

Is The Bible God's Word? By Randy Pope

The Two Most Important Questions

Men and women throughout the ages have debated the two most important questions in life. The first is, "If there is a God who is knowable, how does one get to know Him?" The second is, "If there is a literal heaven, how can one be certain he will live there after death?" The Bible says that the answer to both questions is one and the same. The Bible quotes Jesus Christ who says, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). To "come to the Father" includes both knowing God and gaining qualification to enter heaven upon death. However, to believe the credibility of this quote of Jesus presumes, among other things, that the writings of the Bible are reliable. Christians throughout history have argued that the Bible is God's Word. They most often agree that as God's Word it is both inspired (God-breathed) and infallible in its original writing.

The First Issue to Investigate

It would be easy to argue from logic that a book written with human hands could not be authored by God. Even if it were believed to be so, a strong case could be made for expecting that writing to be significantly altered through the hundreds of years of duplicating by hand the various manuscripts.

Yet, in spite of such logic, very intelligent and scholarly giants have persistently believed in the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. Many of those who do, boldly insist that in doing so they have not "shelved their brains," and agree that there is a solid, historical rationale for such a belief.

The Bible's Incredible Unity

The Bible was written over a period of 1500 years by over 40 human authors writing in three different languages. These men and women lived in three different continents and wrote on a variety of controversial subjects. One would expect that these authors, living in such different cultures, would contradict each other. Yet there is an amazing unity throughout the Bible without error or contradiction. This unity would suggest that the Bible was written by one author, namely God.

The Bible's Historical Accuracy

Throughout the years skeptics have claimed that many of the stories in the Bible had no historical foundation. One after another of these accusations are being abandoned. A favorite target was the Old Testament account of the city of Jericho. The Bible recounts that Joshua and the Israelites marched around the city of Jericho once each day for six days. On the seventh day they walked around the city seven times. The priests then blew their trumpets, the walls of Jericho collapsed and the city was invaded. Those who deny the existence of the supernatural have dismissed this account as fanciful. Their skepticism was strengthened by the fact that there was no city where the Bible claims Jericho to have existed—only desert.

However in the 1930's archaeologists made an incredible find. Going to the Bible location of Jericho, they began to dig and discovered an ancient city buried beneath the sand. Finding a vase with the name of the city on it, they learned that it was, in fact, Jericho.

Furthermore, during the excavations, an archaeologist concluded that "the walls fell outward so completely that the attackers would be able to clamor up and over the ruins into the city." *One would expect the walls of the city to fall inward during an invasion, and yet the walls of Jericho fell outward in accordance with the biblical account.*

Commenting on the historical accuracy of the Bible, archaeologist William E. Albright states, "Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of the innumerable details and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history."

The Bible's Fulfilled Prophecies

The Bible contains countless prophecies about future events. If the Bible were not inspired, the odds of these prophecies being fulfilled would be no better than chance. Yet, we find an incredible accuracy in the Bible's foretelling of the future. *For example, over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament, written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, refer to the coming Messiah, Christ. All 300 came true.* The following are examples of these prophecies, their Old Testament references and their New Testament fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

- a. Messiah to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2 - Matthew 2:1-6)
- b. Messiah to be a descendant of David (Jeremiah 23:5 - Luke 3:31)
- c. Messiah to enter Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9 - Matthew 21:1-9)
- d. Messiah to be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9 - Matthew 26:47-50)
- e. Messiah to be sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12 - Matthew 27:9)
- f. Money thrown in God's house (Zechariah 11:13 - Matthew 27:5)
- g. Money given for potter's field (Zechariah 11:12,13 - Matthew 27:7-8)
- h. Messiah's side, hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:16 - John 20:25)
- i. Messiah crucified with thieves (Isaiah 53:12 - Luke 23:32-43)
- j. Messiah's clothes divided and lots cast for them (Psalm 22:18 - John 19:23-24)
- k. Messiah's bones not broken (Psalm 22:17, Psalm 34:20 - John 19:31-33)
- l. Messiah to be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9 - Matthew 27:57-60)

Mathematical probability indicates that the chances of only eight of these prophecies being fulfilled in the same man are 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. These odds are statistically impossible apart from a sovereign God who knows the future.

The Bible's Miraculous Preservation

It would be reasonable to expect errors in the transmission of the Bible in the last 3500 years, especially since copies were duplicated by hand. How do we know the Bible we have today is same as the original?

Until 1947, the oldest known Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were dated from the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. They were copies of only the first five books of the Bible. Then, in 1947 came the remarkable discovery of *the Dead Sea Scrolls*. These were early manuscripts from the library of the Jewish religious groups, which flourished at Qumran about the time of Jesus. These manuscripts were written about a thousand years earlier than the ninth century documents. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls are copies of every Old Testament book except Esther. Upon this discovery, the question was raised whether the ninth and tenth century manuscripts would match up to these ancient manuscripts. Would errors have been made in transmission over those 1000 years?

The impact of this discovery is vividly illustrated in the virtual duplication of the Isaiah scroll (dated 125 B.C.) in the Masoretic text of Isaiah (A.D. 916) written 1000 years later. This demonstrates the unusual accuracy of the copyists of the scripture over a thousand year period. Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen letters have been questioned. Ten of these letters are a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as a conjunction. The remaining three letters comprise the word "light", which is added in verse 11 and does not greatly affect the meaning. Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission-and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage. Comparisons of other Bible passages show even closer duplications. *This incredible preservation of the Bible over time can best be explained by God's doing.* Desiring to keep the Scriptures in accord with His original revelation, God ensured that the Bible would be accurately copied over the centuries.

There is no better way to investigate the claims of Christianity than by reading the Bible itself. And there is no better place to begin one's reading than in the Gospel of John. This Gospel is written by one of Jesus' closest disciples, John, who seeks to convey the historical account of the life and teaching of the one whom claimed to be the Christ.

Read John 5:18-47 from the Bible.

1. What did Jesus' enemies accuse Him of claiming?
2. What did Jesus' promise in 5:24? How does one receive these promises?
3. Jesus presents witnesses who attest to His deity (31-39). Who or what are they?
4. 5:39 states why Jesus said the Scriptures were written. What is the aim and reason for The Scriptures?
5. Other Passages about the Scriptures.
 - a. II Timothy 3:15-16
 - b. Mark 13:31 or Psalm 119:160
 - c. John 20:30-31
 - d. II Peter 1:20-21