

The Authenticity of the Bible

By Jerry Collins

- *How is the Bible different from other religious books?*
- *How did we get the Bible?*
- *Who has the right interpretation of the Bible?*

1. Uniqueness

The Bible is a unique library of 66 books written over a 1,500 year period by 40 authors in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) on three different continents (Europe, Asia, and North Africa). Its books include history, poetry, romance, prose, and prophecy, with a cast of 2,930 characters depicted in 1,551 places, and written on hundreds of controversial subjects with perfect harmony and continuity. This harmony is unlikely without it being a work of God. People just do not agree that easily, even in more objective subjects like physics, chemistry or medicine. For example, rarely would you get the same diagnosis from two doctors in the same specialty. The Bible has also been translated into nearly 1,700 languages and has stood the test of time as the most valuable book in the world.

2. Character

The Bible tells us it was God's choice to disclose Himself and His view of the world. That disclosure is called revelation. He did this through His creation (Romans 1:18-20) and through His written Word, the Bible. This came about as God guided the human authors to write down His Word. This writing is called inspiration (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:15-16). As a result, the Bible is infallible, which means it is without error as it was originally written. In other words, the original words are an exact record of the mind and will of God (Luke 24:27, 44). Therefore, nothing should be added or taken away from it (Revelation 22:18-19). So the Bible is the infallible, inerrant, verbally inspired revelation of God.

3. Canonicity

Historically, the church had to decide which books God Himself inspired. The collecting of these books into the Bible is called canonicity. For example, a book of the Bible was recognized as God's Word when it (1) claimed internally to be from God, (2) taught things consistent with the rest of the Bible, (3) was written or sanctioned by an apostle, or (4) was already being used by the church.

4. Development

The Old Testament was copied by scribes who carefully counted every line, word, syllable, and letter to ensure accuracy. The earliest complete copy of the Old Testament dated from around A.D. 900. But in 1948, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These were Old Testament manuscripts which dated 1,000 years earlier (150 B.C.). When the two sets of manuscripts were compared, they were essentially, and amazingly, the same.

The New Testament has more than 24,000 partial or complete manuscript copies, the oldest fragment dating from A.D. 130, which makes the New Testament the most credible document in existence. For example, Caesar's Gallic War (58 B.C.) has 10 existing manuscripts, the oldest being some 900 years later than Caesar's day.

There are also enough quotations from the early church fathers, who lived 150-200 years after the time of Christ, so that even if we did not have a single copy of the Bible, we would have all but 11 verses of the entire New Testament from material written within 200 years of Christ's death and resurrection.

5. Archaeology

Archaeology has proven and verified over and over again the accuracy and reliability of the Bible. Here are three examples: (1) The Dibon Stone, dated around 800 B.C., records King Omri of Israel (1 Kings 16:15-28), a number of biblical places, and the name of the God of Israel. (2) The Ebla Tablets (2400-2250 B.C.), recently discovered in Syria, not only show that writing existed nearly 1,000 years before Moses, but that laws, customs, and events were recorded in writing at that time. (3) Luke and Acts, written by Luke, are filled with literal dates, times, people, places, and events, yet not one has ever been found to be even the slightest bit inaccurate.

6. Prophecy

(1) The Old Testament predicted that Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome would rise and fall (Daniel 2:31-45). (2) The city of Tyre was destroyed just as Ezekiel 26 predicted. (3) Abraham's descendants still exist, just as predicted in Genesis 12:15, and (4) there is no trace of the Canaanites or Edomites who were all cursed by God (Genesis 9:25; Obadiah 1-21). (5) Prophecies of the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, including the place of His birth (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1), His virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23), His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:15), the piercing of His hands and feet (Psalm 22:16; Matthew 27:35), the casting of lots for His clothing at the crucifixion (Psalm 22:18; Matthew 27:35), His burial (Isaiah 53:9; John 20:28), and that He was to be called God (Isaiah 9:6; John 4:25-26).

7. Credibility

The credibility of the Bible is demonstrated by its self-testimony. (1) The Old Testament writers claimed over 2,600 times to be writing the Word of God. (2) There are at least 320 quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament. (3) Peter equated Paul's writings with *the rest of the scriptures* in 2 Peter 3:16. (4) Jesus claimed the Old Testament was God's Word (Matthew 5:18) when He equated what Moses wrote with what God said (Matthew 15:4).

8. Understanding

Understanding the Bible requires that we interpret each phrase within its context. To do this: (1) We must consider the historical background surrounding the writing of the book. (2) We must also take each passage at face value, considering it in a plain, ordinary, normal way as you would when you read a newspaper. (3) And most important, we must seek the author's meaning. For example, the author might be writing a story, a figure of speech, prophecy, a parable, narrative, or poetry.

God promises that the Holy Spirit will become our teacher as He illuminates (makes clear) His written revelation in the Bible (John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:93:2).

Questions and Answers

Q: *How is the Bible different from other religious books?*

A: The Bible not only claims to be God's Word, but the verifiable evidence from archaeology, fulfilled prophecy, and its self-testimony authenticate this claim.

Q: *How did we get the Bible?*

A: God guided human authors to write down His Word without error. Then it was copied and recopied by professionally trained men, reproduced in print and preserved in the words we have today.

Q: *Who has the right interpretation of the Bible?*

A: The Bible, like any other book, can be misinterpreted. Interpreting each phrase within its context by considering its historical background, taking the words in a plain, ordinary, normal way, will clarify the author's meaning. The correct interpretation is what the author intended his readers to understand.