the teaching of Christ.

The writers also showed selfless love for others and for God's purpose. Moses pleaded to God for Israel when they were disobedient and were in danger of rejection by Him: he was prepared to forego personal benefits and give his own life if that would save Israel. Paul states that he would have forfeited his own life if that would have saved his own nation, who were then

persecuting him. All the writers give an exalted view of God's love, and mankind's duty to respond with love.

God and Man

Uniquely, the Bible shows man as he is, morally weak and mortal, but does not degrade him. He is God's creation, and is given the opportunity to qualify for the gift of immortality, for the service and glory of God. The Bible has a consistent sense of holiness, dealing with issues from a Divine perspective, and with the proper relationship between God and man observed. The distance between sinful man and the perfect God and Creator is never forgotten.

The Bible writers always represent sin (disobedience to God) as evil, dishonouring God and deserving punishment. Sin is the breaking of God's law and brings death: sin is never treated lightly or the subject of humour; it is never encouraged and never condoned.

Nature as the Work of God

Sunshine and rain, crops for food, the seasons, the whole range of living things and the universe itself are always attributed to God, the Creator. Psalm 104 is a good example of this.

You Who laid the foundations of the earth, so that it should not be moved forever, You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains... He sends the springs into the valleys; they flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their home; they sing among the branches.

He waters the hills from His upper chambers (Psalm 104:5-13).



The Evidence of Prophecy

In the 19th century, a highly qualified scientist is reported as saying, “Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible”, and “Radio has no future”. Whilst developing his jet engine, Frank Whittle was told by the Professor of Aeronautical Engineering at Cambridge, “Very interesting, Whittle, my boy, but it will never work”.

The Bible, however, contains positive prophecies which could only be made by God. The Old Testament, completed hundreds of years before Jesus was born, contains numerous prophecies about him that are recorded in the New Testament as having been fulfilled. ‘Helps to the Study of the Bible’, cited above, lists 176 such prophecies, ranging from his birth to his resurrection, and then on to his second coming, which is shortly to be realised.

Bible prophecy includes the destiny of cities, nations and empires, such as the demise of Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre and Egypt. The historical sequence of the four powerful empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome are clearly forecast by Daniel. Bible prophecy about the Jews is a subject in itself, but do read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, which accurately

predict Israel’s history through the ages. Only God could make forecasts like these.

Conclusion

These are amongst the great amount of evidence that the Bible is truly the Word of God. Other proofs for consideration include its internal ‘undesigned coincidences’; its wonderful preservation by a disobedient nation, oppressed by enemies and suffering many adversities; and its survival despite efforts to destroy both it and those who embraced it. Archaeological discoveries have confirmed its accuracy and reliability.

The Bible also describes our own times so precisely in ways that show it has Divine authority. Jesus said:

There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (Luke 21:25-28).

God’s Kingdom is coming soon, nothing is more sure! We can be confident in the Bible and build our life on the firm foundation. Faith will grow with prayerful reading; and humble readers can prepare themselves for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, to complete God’s purpose to fill the earth with His glory.

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