

Convincing Evidence: The Bible

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The apostle Peter exhorts us to be *“ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”* **1 Peter 3:15**

The Christian life – well lived – is a spectacle, drawing questions from people all around. Indeed, “the strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.” Thus, when men come to us seeking to know the source of our hope and joy, what will we say? When they inquire about our peace, that peace that the world cannot give, whence shall we direct them?

The dilemma

The phrase *“because the Bible says so”* answers so many questions:

“Why do you believe that the world was created in six days?” – “Because the Bible says so.”

“Why do you believe in life beyond the grave?” – “Because the Bible says so.”

“Why do you hold onto a hope of life beyond the grave?” – “Because the Bible says so.”

But *“Why should I trust the Bible?”* cannot, reasonably, be answered *“Because the Bible says so”* – that would be circular reasoning.

What then makes the Bible a sure foundation on which to build our faith? Is it rational to believe in it? What is its origin? Can we trust a book that was written ages ago to provide guidance in today's technologically advanced world? What relevance does it have? Can we find in it an authoritative source of principles for right living? Can we see in the Biblical narrative anything other than figments of human imagination? Can we find meaning in the Bible for real life problems? Can we with Peter say that *“we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* **2 Peter 1:16**? In short, can we build a whole system of belief on the Bible?

What does the Bible say about itself?

The Bible makes a huge claim about itself. *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”* **2 Timothy 3:16**, where “by inspiration of God” simply means God-breathed. The Bible claims a divine origin.

Who wrote the Bible?

The phrase “the word of the Lord came to/unto” occurs 81 times in the Old Testament (King James Version). Through this, more than forty different authors (an army general, government officials, kings, shepherds, fishermen, scribes, priests, singers, prophets, a physician, a tent-maker and a tax collector) from different geographical areas, living at different times of earth's history (a span of 1500 years) testified that they were but penmen of God. The fact that they could, collectively, weave a story so intricate, so unified, a story that answers the great philosophical questions of humanity – of origin, purpose, morality and eternity – is testament

to a supernatural power at work. Indeed, *“holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” 2 Peter 1:21.*

Who decided which books belonged to the Bible?

The development of the biblical Canon did not occur at a set point in time; rather, it was the result of centuries of reflection. When a prophet or apostle wrote messages from God, they were taken up as authoritative by their immediate audience and when they exited the scene, their messages remained as *“profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness”* for future generations.

The Old Testament (O.T.) books were acknowledged as authoritative by the time of the apostolic church and formed the Scriptures used by Jesus and His disciples. The numerous occurrences of the phrase “the law and the prophets” in the New Testament (N.T.) shows the high esteem with which the O.T. was regarded. In fact, of the 39 books in the O.T., only 9 are not quoted from in the N.T. Of the 27 books in the N.T. only 6 do not directly quote the O.T. Furthermore, among the Dead Sea scrolls discovered around 1947 in Israel, manuscripts of all but one of the O.T. books have been discovered. The scrolls have been dated to around 200BC, showing that the O.T. canon had been largely agreed upon by then.

The development of the New Testament canon was slightly different. Most of the books were written as letters addressed to different churches either by an apostle or by someone in direct contact with one. Over the passage of time and with the cropping up of heresies, there was need to have an authoritative list of documents that were, indeed, inspired. Within the N.T. Peter refers to the writings of Paul as authoritative (*2 Peter 3:15-16*); Paul quotes Luke’s gospel as Scripture (*1 Timothy 5:18* quotes *Luke 10:7*). Lists of N.T. books began to appear as early as the first century and by the early third century, only about 7 books were not universally agreed upon as stated by Eusebius. In 367, Athanasius wrote a letter containing all the 27 books. In 393, a synod affirmed the list of 27 N.T. books and the 397 Council of Carthage published the same list.

It can thus be seen that God inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures, and the church recognised the Bible canon by experience and agreement.

What does God say differentiates Him from other gods?

God stakes His glory and honour on three things, by which also He differentiates Himself from other so-called gods:

1. Only God can save (*Isaiah 43:11*)
2. Only God can create (*Isaiah 40:25-26*)
3. Only God can accurately tell of the past and the future i.e. history and prophecy (*Isaiah 46 9-10*)

If the Bible is of divine origin, then these three qualities of God must be evidently set forth in its pages.

1. **Only God can save**

The degraded condition of humanity is acutely felt by all. The cases of crime, insecurity, moral decadence, drug abuse and other evils committed by man against man are constantly reported by news agencies. Our education systems have proven themselves unable to curtail the spread of corruption neither do they have the capacity to impart brotherly kindness to their students. Human philosophies such as humanism and romanticism have had their time in the sun yet have fallen short of refining the sensibilities of their adherents. Even science, with its focus on methodology and evidence, is out of its depth when it comes to pulling man out of the depths of the pit to which he has sunk. Said one, "Science is a magnificent force, but it is not a teacher of morals. It can perfect machinery, but it adds no moral restraints to protect society from the misuse of the machine. It can also build gigantic intellectual ships, but it constructs no moral rudders for the control of the storm-tossed human vessel. It not only fails to supply the spiritual element needed but some of its unproven hypotheses rob the ship of its compass and thus endanger its cargo" (***Bryan Jennings summation of the Scopes Trial***).

Yet the Bible declared long ago that *"the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked...there is none righteous, no, not one...they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one...Can the Ethiopian change his skin" it enquires, "or the leopard change its spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil...Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10, 12; Jeremiah 13:23; Job 14:4.*

Not only does the Bible accurately describe the degraded condition of humanity but it also gives power to break the chains of sin, free from addiction and refine sensibilities. Men and women of all ages have found in it a remedy for their sin-sick souls. Oh, yes! If you haven't experienced this joy and peace, it can be yours today. "When [the Bible's] principles have actually become the elements of character, what has been the result? what changes have been made in the life? ... In its power, men and women have broken the chains of sinful habit. They have renounced selfishness. The profane have become reverent, the drunken sober, the profligate pure. Souls that have borne the likeness of Satan have been transformed into the image of God. This change is itself the miracle of miracles. A change wrought by the word, it is one of the deepest mysteries of the word. We cannot understand it; we can only believe." ***Education 171.4.***

2. Only God can create

One of the questions that has puzzled many a man all through history is that of origin. For in our origin, we find the reason for our existence, the definition of our lifework and the goal to be reached. We either arose due to chance and hence have no purpose, lifework or goal, or we are the product of deliberate design.

All around us are things with designs so complex and complete. The unassuming bacteria, often thought to be the simplest of organisms, has in itself a complexity that man – let alone chance – may never reproduce. The classification of biological parts into organelles, cells, tissues, organs, organ systems and organisms points to deliberate design, and deliberate design must, of necessity, have a designer.

Logically, the question of the chicken and egg hits a snag: chickens are hatched from eggs laid by chickens hatched from eggs laid by chickens... *ad infinitum*. Reason, therefore, contends that either the chicken with egg-laying capabilities or the egg with chicken-hatching capabilities must have been in existence before the never-ending cycle began. What worldview provides an answer to this conundrum?

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" Genesis 1:1. The Bible provides a simple answer that answers the question of origin, appealing to both faith and reason: a Supernatural Being as the origin of all that exists, creating what is seen *ex nihilo*, is a plausible explanation to the origin of life. And not only did God create in the past (*Genesis 1:1*), He still actively creates today (*2 Corinthians 5:17*) and, at the end of time, will create (*Revelation 21:5*).

3. Only God can accurately tell of the past and the future (history and prophecy)

"And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him" "As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter" Daniel 2:1; Daniel 2:29.

Nebuchadnezzar was at the pinnacle of his power. He had brought Egypt, Assyria, Phoenicia and Jerusalem under his rule, leaving Babylon as the ruler of the known world. He had wise men at his beck and call; servants multiplied many times over answered his varied demands; gold flowed into the treasury of Babylon from the vassal states. Yet he was troubled. Beyond the salutation *"Oh king, live forever"*, he discerned his sure end, the end that all men must inevitably face – death. What would happen when he exited the scene?

At this point, it is important to note the worthlessness of a life lived for this life's sake only. The hedonist finds somewhere down the road of pleasure an abyss – ask Oscar Wilde. Martin Luther will confirm that somewhere down the road of self-abnegation is an abyss that the ascetic eventually runs into. The road of power, so often travelled by the despot, leads to the same abyss – ask Adolf Hitler. The robber baron, as ambitious as he may be, unsuccessfully tries to circumvent that very abyss – ask Andrew Carnegie. These men are but representatives of humanity striving to achieve happiness in varied ways, only to arrive at an abyss that the Preacher calls *"Vanity" Ecclesiastes 1:2*.

Back to Nebuchadnezzar: through him, God revealed the pageant of world history – then future, now mostly past. From the head of gold (Babylon *Daniel 2:38*), breast and arms of silver (Medo-Persia *Daniel 5:28*), belly and thighs of brass (Greece *Daniel 8:21*), to the legs of iron (Rome *Daniel 8:23-25*), the outline of the world's kingdoms was given almost 1000 years in advance. And in the divided kingdoms of iron mixed with clay, we are brought right to our time.

Daniel is, however, not alone in his prophecies of the rise and fall of Babylon. Both Isaiah living 150 years before and Jeremiah living at the time of the captivity wrote on this matter. Of the rise: *"lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation" Habakkuk 1:5-11*. Of the fall: *"Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the*

*Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah...the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me...Babylon is fallen, is fallen...Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed... It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation" **Isaiah 13:19; Isaiah 21:4, 9; Jeremiah 51:8; Isaiah 13:20.***

If we sincerely consider this prophecy, we must arrive at either one of two conclusions: the Bible prophecies were either written before the fact (hence under the influence of a supernatural power) or they were written after the fact (i.e. written later after the events had taken place). If we agree on the former, we must therefore contend with the thought of the Bible having been written under the influence of a supernatural power. If we agree on the latter, we must throw out the Bible as a book that makes claims it cannot uphold. What choice will you make?

"[God's] own existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. True, He has not removed the possibility of doubt; faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration; those who wish to doubt have opportunity; but those who desire to know the truth find ample ground for faith." **Education 169.2.**

A preacher's call:

If this prophecy is true (and history corroborates it quite perfectly), then the last bit of it must be true. There will be a Rock cut without hands that will strike the metal image, breaking it into pieces and itself become established and fill the earth. This Rock is Jesus (**1 Corinthians 10:4**). Now, it is often said that World War 2 was won by "British intelligence, American steel and Russian blood" – human effort, but it is not so with this kingdom. To be on the Lord's side you must be "*called, and chosen, and faithful*" **Revelation 17:14**. God calls you, God consecrates you, God keeps you from falling – from start to finish, it is the work of God. Will you let Him work in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure? Will you allow Him to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all that you can ask or imagine? Will you take hold of His hand by faith and let Him lead you to the promised land? The choice is yours alone.

Does the Bible address modern issues such as abortion, pornography, gambling, inequality and drug abuse?

*"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." **Ecc1:9***

*"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." **1Co 10:11***

There is indeed nothing for which the Bible does not provide guiding principles. All vices can be traced to breaking principles laid out in the Bible – whether it is abortion going against God's plans for unborn children, pornography being a manifestation of committing adultery in the mind, gambling and its origin in the love of money and discontentment, inequality and the treading down of the lowly in society, or even drug abuse defiling bodies that are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Final thoughts

Do you believe that the Bible is indeed an inspired revelation of God's will? If so, read on.

God desires that you may be *“perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”*. For this reason, the Scriptures have been given you *“for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness”* **2 Timothy 3:17, 16**.

Doctrine – this entails building up a system of beliefs. Many today exclude doctrine from the Christian's experience (preferring love and unity) but we know that doctrine is important because Jesus upheld and taught doctrine (**Matthew 7:28**). Knowing what the Bible says for yourself will protect you from being “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness.”

Reproof – the Bible will point out where you are wrong. God promises that *“whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth”* **Hebrews 12:6**. While it is never pleasant to have your wrongs pointed out, remember that God loves you, and seeks your eternal good. As **Hebrews 12:11** says, *“No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”*

Correction – the Bible not only condemns our wicked nature but provides a remedy for it. When it says, *“the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked”* it also says, *“I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins.”* When it leads us to exclaim, *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* it also invites us to pray, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* (**Jeremiah 17:9-10; Romans 7:24; Psalms 139:23-24**). God promises that He will guide us by *“a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.”*

Instruction in righteousness – our earthly sojourn is a lifelong school of training in which we are prepared “for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come” **Education 13.1**.