

Evidence for the Bible—Part 2

By Dr. Norman Geisler

Original Text Is Without Errors, Not the Copies

As noted in the articles *Alleged Errors in the Bible* (See **Theological Dictionary** archives), this does not mean that every copy and translation of the Bible is perfect. God breathed out the originals, not the copies, so inerrancy applies to the original text, not to every copy. God in his providence preserved the copies from substantial error. In fact, the degree of accuracy is greater than that of any other book from the ancient world, exceeding 99 percent.

The Overall Evidence

Considered as a totality, evidences for the Bible's claim to be the Word of God are overwhelming.

The Testimony of Christ

Perhaps the strongest argument that the Bible is the Word of God is the testimony of Jesus. Even non-Christians believe he was a good teacher. Muslims believe him to be a true prophet of God. Christians, of course, insist that he is the Son of God as he claimed to be (Matt. 16:16-18; Mark 2:5-11; John 5:22-30; 8:58; 10:30; 20:28-29) and proved to be by numerous miracles (John 3:2; Acts 2:22). Even the *Qur'an* admits that Jesus did miracles, and that the Bible Christians used in Muhammad's day (A.D. seventh century) was accurate, since they were challenged to consult it to verify Muhammad's claims.

Jesus affirmed the Old Testament to be the Word of God and promised to guide his disciples to know all truth. Jesus claimed for the Bible:

1. Divine authority—Matthew 4:4, 7, 10
2. Indestructibility—Matthew 5:17-18
3. Infallibility or unbreakability—John 10:35
4. Ultimate supremacy—Matthew 15:3, 6
5. Factual inerrancy—Matthew 22:29; John 17:17
6. Historical reliability—Matthew 12:40, 24:37-38
7. Scientific accuracy—Matthew 19:4-5; John 3:12

The authority of Jesus confirms the authority of the Bible. If he is the Son of God, then the Bible is the Word of God. Indeed, if Jesus were merely a prophet, then the Bible still is confirmed to be the Word of God through his prophetic office. Only if one rejects the divine authority of Christ can he consistently reject the divine authority of the Scriptures. If Jesus is telling the truth, then it is true that the Bible is God's Word.

Manuscript Evidence

New Testament manuscripts are now available from the third and fourth centuries, and fragments that may date back as far as the late first century. From these through the medieval centuries, the text remained substantially the same. There are earlier and more manuscripts for the New Testament than for any other book from the ancient world. While most

books exist in ten or twenty manuscripts dating from a thousand years or more after they were composed, one nearly entire manuscript, the *Chester Beatty Papyri*, was copied in about A.D. 250. Another manuscript with the majority of the New Testament, called *Vaticanus*, is dated to about A.D. 325.

The Biblical Authors

Whatever weaknesses they may have had, the biblical authors are universally presented in Scripture as scrupulously honest, and this lends credibility to their claim, for the Bible is not shy to admit the failures of his people.

They taught the highest standard of ethics, including the obligation to always tell the truth. Moses' law commanded: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Exod. 20:16). Indeed, only one "whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart" (Ps. 15:2), who "has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow-man, [and] who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts" were considered righteous.

The New Testament also exalts integrity, commanding: "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25). The person who "loves and practices falsehood" will be excluded from heaven, according to Revelation 22:15. Absolute truthfulness was extolled as a cardinal Christian virtue.

The biblical writers not only taught the highest moral standards, including truthfulness, but they exemplified them in their lives. A true prophet could not be bought off. As one prophet who was tempted confessed, "I could not go beyond the command of the Lord" (Num. 22:18). What God spoke, the prophet had to declare, regardless of the consequences. Many prophets were threatened and even martyred but never recanted the truth. Jeremiah was put into prison for his unwelcome prophecies (Jer. 32:2; 37:15) and even threatened with death (Jer. 26:8, 24). Others were killed (Matt. 23:34-36; Heb. 11:32-38). Peter and the eleven apostles (Acts 5), as well as Paul (Acts 28), were all imprisoned and most were eventually martyred for their testimony (2 Tim. 4:6-8; 2 Peter 1:14). Indeed, being "faithful unto death" was an earmark of early Christian conviction (Rev. 2:10).

People sometimes die for false causes they believe to be true, but few die for what they know to be false. Yet the biblical witnesses, who were in a position to know what was true, died for proclaiming that their message came from God. This is at least *prima facie* evidence that the Bible is what they claimed it to be—the Word of God.

The Miraculous Confirmation

It is always possible that someone believes he or she speaks for God and does not. There are false prophets (Matt. 7:15). This is why the Bible exhorts: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). One sure way a true prophet can be distinguished from a false one is miracles (Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3-4). A miracle is an act of God, and God would not supernaturally confirm a false prophet to be a true one.

When Moses was called of God, he was given miracles to prove he spoke for God (Exodus 4). Elijah on Mount Carmel was confirmed by fire from heaven to be a true prophet of the true God (1 Kings 18). Even Nicodemus acknowledged to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs

you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2).

Even the *Qur'an* recognized that God confirmed his prophets (sura 7:106-8, 116-119), including Jesus, by miracles. God is said to have told Muhammad, “If they reject thee, so were rejected apostles before thee, who came with clear signs” (sura 17:103). Allah says, “Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron, with Our signs and authority manifest” (sura 23:45). Interestingly, when Muhammad was challenged by unbelievers to perform like miracles, he refused (see sura 2:118; 3:183; 4:153; 6:8, 9, 37). In Muhammad’s own words (from the *Qur'an*), “They [will] say: ‘Why is not a sign sent down to him from his Lord?’” since even Muhammad admitted that “God hath certainly power to send down a sign” (sura 6:37). But miracles were a mark of Jesus’ ministry, as of other prophets and apostles (Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:12). When asked by John the Baptist if he was the Messiah, Jesus responded, “Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached” (Luke 7:20-22).

Miracles, then, are a divine confirmation of a prophet’s claim to be speaking for God. But of all the world’s religious leaders, only the Judeo-Christian prophets and apostles were supernaturally confirmed by genuine miracles of nature that could not possibly have been self-delusion or trickery. Confirming miracles included the turning of water into wine (John 2), healing of those with organic sicknesses (John 5), multiplying food (John 6), walking on water (John 6), and raising the dead (John 11).

Muslims allege that Muhammad did miracles, but there is no support for this claim, even in the *Qur'an* (for his refusal to do miracles, see sura 3:181-84). Only the Bible is supernaturally confirmed.

(to be continued)