



HOW CAN WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD?

A RELIGION PROFILE FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, INC.

THE QUESTION POSED

Christians claim the Bible is God's Word. That means that they believe the Bible is a verbal revelation from God that makes it unique from every other book. But how can such a claim be verified?

First, we would expect certain things to be true about a book from God. Such characteristics might also be true about humanly-authored books, but we would expect that, at the very least, they would be true about God's book. Such characteristics would include the following:

- It would claim to be God's Word.
- It would be historically accurate when it speaks on historical matters.
- The authors would have to be trustworthy.
- The book would be thematically unified and without contradictions.
- We would have received accurate copies of the original manuscripts.

Second, because God is unique, His book would bear characteristics that could be true of it alone. Such characteristics would distinguish God's book from all other books in such a way that it could not be counterfeited. These characteristics would include the following:

- It would make statements that would reveal knowledge about

the way things work beyond the knowledge of its day.

- It would make predictions about the future that could not be known through natural means.
- The message would be unique.
- The messengers would be confirmed by miracles.
- The words would have a transforming power.

Now let's look at the characteristics listed to see if they are true about the Bible.

CHARACTERISTICS THAT MUST BE TRUE OF GOD'S WORD, BUT COULD ALSO BE TRUE OF A HUMAN BOOK

1. THE BIBLE CLAIMS TO BE GOD'S WORD

A. The Authors Claimed To Speak God's Words

Much of the Bible was written by prophets of God. The prophet was someone who was to say exactly what God told him to say, no more and no less. Jeremiah was commanded: "This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the LORD's house and speak to all the people. . . . Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word" (Jeremiah 26:2). The prophet was to speak "everything the Lord had said" (Exodus 4:30).

Throughout the Scriptures, moreover, the authors, whether they

were called a prophet or not, claimed to be under the direction of the Holy Spirit: "Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21; cf., 2 Samuel 23:2; Matthew 22:43).

B. The Bible Claims to be "Breathed Out" by God

Writing about the entire Old Testament, the apostle Paul declared: "All Scripture is *God-breathed*" (2 Timothy 3:16; emphasis added). Jesus described the Scriptures as the very "word that comes *from the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4; emphasis added).

C. The New Testament Was Seen As Being Revealed Scripture As Well

When the New Testament authors used the word "Scripture" they usually had the Old Testament in mind, since the New Testament was still in the process of being written. Nevertheless, they were also well aware that Jesus had told the apostles that the Holy Spirit would continue the process of inspiring new Scripture (John 14:26; 16:13). Paul, for example, understood that his writings were "words taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:13; see also Galatians 1:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:15-16), and he taught that God was continuing the

process of revelation in others as well (Ephesians 3:4-5).

D. What The Bible Says, God Says, and Vice Versa

Another way the Bible claims to be the Word of God is expressed in the formula, "What God says, the Bible says." This is manifested in the fact that often an Old Testament passage will claim God said it, yet when this same text is cited in the New Testament it asserts that "the Scriptures" said it. The reverse is true as well: What the Bible says, God says. The chart below cites only two of many examples.

E. The Biblical Writers Claim "Thus Said The Lord"

Phrases like "thus says the Lord" (Isaiah 1:11,18; Jeremiah 2:3,5; etc.), "God said" (Genesis 1:3,6; etc.), "the Word of the Lord came to me" (Jeremiah 34:1; Ezekiel 30:1; etc.) and other similar phrases occur hundreds of times in the Old Testament. Their significance is that the writer is claiming to be giving the very Word of God.

The Bible is also spoken of as being "the Word of God." For example, Jesus told the Jews of His day: "Thus you nullify *the word of God* for the sake of your tradition" (Matthew 15:6, emphasis added).

Paul speaks of the Jews as having "been entrusted with *the very words of God*" (Romans 3:2, emphasis added; see also Hebrews 4:12).

F. The Bible Claims To Have Divine Authority In All Its Parts

The Bible claims to be divinely authoritative with respect to all that is written within it (2 Timothy 3:16). That includes its very words (Matthew 22:43; 1 Corinthians 2:13; Galatians 3:16), the tenses of the verbs (Matthew 22:32; Jesus draws significance from the present tense of 'I am') and even to the smallest parts of the words (Matthew 5:17,18). Even though the Bible was not verbally dictated by God to the authors, nevertheless, the result is just as perfect as if it had been. For the biblical authors claimed that God is the source of the very words of Scripture, since He supernaturally superintended the process by which they wrote but still used their own vocabulary and style: "but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

G. Christ Testified That The Bible Is From God

Jesus had an extremely high view of Scripture. For example,

- He said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word

that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

- He said that the Bible is imperishable (Matthew 5:17-18).
- He asserted that the Bible cannot be broken, or fail in its purpose (John 10:35).
- He affirmed the ultimate supremacy of the authority of the Bible over human tradition (Matthew 15:3,6).
- He considered the Bible to be without error (Matthew 22:29; John 17:17).
- He considered the Bible to be historically reliable (Matthew 12:40; 24:37-38).

2. THE BIBLE IS HISTORICALLY ACCURATE

The Bible is not merely a book containing theological teachings that are unrelated to history, but the theological statements of Scripture are closely linked to historical events. For example, Paul maintained that if Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead was not an historical fact, then our faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:17). Scriptural characters, like Paul, were not a group of gullible religious people who were ready to believe anything that came along.

The history given in the Bible has been confirmed by archaeology to a remarkable degree. Noted archaeologist, Nelson Glueck, states,

"It may be stated categorically 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, emphasis added).

Archaeologist Millar Burrows notes that "more than one archaeologist has found his respect for the *Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine*" (Burrows, 1, emphasis added).

WHAT GOD SAYS . . .	THE BIBLE SAYS.
"The Lord said to Abram, ' . . . all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'" (Genesis 12:1,3).	"The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and <i>announced</i> the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you'" (Galatians 3:8).

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS . . .	GOD SAYS.
"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?" (Psalms 2:1) [written by <i>David</i>].	"You <i>spoke by the Holy Spirit</i> through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?'" (Acts 4:25).

William Ramsay is one such example of an archaeologist who went from believing that the Bible contained fabricated myths to believing that the Bible was not only accurate historically but that it was the Word of God.

Earlier in his life Ramsay had been influenced by a liberal theology, which taught that the writers of the Bible were more interested in promoting a biased theological perspective than in recording history accurately. In the course of his studies, however, Ramsay was surprised to find extensive archaeological evidence for the accuracy of the biblical narratives. One thing that impressed Ramsay about Luke, the writer of Acts, was his accuracy with respect to ostensibly insignificant details. For example, Luke accurately names the rulers of Thessalonica “politarchs,” Gallio the “Proconsul of Achaea,” the official in Ephesus a “temple warden,” the governor of Cyprus a “proconsul” and the chief official in Malta “the first man of the island.” Such titles have since been confirmed in numerous Greek and Latin inscriptions.

What Ramsay began to realize was that the Bible was not mythical, but that it was a document that recorded history with extreme accuracy. He wrote, “Luke is an historian of the first rank” (Wilson, 114). And if the Bible was accurate in its historical details, then he considered there to be a good chance that the biblical authors could be trusted to accurately relate the spiritual significance of the historical events as well.

3. THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE BIBLICAL AUTHORS

As we saw in point 1, the biblical authors claimed to be receiving their messages from God. Now, if the biblical writers were known perjurers, there would be no reason to accept their claim. But they were honest men of integrity, which lends

support to the credibility of their claim of having been inspired by God. Their honesty and integrity is evident by the following things.

First, they taught the highest standard of ethics, including the obligation to always tell the truth: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25; see also Exodus 20:16; Psalms 15:2; Revelation 22:15).

Second, the writers of the Bible paid a high price for their truthfulness. For example, Peter and the eleven apostles (Acts 5), as well as Paul (Acts 28), were all imprisoned. Most were eventually martyred for their witness for Christ (2 Timothy 4:6-8; 2 Peter 1:14). Indeed, being “faithful, even to the point of death” was an earmark of early Christian conviction (Revelation 2:10).

People sometimes die for what they believe to be true and isn’t. But few are willing to die for what they know to be false. Yet the biblical witnesses died for the truth they proclaimed, believing that their message had come from God. While not being proof, such evidence is an indication that the Bible is what the biblical writers claimed it to be—the Word of God.

4. THE TESTIMONY OF THE AMAZING UNITY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is amazing in its unity amid vast diversity. Even though the Bible was composed by many persons of diverse backgrounds and different time periods, nevertheless it manifests a unity that would indicate there was one Mind behind its writing.

Consider the diversity of the Bible. The Bible:

- was written over a **period of some fifteen hundred years** or more (from at least 1400 B.C. to nearly 100 A.D.),
- is composed of **66 different books**,

- was written by some **40 different authors**,
- was composed in **three languages**—Hebrew, Greek, and some Aramaic,
- contains discussions on **hundreds of different topics**,
- was written in a **variety of different literary styles**, including historical, poetic, didactic, parabolic, allegorical, apocalyptic, and epic,
- was composed by **authors of many different occupations**.

Yet in spite of all this vast diversity, the Bible reveals an amazing unity. First, it is **one, continuous unfolding drama of redemption** from Genesis to Revelation; from paradise lost to paradise regained; from the creation of all things to the consummation of all things (Sauer, *Dawn and Triumph*).

Second, the Bible has **one central theme—the Person of Jesus Christ** (Luke 24:27). In the Old Testament, Christ is seen by way of anticipation; in the New Testament by way of realization. In the Old Testament He is predicted, and in the New Testament He is present (Matthew 5:17-18). The Old Testament expectation of Christ came to a historical realization in the New Testament.

Third, from beginning to end the Bible has **one unified message**: humanity’s problem is sin (Genesis 6:5; Romans 3:23), and the solution is salvation through Christ (Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45).

Such incredible unity amidst such great diversity is best accounted for by a God who stands outside time and history and who was therefore able to direct the writing of the Bible. The very same Mind that the writers of Scripture claimed to have inspired them also appears to have superintended them, weaving each of their pieces into one overall mosaic of truth.

To highlight the incredible unity of the Bible by way of contrast, suppose that a book containing family medical advice was composed by 40 doctors over 1500 years, in different languages, on hundreds of different medical topics, etc. What kind of unity would it have, even if all the succeeding authors knew what the preceding ones had written? One chapter would say all disease is caused by demons that need to be exorcised. Another would claim that disease is in the blood, which needs to be drained out. Still another would claim disease is psychosomatic—mind over matter. Such a book would lack unity, continuity, and no one would seriously consider it a definitive source to answer what is the cause and cure of disease.

Yet the Bible, with even greater diversity in the topics addressed, is the world's perennial best seller and is sought by multiplied millions as the solution to humanity's spiritual problems. It alone, of all books known to humankind, needs the Deity to account for its amazing unity in the midst of such diversity.

5. THE DOCUMENTS WE POSSESS ARE ACCURATE COPIES OF THE ORIGINALS

In 1948, Bedouin shepherds discovered Old Testament manuscripts in the Qumran caves near the Dead Sea. These manuscripts had been hidden for 2,000 years. They serve as a control by which to gauge the accuracy of the manuscripts that had been copied during the time that they were hidden in the caves.

What did the scholars find when they compared the Qumran manuscripts with the present day copies? Millar Burrows, who wrote a book on *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, said,

“It is a matter of wonder that through something like a

thousand years the text underwent so little alteration” (Geisler, 1986, 366-367).

Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer wrote concerning the two copies of the book of Isaiah found in the caves,

“[they] proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling” (Geisler, 1986, 367).

Thus, we can say with assurance that those who copied the text of the books of the Old Testament did so with great care.

What about the textual accuracy of the New Testament? The degree of accuracy of the New Testament exceeds 99%, which is greater than that of any other book from the ancient world (see Geisler, 1986, ch.

22). The reasons for this amazing accuracy are that, with respect to the Bible, the number of New Testament manuscripts that we have is greater than for other books from the ancient world, and the biblical manuscripts are much closer in time to the originals than those of other works from ancient times. Consider the chart below.

It must be clarified that Christians claim that God inspired, or “breathed out,” the text of the *original* manuscripts, *not* everything in the copies. The copies are without error only in so far as they were copied correctly. It is nevertheless true that the copies were copied with great care and a very high degree of accuracy. Christians believe that God in His providence preserved the copies from all substantial error.

There are, however, some minor copyist variants in the biblical manuscripts. It is important,

RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS		
Author/Book	Time Gap between the Original and the Copy	Number of Copies
Herodotus, <i>History</i>	ca. 1,350 yrs.	8
Thucydides, <i>History</i>	ca. 1,300 yrs.	8
Plato	ca. 1,300 yrs.	7
Demosthenes	ca. 1,400 yrs.	200
Caesar, <i>Gallic Wars</i>	ca. 1,000 yrs.	10
Livy, <i>History of Rome</i>	ca. 400 yrs. ca. 1,000 yrs.	1 partial 19 copies
Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>	ca. 1,000 yrs.	20
Pliny Secundus, <i>Natural History</i>	ca. 750 yrs.	7
New Testament	fragment of a book: +50 yrs. books of the NT: 100 yrs. most of the NT: 150 yrs. complete NT: 225 yrs.	5366

(Geisler and Nix, 408)

though, to note of these copyist variants that:

- Such variants are relatively rare in the copied manuscripts;
- In most cases we know which one is wrong from the context or the parallel passages;
- In no case do the variants affect any doctrine of Scripture;
- The variants actually vouch for the accuracy of the copying process, since the scribes who copied them knew there were variants in the manuscripts, still they were duty-bound to copy what the text said;
- The variants don't affect the message of the Bible.

In fact, one must make a distinction between the text and its message, for one can receive a text with variants and still receive 100% of the message. For example, suppose you receive a message from Western Union as follows:

#ou have won seven million dollars.

No doubt you would gladly pick up your money. And if the telegram read this way, then you would have no doubt at all about its message:

Y#u have won seven million dollars.
Yo# have won seven million dollars.
You #ave won seven million dollars.

Why are we more sure of the message when there are more variants? Because each variant is in a different place, and with each new line we get another confirmation of every other letter in the original message.

Three things are important to note:

1. Even with one line—variant and all—100 percent of the message comes through.
2. The more lines, the more variants. But the more variants, the more sure we are of what the intended message really was.
3. There are hundreds of times more biblical manuscripts than there are lines in the above example.

And there is a greater percentage of variants in this telegram than in all the biblical manuscripts combined.

CHARACTERISTICS THAT COULD BE TRUE ONLY OF GOD'S WORD

1. *SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE BEFORE ITS TIME*

One of the amazing things about the Bible is that it makes scientifically accurate statements about the body, the earth, and the heavens that predate their discoveries by usually 2,000-3,000 years. Moreover, such scientific statements were made in the midst of cultures that were largely superstitious and not scientific in their approach.

A. The Body

In the 1840s, there was a one in six rate of a pregnant woman dying from "childbirth fever" after entering a particular hospital in Vienna, Austria. Ignaz Semmelweis, one of the doctors, noticed that their deaths were not random, but that the patients had been examined by doctors who had just autopsied victims of "childbirth fever." So Dr. Semmelweis implemented a policy that all doctors must wash their hands after doing autopsies. As a result, the mortality rate among pregnant women dropped dramatically to one in eighty-four. But instead of Dr. Semmelweis receiving accolades, the other doctors failed to see the connection, and considered the constant washing of hands to be a bother. Dr. Semmelweis was ostracized and eventually left Vienna to practice medicine in Budapest, where the same story repeated itself (Cairney, "Prescience 2," 137-142).

What is significant about Dr. Semmelweis's story is that the cleanliness laws set down by God through Moses predated by 3,500 years the principles of washing to

prevent the spread of disease. Moses wrote:

"For the unclean person [someone who has touched a dead person or animal], put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them.... The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and that evening he will be clean" (Numbers 19:17,19).

Such a statement assumes a knowledge about how that which is unseen to the naked eye—germs and bacteria—are responsible for spreading disease. But such knowledge was not discovered until the 1800s! Moreover, washing was not a common practice in the surrounding cultures at the time of Moses (Cairney, "Prescience 2," 129).

B. The Earth

The following are physical phenomena mentioned in the Bible that not only went against the wisdom of the surrounding cultures at the time but that also predate the earliest scientific discoveries of such phenomena by usually 2,000-3,000 years:

- The ocean floor contains deep valleys (2 Samuel 22:16; Job 38:16; Psalms 18:15) and towering mountains (Jonah 2:6). The ancients thought the ocean floor was "flat, sandy, and bowl-like" (Barfield, 170).
- The ocean contains underwater springs (see Genesis 7:11; Job 38:16; Proverbs 8:28). The other civilizations believed the ocean was fed only by rain and rivers (Barfield, 171).
- Moses wrote, "For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused" (Exodus 23:10). Allowing the ground to lie fallow every seventh year was not a custom in the non-biblical cultures. It is a practice, however,

that scientists have since discovered was way ahead of its time (Cairney, "Prescience 1," 134).

C. The Heavens

One of the amazing things about the Bible, when it comes to statements about the heavens, is the errors that the biblical writers *did not make*, even though such errors were common beliefs in the surrounding cultures. The biblical writers ...

- Did not consider the stars to be near us and fixed in their positions. Genesis 1:8,14-17 speaks of the heavens as an "expanse," which literally means "spreading out." Jeremiah implies that the heavens cannot be measured (31:37; Barfield, 102).
- Did not consider the heavens to have existed from eternity, but taught that they had a beginning (Genesis 1:1).

The biblical statements about the heavens are common assumptions today, but they were anything but common in the days when the books of the Bible were penned.

2. THE SUPERNATURAL PREDICTIONS OF THE BIBLICAL PROPHETS

Unlike any other book in the world, the Bible is the only one to offer specific predictions hundreds of years in advance that were literally fulfilled. In some cases *very different* prophecies were made—and then fulfilled—about cities that were *relatively close* to each other. The following is only one of several possible examples.

A. Memphis and Thebes:

The prophet Ezekiel wrote in the sixth century B.C.:

"This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis.... I will... inflict punishment on Thebes. I will... cut off the

hordes of Thebes" (Ezekiel 30:13-15).

Both Memphis and Thebes were destroyed hundreds of years after Ezekiel's prophecy. What is most significant, though, is that the idols were removed entirely from Memphis but they were not removed from Thebes, just as Ezekiel had predicted. (Bloom, 179-181).

B. The Coming Of Christ

Many of the Bible's predictions center around the coming of Christ. Consider the following predictions, made centuries in advance, that said the Messiah would:

- be from the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; cf., Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16),
- be of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10; cf., Luke 3:33; Hebrews 7:14),
- be of the house of David (2 Samuel 7:12f; cf., Matthew 1:1),
- be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; cf., Matthew 1:21f),
- be born in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; cf., Matthew 2:1 and Luke 2:4-7),
- be anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2; cf., Matthew 3:16-17),
- perform miracles (Isaiah 35:5-6; cf., Matthew 9:35),
- be rejected by the Jews (Psalms 118:22; cf., 1 Peter 2:7),
- die a humiliating death (Psalms 22; Isaiah 53:3; cf., Luke 9:22) at about 33 A.D. (Daniel 9:24f),
- be rejected by His own people (Isaiah 53:3; cf., John 1:10-11; 7:5, 48),
- be silenced before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7; cf., Matthew 27:12-19),
- be mocked (Psalms 22:7-8; cf., Matthew 27:31),
- be pierced in His hands and feet (Psalms 22:16; cf., John 20:25),
- be put to death with thieves (Isaiah 53:12; cf., Luke 23:33),
- pray for His persecutors (Isaiah 53:12; cf., Luke 23:34),
- be pierced in His side (Zechariah 12:10; cf., John 19:34),

- be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9; cf., Matthew 27:57-60),
- have people casting lots for His garments (Psalms 22:18; cf., John 19:23-24)
- rise from the dead (Psalms 16:10; cf., Acts 2:31; Mark 16:6).

Note several unique features about the biblical prophecies, in contrast to all other examples of attempted predictions today. First, unlike many psychic predictions, many of these prophecies were **very specific**, giving, for example, the very name of the tribe, city, and time of Christ's coming.

Second, unlike the forecasting found in the tabloids at the check-out counter, **none of these predictions failed**.

Third, since these prophecies were **written hundreds of years before Christ was born**, no one could have been reading the trends of the times or just made intelligent guesses.

Fourth, many of these predictions were **beyond human ability to force a fulfillment**. For example, as a mere human being, Christ had no control over when, where, or how He would be born, how He would die (considering others were responsible for His death), or rise from the dead.

The best explanation for the fulfillment of such predictions made hundreds of years earlier is the existence of a transcendent God who knows all things, including "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10).

Skeptics sometimes claim equal authority for predictions from psychics. But there is a quantum leap between the fallible human prognosticators and the unerring prophets of Scripture. Indeed, one of the tests of the false prophets was whether their predictions came to pass (Deuteronomy 18:22). Those whose predictions failed were killed

by stoning (v. 20)—a practice that no doubt caused serious pause in any who were not absolutely sure their messages were from God! Amid hundreds of prophecies, biblical prophets are not known to have made a single error. By comparison, a study made of top psychics revealed that they were wrong 92% of the time (Kole, 69-70)! Jean Dixon, for example, predicted that Jacqueline Kennedy would not remarry, but she married Aristotle Onassis the next day (Kole, 70)!

3. THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE

Romans 6:23 encapsulates the uniqueness of the biblical message: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

A. Spiritual Death

The Christian Gospel begins with the message that the spiritual condition of humanity is hopeless in that humanity is spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). In this, Christianity is unique.

Other religions acknowledge that there is something spiritually wrong with humanity, but they also hold out the hope that we are somehow fixable through some form of human effort. According to the Bible, however, we are not fixable through our own effort. Just as physically dead people can't give life to themselves, so there is no way we who are spiritually dead can give life to ourselves (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Our being spiritually dead, moreover, is related to God being absolutely holy. God will not allow sin in His presence: "with you the wicked cannot dwell" (Psalms 5:4). The problem is that "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23).

B. Eternal Life

Even though the news about humanity's spiritual condition is terribly bad, God has given us tremendously good news. That good news is that

we can have the assurance of eternal life. Such eternal life is not merely some continued existence after death on a spiritual plane, but it is fellowship with God Himself (John 17:3). No other religion promises to draw us as close to God as does the Gospel of Christ (Hebrews 4:16). Such fellowship with God, moreover, can begin now.

Plus, no other religion can confirm the hope of eternal life like Christianity, because Jesus Christ is the only founder of a religion who has bodily risen from the dead.

C. A Gift

The Christian Gospel is also unique because the gift of eternal life is entirely free. A gift is not a gift if it is earned; it can only be received. The means by which to receive God's gift is, first, to acknowledge our need for life, since our sin has caused our spiritual death; and, second, to trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty of sin—death—on our behalf (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The offer of the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ is the core message of the Bible, and it sets the Bible apart from all other books in all of history.

4. THE MIRACULOUS CONFIRMATION OF THE BIBLICAL WITNESSES

The biblical prophets claimed to receive their message from God. Of course, as even the Bible admits, there are false prophets (Matthew 7:15). This is why the Bible exhorts us: "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 of the sure ways a true prophet can be distinguished from a false one is by miracles (Acts 2:22; Hebrews 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, for

example, he was given miracles to prove that he spoke for God (Exodus 4:1f).

Miracles were an earmark of Jesus' ministry (Acts 2:22), as they were of other prophets and apostles (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12). When asked by John the Baptist if he was the Messiah, Jesus cited his miracles, such as making the blind to see, the lame to walk, the lepers to be healed, the deaf to hear, and the dead raised to life (Luke 7:20-22). Nicodemus, one of the Jewish religious leaders, acknowledged such miracles (John 3:2).

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 psychosomatic or trickery. For example, they turned water into wine (John 2), instantaneously cured organic sickness in people (John 5), multiplied the number of loaves of bread for a huge crowd (John 6), walked on water (John 6), immediately cured one who had been born blind (John 9), and raised the dead (John 11).

Significantly, even though Muhammad acknowledged how the prophets before him were confirmed by miraculous signs (Surahs 3:184; 17:103; 23:45), he refused to perform similar miracles when challenged by unbelievers (Surahs 2:118; 4:153; 6:8,9,37).

Only the Bible has been supernaturally confirmed to be the Word of God by special acts of God (see Geisler, 1994, chs. 8-9).

5. THE TESTIMONY OF THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE BIBLE

The writer of the book of Hebrews declared,

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

There is indeed something "living and active" and "penetrating" about the Bible that is different from any other book. The Bible rings with the chords of truth, and it speaks to the hearts of men and women. It has changed the lives of millions of people.

Of course, the Bible speaking to one's heart is a personal matter, but that does not make it any less significant. Our challenge to you is, if you have not read the Bible, try it. A good place to begin is with the book of John, which is in the New Testament portion of the Bible. The book of John was written "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ ... and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the Bible has met the criteria that supports its claim for being the Word of God. With respect to the criteria that could also be said about a humanly-authored book, the Bible claims to be the Word of God, it is historically accurate, its authors were trustworthy, it is unified amidst an amazing diversity, and accurate copies of the original manuscripts have been passed down to us. With respect to the criteria that could be said only of God's Book, the Bible contains scientific statements that predate their discoveries by 2,000-3,000 years, it made predictions that were fulfilled hundreds of years later, its message is unique, its messengers were confirmed by miracles, and the words have a transforming power.

There is no other book like the Bible!

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