

Evidence for the Bible—Part 3

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Predictions by Biblical Prophets

Unlike any other book, the Bible offers specific predictions that were written hundreds of years in advance of their literal fulfillment. Many of these center around the coming of Christ and others around world events. While Bible critics play with the dating of Old Testament books to claim that predictions were written after their fulfillment, these claims abuse credibility. In some cases of more recent fulfillment no such claims are even possible. These fulfillments stand as a mark of the Bible's unique, supernatural origin.

The Unity of the Bible

One supporting line of evidence for the Bible's divine origin is its unity in great diversity. Even though composed by many people of diverse backgrounds over many years, Scripture speaks from one mind.

Not taking into account unknowns in the dating for Job and sources Moses could have used, the first book was written no later than 1400 B.C. and the last shortly before A.D. 100. In all there are sixty-six different books, written by perhaps forty different authors of different backgrounds, educational levels, and occupations. Most was written originally in Hebrew or Greek, with some small portion in Aramaic.

The Bible covers hundreds of topics in literature of widely varying styles. These include history, poetry, didactic literature, parable, allegory, apocalyptic, and epic.

Yet note the amazing unity. These sixty-six books unfold one continuous drama of redemption, paradise lost to paradise regained, creation to the consummation of all things (see Sauer). There is one central theme, the person of Jesus Christ, even by implication in the Old Testament (Luke 24:27). In the Old Testament Christ is anticipated; in the New Testament he is realized (Matt. 5:17-18). There is one message: Humankind's problem is sin, and the solution is salvation through Christ (Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10).

Such incredible unity is best accounted for by the existence of a divine Mind that the writers of Scripture claimed inspired them. This Mind wove each of their pieces into one mosaic of truth.

Critics claim this is not so amazing, considering that succeeding authors were aware of preceding ones. Hence, they could build upon these texts without contradicting them. Or, later generations only accepted their book into the growing canon because it seemed to fit.

But not all writers were aware that their book would come to be in the canon (for example, Song of Solomon and the multi-author Proverbs). They could not have slanted their writing to the way that would best fit. There was no one point when books were accepted into the canon. Even though some later generations raised questions as to how a book came to be in the canon, there is evidence that books were accepted immediately by the contemporaries of the writers. When Moses wrote, his books were placed by the ark (Deut. 31:22-26). Later, Joshua was added, and Daniel had copies of these works, plus even the scroll of his contemporary Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2). In the New Testament, Paul cites Luke (1

Tim. 5:18, cf. Luke 10:7), and Peter possessed at least some of Paul's Epistles (2 Peter 3:15-16). While not every Christian everywhere possessed every book immediately, it does seem that some writings were accepted and distributed immediately. Perhaps others were disseminated more slowly, after they were determined to be authentic.

Even if every author possessed every earlier book, there is still a unity that transcends human ability. The reader might assume that each author was an incredible literary genius who saw both the broader unity and "plan" of Scripture and just how his piece would fit in it. Could even such geniuses write so that the unforeseen end would come out, even though they could not know precisely what that end would be? It is easier to posit a superintending Mind behind the whole who devised the plot and from the beginning planned how it would unfold.

Suppose a book of family medical advice was composed by forty doctors over 1500 years in different languages on hundreds of medical topics. What kind of unity would it have, even assuming that authors knew what preceding ones had written? Due to superstitious medical practice in the past, one chapter would say that disease is caused by demons who must be exorcised. Another would claim that disease is in the blood and must be drained by blood-letting. Another would claim disease to be a function of mind over matter. At best, such a book would lack unity, continuity, and usefulness. It would hardly be a definitive source covering the causes and cures of disease. Yet the Bible, with greater diversity, is still sought by millions for its solutions to spiritual maladies. It alone, of all books known to humankind, needs a God to account for its unity in diversity.

Archaeological Confirmation

Archaeology cannot directly prove the Bible's inspiration; it can confirm its reliability as an historical document. This is an indirect confirmation of inspiration. The conclusion of that evidence was summed up by Nelson Glueck that "no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible" (Glueck, 31). Millar Burroughs notes that "more than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine" (Burroughs, 1).

Testimonies of Transforming Power

The writer of Hebrews declares that "the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword" (4:12). The apostle Peter added, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). While not in the area of primary evidence, a subjective, supporting line of evidence is the change in life that God's Word brings. While early Islam spread by the power of the sword, early Christianity spread by the sword of the Spirit, even as Christians were being killed by the power of the Roman sword.

The great Christian apologist William Paley summarized the differences between the growth of Christianity and Islam vividly:

For what are we comparing? A Galilean peasant accompanied by a few fishermen with a conqueror at the head of his army. We compare Jesus, without force, without power, without support, without one external circumstance of attraction or influence, prevailing against the prejudices, the learning, the hierarchy, of his country, against the ancient religious opinions, the pompous religious rites, the philosophy, the wisdom, the authority of the

Roman empire, in the most polished and enlightened period of its existence,—with Mahomet making his way amongst Arabs; collecting followers in the midst of conquests and triumphs, in the darkest ages and countries of the world, and when success in arms not only operated by that command of men’s wills and persons which attend prosperous undertakings, but was considered as a sure testimony of Divine approbation. That multitudes, persuaded by this argument, should join the train of a victorious chief; that still greater multitudes should, without any argument, bow down before irresistible power—is a conduct in which we cannot see much to surprise us; in which we can see nothing that resembles the causes by which the establishment of Christianity was effected. [Paley, 257]

Despite the later misuse of military power in the Crusades and at isolated times earlier, the fact is that *early* Christianity grew by its spiritual power, not by political force. From the very beginning, as it is today around the world, it was the preaching of the Word of God which transformed lives that gave Christianity its vitality (Acts 2:41). For “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Conclusion

The Bible is the only book that both claims and proves to the Word of God. It claims to be written by prophets of God who recorded in their own style and language exactly the message God wanted them to give to humankind. The writings of the prophets and apostles claim to be the unbreakable, imperishable, and inerrant words of God. The evidence that their writings are what they claimed to be is found not only in their own moral character but in the supernatural confirmation of their message, its prophetic accuracy, its amazing unity, its transforming power, and the testimony of Jesus who was confirmed to be the Son of God.

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