

The Reliability of Scripture as the Word of God

A month ago someone asked me, “Why do you have such a high regard for the Bible? Isn’t it written by men? Why do you think it is so special?”

The Bible is a completely unique book. It is not really a book, but a library of 66 books with a unity of purpose running through them. It was written by forty different authors over a 1600 year time span from three different continents. It was written originally in three different languages. Every author was from a different walk of life—political leaders, Generals, fishermen, shepherds, doctors, I.R.S. agents, prime ministers, kings, and rabbis. They all wrote from different circumstances and different purposes and to different audiences. Nevertheless, every book of the Bible is consistent and complimentary to its one main theme—the redemption of mankind. Each of these authors claimed that their inspiration was directly from God, as David said, “The Spirit of God spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue”(2 Samuel 23:2). Jesus backed up David on this in Mark 12:36 when He said, “David himself spoke in the Holy Spirit”, then He quoted from Ps. 110. I have not counted them, but I have read many times that the Bible says it is the word of God around 3000 times

Consider the New Testament

The New Testament is made up of 27 letters written by different men at different times and places over a 50 year period in the first century. It was all written originally in Greek on papyrus or parchment and rolled up in scrolls around a stick. The original Greek cursive had no punctuation, no chapter or verse divisions and no spaces between words. Because of the poor materials it had to be copied constantly. Since Christianity was illegal, the letters were hidden and there were no church councils to bring them all together until the 4th century. Amazingly, when they were all compiled after 300 years of being hand copied, they remained consistent and reliable. Copies we have in libraries and museums from 2nd century Alexandria are the same as 3rd century Antioch and 4th century Rome. In 384 AD, Jerome was commissioned to translate the original Greek into the Latin Vulgate which was used exclusively in the western churches until the 16th century. The invention of the printing press and the changes brought by the Reformation saw many translations, but the first widely used English translation was in 1611 when King James sought to reconcile various religious parties, so he commissioned Oxford and Cambridge to translate the best available Greek and Hebrew manuscripts into English--- thus the King James Version. The only problem with it is, besides the old English, the very best Greek manuscripts have been found in the last 150 years. Our translations today like the NIV and the NASV are far superior.

I have had people try to tell me the Bible has been changed over the years. Both Mormons and Muslims will tell you it originally was inspired by God but was changed in

the middle ages, therefore their books are more inspired or are the last word. Nonsense, we have complete copies of the New Testament dated at 350 A.D. along with hundreds of fragments of NT passages from the 2nd and 3rd centuries. We also have copies of 2nd and 3rd century writings of theologians and church fathers who quote from the New Testament. In fact we have so many quotations that you could practically write the NT using just the quotations. All of these manuscripts, fragments, and quotations prove that the Bible we have is reliable and has not changed from the originals except for some copyists errors that are identifiable. A good example of this is a papyrus fragment of the Gospel of John that all experts date in the early 2nd century around 125AD. Prior to this discovery, critics were trying to say John was not written by John and should be dated in the 2nd or 3rd century. Now everyone agrees that it was written by John at the end of the first century. This fragment is in Greek, it is John 18, it was found in 1935, and is kept in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England.

Old Testament

Prior to 1947, the earliest O.T. we had was the Masoretic text dated between 900-1000 AD. Therefore critics assumed the OT had been changed over the years since there was a 1400—2500 year gap between the originals and our earliest copies. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls changed that. They were dated as early as 150 BC, so scholars were eager to compare. What they found was a 95% accuracy, and the 5% was in spelling (much like our Old English 500 years ago). Also the Silver Scroll was recently discovered in a burial tomb in Jerusalem and dated back to 600 BC. It is the book of Numbers, and it also is virtually identical. Therefore, the accusation that the Bible has been changed is ludicrous. It is by far the most documented and reliable ancient writing that we have.

Another proof that the Bible is inspired by God is fulfilled prophecy. The Old Test. was completed about 400 years before the New Test., the prophets wrote of many future events—all of which were fulfilled or await fulfillment at the 2nd coming of Christ. Again, I have not counted but I have read that the first coming of Christ fulfilled 300 OT prophecies concerning the Messiah. How did they know that Jesus would be of the tribe of Judah, the family of David, be born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, die by crucifixion (which hadn't been invented yet), be sinless but die for sinners, silent before His accusers, buried in a rich man's tomb, be resurrected, and ascend to heaven? I believe they knew the same way Daniel explained how he knew so many future events, "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (Dan.2:28). What we have is the revelation of God to man. How can we be assured of this? There are at least eight reasons I can think of:

1. Internal evidence—it says that it is.
2. It is alive and it changes lives. I can personally testify to the impact of the Word of God on my life. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to change lives.

3. A plethora of fulfilled prophecy. How did Daniel know and name in advance the four world powers in the history of the Middle East? How did Nahum know Nineveh would be destroyed and never be rebuilt? How did all the prophets predict the Assyrian invasion and the Babylonian captivity? How did Moses predict the history of Israel in Deuteronomy 28? How did the O.T. prophets predict Christ as to place of birth, type of execution, and the very words that He would speak?

4. Incredibly well organized, copied, and preserved—miraculously so

5. The Old Testament was confirmed by Jesus, and Jesus' life, miracles, ministry, teaching, and resurrection were confirmed by the eyewitnesses who wrote the NT, along with the Apostles who were well respected men who died for their beliefs. The resurrected Christ was attested to by over 500 eyewitnesses (1 Cor.15:6) who witnessed to the first century church and were never refuted. Jesus is alive.

6. Archeology—Dead Sea Scrolls, Silver Scroll and a plethora of discoveries that confirm people, places, and events in the Bible.

7. Early Church Fathers of the 2nd and 3rd generation who were disciplined by the Apostles or the disciples of the Apostles who also wrote about Christ and confirmed everything in the Bible.

8. Uniqueness of the Bible and the CONTINUITY—there is nothing like it. Forty different authors over 1600 years all wrote a complimentary message about God's plan to redeem mankind. It is a unique composite of 66 books bound by a historical sequence, prophecy and fulfillment, and anticipation of and presentation of the Savior. The authors lived so far apart and had such diverse backgrounds that you would not expect such continuity. Do you think you could find 66 books in the library with this kind of continuity? NO WAY. The only answer is divine inspiration.

For these reasons and many more, we must come to the conclusion that PEOPLE DON'T REJECT THE BIBLE BECAUSE IT IS FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS, THEY REJECT THE BIBLE BECAUSE THE BIBLE CONTRADICTS THEM. They must change themselves, or they must reject the Bible.

Let the Bible be alive in your life as Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly". We live in a hostile world so we need all the spiritual defenses God has provided, so use it as Ephesians 6:17 commands, "take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the WORD OF GOD".

CHARLIE TAYLOR