

Introduction

I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: Just hovering over the great gulf; till a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri* [a man of one book]. [John Wesley, as quoted by Ralph Earle, *How We Got Our Bible* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1971), p. 18].

The Bible is the *summa bonum* (highest good) of world literature. In a time of skepticism and relativism, it is comforting to know that God has given us an anchor of the soul: his Word.

The Old Testament (Jewish and Christian Scripture) is a library 39 books, written by about 30 writers over a period of about 1,000 years. It was written primarily in Biblical Hebrew. *It was carefully written and accurately transmitted down through history by Jewish scholars.*

The New Testament (Christian Scripture) is a library of 27 books, written by about 9 writers over a period of about 60 years. It was written in *koine* (common) Greek, the universal language of Jesus' time. There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts (partial or whole) of the New Testament, *making the New Testament the most well-authenticated document in human antiquity.*

There are no autographs (original writings) of the Bible in existence. Until the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in about 1455, each Bible was laboriously copied by hand. (The first book printed by moveable type was the Gutenberg Bible, a Latin Bible printed in Mainz by Gutenberg sometime before 1456.) Through the science of Textual Criticism, the various Greek manuscripts are studied and the original is reconstructed. The result is a very accurate text. Translations are made from this reconstructed text.

Biblical Hebrew and *koine* Greek are "dead" languages. That is, they are no longer spoken and therefore do not change in meaning. This factor provides a more accurate base for translation.

Let us now look more into detail concerning the Bible.

The Bible Is God's Written Word

How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God? There are several rational arguments that demonstrate this.

1. The *A Priori* Argument. Because of the nature of man and the nature of God, a revelation from God is reasonable. God is both holy and loving. Man is relatively sinful and weak. War, murder, violence, abortion, drug abuse, adultery, stealing, lying, disease, hunger, environmental pollution, bad treatment of animals and other evils cry out for positive intervention. Therefore, it is inevitable that God would help people in their pitiful predicament. God initiated communication with us from the beginning. He told us and continues to tell us that he loves us and has prepared for our redemption.

2. The Argument from Analogy. (1) Humans and even animals communicate. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that their Creator also communicates. (2) Our bodies heal themselves. Therefore it is reasonable that our creator has a healing nature, and would seek to heal his creation. This would entail his speaking to us. (3) Society seeks to protect its citizens from harm. Therefore it is reasonable that the Creator first had this desire and implanted it within his creation. The Creator would communicate ways that society should regulate itself. Etc.

3. The Argument from the Indestructibility of the Bible. Very few books survive more than twenty-five years. Therefore the Bible must be a very unique book to survive thousands of years.

The Roman emperor Diocletian made a royal edict in 303 AD for every copy of the Bible to be destroyed by fire, thus hoping that Christianity would be wiped out. He killed so many Christians and destroyed so many Bibles that he mistakenly thought that his evil crusade had succeeded. He went so far as to have a special medal struck that boasted, "The Christian religion is destroyed and the worship of the gods restored." A few years later, Constantine became the new emperor and made Christianity the state religion!

The French infidel Voltaire predicted that Christianity would be extinct one hundred years after his death. He died in horror in 1778, crying out for more laudanum to anesthetize his fear. The Bible still lives and Christianity still lives.

Communism assailed the Bible for seventy years. However, communism recently collapsed due to internal moral failure and appears to have learned a lesson that the West has yet to learn. Countries of the former USSR are now embracing the Bible and its teaching.

Some scholars have attempted to degrade the Bible to the same level as other religious books. This subtle attack has also failed. The science of archaeology has confirmed the historical accuracy of the Bible. The late leading Palestinian archaeologist W. F. Albright stated, "Nothing has been discovered that would tend to discredit the faith of the Jew or Christian." Archaeologist W. P. Free stated that findings confirmed the biblical accounts. [See Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology And Bible History* (Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, 1969)]. Archaeology both confirms and illuminates (helps us understand) the Bible.

The Bible (or portions of it) have been translated into 1900 languages, giving 98 percent of the world's population access to the Bible. There are about 3,000 languages or dialects in which no portion of the Bible has been translated. ["In Their Own Words," (New York: American Bible Society, 1990)].

The Bible and Christianity have thrived in persecution. How can this fact be explained? The Bible is God's Word and he will not allow his Word to be destroyed! The Holy Spirit supervises the communication of God's Word to us:

Eternity Ü Holy Spirit P Eternity

Time

Inspiration P Transmission P Translation P Illumination

First, the Holy Spirit *reveals* and *preserves* the Word of God. Then he *transmits* the Word of God safely down through history. Next, he *communicates* the Word of God through various translations and means of proclamation. He then *illuminates* (explains to us) the Word of God.

4. The Argument from the Character of the Bible. The Bible is unified. Although it was formed over a period of 1600 years by about 40 authors, there is a universal theme of redemption. It has a beginning and an end. It has a consistent doctrinal system, one moral standard, and one plan of salvation. It magnifies the holiness and goodness of God.

5. The Argument from the Influence of the Bible. (1) Christianity supplanted Roman paganism three hundred years after Christ's death and resurrection. The rapid spread of Christianity in the face of intense persecution indicates that the Bible is, as it claims to be, the written Word of God. (2) The historical influence of the Bible is positive.

Civilized nations have based their laws on biblical principles. Social reform followed the proclamation of the Word of God. (See Timothy L. Smith's book, *Revivalism and Social Reform*.) Slaves were set free. Women's and children's rights have been recognized. The Bible inspired great masterpieces of music such as Handel's Messiah. The Bible inspired great art such as that of Michelangelo's. The Bible inspired great architecture such as cathedrals and universities. The

most successful

drug rehabilitation program, Teen Challenge, is based on the Word of God—see my electronic booklet,

Alcoholism and Its Cure

(Click the link at the bottom of this page to read it on line). Individuals are radically changed for the better when they receive the Word of God into their hearts and minds. Entire nations have been saved from self-destruction by its individuals receiving the Word of God—see the writings of New Testament scholar Derek Prince. (3) Our calendar is based on Christ's birth. Time is recorded both forward and backward relative to his birth.

6. The Argument from Fulfilled Prophecy. The most amazing example of fulfilled prophecy is that of Jesus of Nazareth. He fulfilled 333 distinct Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. By the laws of simple probability, the chance of one person fulfilling that many prophecies is expressed by $\frac{1}{2}$ to the 333rd power or one out of the number 84 followed by 97 zeros! Taking account of the miracles relating to Christ, it would be impossible for a human being to fulfill all those prophecies, unless Omniscience predicted them and Omnipotence fulfilled them. These attributes only belong to God! [Frank Boyd, *Introduction to Prophecy* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1948), 19-20.]

For some specific prophecies fulfilled by Jesus, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Vol. I* (San Bernardino: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), 151-184. There are many more fulfilled prophecies in the Bible. Therefore, since only God knows the future, the Bible must be the Word of God!

7. The Argument from the Universal Belief in the Existence of God. All human cultures down through history have believed in the existence of God. The belief in God inheres in the collective unconscious of the the human race and is passed on genetically. If God exists, it is reasonable that he would communicate with us.

8. The Argument from the Bible Claim Itself. Some may see this argument as "begging the question." However, if all other statements in the Bible are true, then this claim must be true also! Since the Bible is credible, then the claim that the Bible is the Word of God must be true, also.

9. The Philosophical Argument. The Bible is confirmed by the *Idealism* school of thought: "That which is self-consistent is true." The Bible is confirmed by the *Realism* school of thought: "That which conforms to reality is true." The Bible is confirmed by the *Thomism* school of thought: "Truth is both rational and spiritual/intuitional." The Bible is confirmed by the *Pragmatic* school of thought: "What works is true." The Bible is confirmed by the *Existentialism* school of thought: "What we choose to be truth formsaffects our being both now and finally/eternally."

10. The Scientific Argument. The oldest scientific "theory" is the existence of God. It has *never been disproven* in the history of mankind. Therefore, it is the oldest scientific Law. Evidence has consistently supported this Law. The Bible is the primary body of evidence supporting the existence of God. The Bible of necessity describes the nature and attributes of God.

The *law of cause and effect* demands a cause for every effect. It is the nature of our universe. We live in the third dimension. If we add movement, we live in the fourth dimension. The argument is this: (1) The universe exists. (2) There is a cause. (3) God is the Ultimate Cause. (4) Therefore, God exists.

11. The Argument from Cumulative Evidence. The above arguments together make an irresistible argument that the Bible is the Word of God.

[These arguments are based on material from original thought and two books: A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* . (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1906), 191-195. Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures In Systematic Theology* , Revised by Vernon D. Doerksen. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 43-49.]

The Bible is believable. That is, it is *credible*. This includes the inspiration, transmission, and translation of the whole Bible text.

Textual criticism, sometimes called *lower criticism*, is the science of reconstructing the *autographs* [original manuscripts]. The Bible is the most accurately-transmitted book of antiquity. [For a more detailed understanding of the accuracy of the New Testament, see Vincent Taylor, *The Text Of The New Testament: A Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1963.)

Higher criticism is the science through which we learn the background of each book of the Bible.

It includes the author, date written and cultural background. The misuse of *higher criticism* in the past in an attempt to discredit the Bible is known as *destructive criticism*. The Bible survived the attacks unscathed. In terms of importance, "*higher criticism*" is really a "lesser criticism," that is, the text itself is of utmost importance, not the background. *high*

The Forming of the Canon

The word "canon" comes from the Greek word *kanon*, which was a reed or rod used for measuring, like our yardstick. Here it means the standard or the officially accepted books of the Bible.

The Hebrew Canon.

The Jewish scriptures and the Protestant Old Testament scriptures are identical. However, even though the Jewish canon and the Protestant cannon are the same, the order of the books is different. Jesus quoted from the Old Testament, thus requiring Christians to accept it as the Word of God. Other New Testament writers also quoted from the Old Testament, declaring it to be the Word of God.

Roman Catholics add the Apocrypha, a collection of 14 books. The books of the Apocrypha were written between 200 BC and AD 100. The word *apocrypha* means "hidden." The 14 books of the apocrypha are: I and II Esdras; Tobit; Judith; Additions to Esther; the Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus (the Wisdom of Sirach); Baruch; Susanna; the Song of the Three Children; Bel and the Dragon; the Prayer of Manasseh; and I and II Maccabees.

The Hebrew canon begins with the books of *The Law*, then *The Prophets*, and lastly *The Writings*.

The *Pentateuch* was written by Moses and constitutes *The Law*. These and the approximate dates they were written are:

- Genesis 1450-1410 BC
- Exodus 1450-1410 BC
- Leviticus 1450-1410 BC
- Numbers 1450-1410 BC
- Deuteronomy 1410 BC

The Jews consider Moses the greatest teacher and his five books have always been accepted as the inspired Word of God.

The *Prophets* were accepted as each appeared. These books, their authors and their approximate dates are:

- Joshua (Joshua) 1400-1370 BC
- Judges (Anonymous) 1050-1000 BC
- I and II Samuel (Samuel+) 930-? BC
- I and II Kings (Jeremiah) 550 BC
- Isaiah (Isaiah) 740-680 BC
- Jeremiah (Jeremiah) 627-585 BC
- Ezekiel (Ezekiel) 592-570 BC

The Twelve:

- Hosea (Hosea) 710 BC
- Joel (Joel) 835 BC
- Amos (Amos) 755 BC
- Obadiah (Obadiah) 840 or 586 BC
- Jonah (Jonah) 760 BC
- Micah (Micah) 700 BC
- Nahum (Nahum) 663-612 BC
- Habakkuk (Habakkuk) 607 BC
- Zephaniah (Zephaniah) 625 BC
- Haggai (Haggai) 520 BC
- Zechariah (Zechariah) 520-518 BC
- Malachi (Malachi) 450-400 BC

The *Writings* are

- Psalms (David+) 1000-550 BC
- Proverbs (Solomon+) 950-700 BC
- Job (Job ?) before 1500 BC
- Song of Songs (Solomon) 965 BC
- Ruth (Samuel ?) 1000 BC
- Lamentations (Jeremiah) 586 BC
- Ecclesiastes (Solomon) 935 BC
- Esther (?) 465 BC
- Daniel (Daniel) 537 BC
- Ezra (Ezra) 456-444 BC
- Nehemiah (Nehemiah) 445-425 BC
- I and II Chronicles (Ezra) 450-425 BC
- (Esther was the last book to be accepted.)

The rabbis officially set the Hebrew canon at the Council of Jamnia, in AD 90. [Ralph Earle, *How We Got Our Bible* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1971), 35].

Many questions have arisen concerning the origin of the Bible. Let us speak to the origin of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. What were Moses' sources? There are at least five sources:

1. Moses was raised in the royal Egyptian household and received the best Egypt had to offer in scientific education.
2. Hebrew oral tradition was passed carefully from father to children. These inspired narratives were precious truths, important to both Jews and to all humanity.
3. There were written records.
4. There were specific words of knowledge—one of the nine gifts of the Spirit as listed in 1 Corinthians 12. God revealed certain facts to Moses. Some scientific knowledge was 4,000 years ahead of its time. [See S. I. McMillen, *None of These Diseases* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1963.)
5. There were specific words of wisdom found in prophecies. Moses, as a prophet, was inspired by the Holy Spirit to include these.

For a more complete answer for questions on the Bible, see books dealing with introduction to

The Bible is Truth!

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the Old Testament and New Testament. [Some good reference books are: Sidney Collett, *All About The Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., n. d.); Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction To The Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press); R. K. Harrison, *Introduction To The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.); Gleason Archer, *A Survey Of The Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press) and Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction To The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)].

[The above dates and authorship were taken from Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Translation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), Old Testament Notes.]

[The Hebrew order of books was taken from *The Holy Scriptures According To The Masoretic Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945)].

The New Testament Canon.

The Books of the New Testament, their authors and the approximate dates written are:

The Gospel Accounts:

- Mark John Mark AD 58
- Matthew Matthew AD 60
- Luke Luke AD 61
- John John (Apostle) AD 95

Paul's Epistles:

- Galatians AD 48
 - 1 Thessalonians AD 50
 - 2 Thessalonians AD 51
 - 1 Corinthians AD 54
 - 2 Corinthians AD 55
 - Romans AD 56
 - Philemon AD 55-61 (From Prison)
 - Colossians AD 55-61 (From Prison)
 - Ephesians AD 55-61 (From Prison)
 - Philippians AD 55-61 (From Prison)
 - 1 Timothy AD 62-64
 - Titus AD 62-64
 - 2 Timothy AD 65
-
- Acts (Luke) AD 62
-
- James (James) AD 62
-
- Hebrews (Paul ?) AD 65
-
- 1 Peter (Peter) AD 65
 - 2 Peter (Peter) Before AD 68
-
- Jude (Jude) AD 70-80

John's Writings:

- [John's Gospel] AD 95
- 1 John AD 95
- 2 John AD 95
- 3 John AD 95
- Revelation AD 95

Mark was written by John Mark, who actually recorded the preaching of the Apostle Peter—technically, it could be called the Gospel according to Peter. Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy are

classified as the Prison Epistles. The authors of James and Jude are probably the half brothers of Jesus. James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; and Jude are classified as General Epistles.

The standards used to accept a book in the canon were:

1. Apostolicity—was it written by or endorsed by an apostle?
2. Contents—was it in harmony with the rest of the Bible?
3. Spiritual Character—was it part of a coherent whole and was it Christ-centered?
4. Universality—was it received by the whole Church?
5. Divine inspiration—was there evidence of this?

[Most of the information above on the New Testament Canon was taken from Ralph Earle, *How We Got Our Bible* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1971), pp. 26-29.]

Inspiration of the Bible

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed (2 Timothy 3:16-17, *Today's English Version*).

Above all else, however, remember that none of us can explain by ourselves a prophecy in the Scriptures. For no prophetic message ever came just from the human will, but people were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God (2 Peter 1:20-12, *Today's English Version*).

The LORD revealed vital truth to the writers of the Bible. This truth could not be discovered by human effort. He also inspired the writers of the Bible to include important historical events. The phrase translated "inspired by God," in 2 Timothy 3:16, is translated from one word in the Greek New Testament, *theopneustos*, which literally means, "God-breathed." (Ralph Earle, *How We Got Our Bible*,
13.)

James Arminius, a Dutch theologian, offers three levels of inspiration:

1. *Inspired into the writers of the Bible.* The Holy Spirit directly revealed to the spirits and minds of selected human beings, truths that could not be discovered by human means.

2. *Dictated to the writers of the Bible.* The LORD dictated word-for-word certain portions of the Bible. Passages that begin with, "Thus saith the LORD..." are dictated. The Ten Commandments are a prime example.

3. *Administered by them under divine direction.* Examples would be quotations of Satan; genealogies; and some historical documents. [This category would include statements of Satan and other liars, accurately reported but not statements of truth, thus not having the authority of the statements of God]. (Based on Ralph Earle,

How We Got Our Bible,

14.) These are

modes

or

methods

of inspiration, not the

results

of inspiration. [Henry Clarence Thiessen,

Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology

(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), 105.]

The *results* of inspiration can be viewed as *plenary verbal* or *plenary dynamic*. *Plenary verbal* means "each word in the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit."

Plenary dynamic

means that the Holy Spirit superintended the process in order to accurately communicate the truth—words or phrases were not necessarily dictated by the Holy Spirit.

Plenary dynamic

accounts for the difference in writing style of the writers of the Bible.

For a treatment of select English translations, see John E. Russell, *English Translations of the Bible: A Brief Critique*.

(Download a free copy at

<http://bustersoft.com/JRCM/>

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Conclusion

Let us accept his Word into our hearts:

Believe the Bible There are some who believe the Bible, And some who believe it in part; Some who trust it with reservation, And some with all their heart. But I know that its every promises firm

and true always;It is tried as the precious silver,And it means just what it says.It is strange how
we trust each otherAnd only doubt our Lord;We will take the word of mortals,And yet distrust
God's Word.But Oh! What light and gloryWould shine o'er all our daysIf we always would
rememberThat he means just what he says.(Author Unknown)

This is Chapter 1 of my proposed eBook, *Systematic Theology*.

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