

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLE

“no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will”

Key question

In what ways is the Bible unique among religious books?

Key text

II Peter 1:20-21

“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

Introduction

If a student is to understand Western Civilization, there is one text above all others that must be required reading. It is the Bible. The themes and ideas of the Bible, more than any other single document, have shaped the science, art, laws, government, hopes, and relationships of Western Civilization. One would not hope to understand the culture of Iran without reading the Koran. One cannot rightly appreciate the USA without a familiarity with the themes of the Bible. The fact that at least parts of it are not required reading in our modern schools is not a matter of separation of church and state, it is separation of sanity and education.

A. **Facts about the Bible**

1. The word “Bible” comes from the Greek word biblos “biblos” or “book.”
2. The word “testament” means “covenant,” or agreement.
3. The Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew (a few short passages in Aramaic) and completed about 400 years before Christ.
4. About 100 years before the Christian Era the entire Old Testament was translated into Greek. This translation is called the Septuagint (LXX). Many of the OT quotations in the NT are taken from this Greek translation rather than the Hebrew.
5. The New Testament was written in the Greek language at the close of the first century AD.
6. The Bible has been read by more people and translated into more languages (over 1200) than any other book in history.

B. **Characteristics of the Bible**

The Bible is not the kind of book that man would write if he could (it does not flatter the human authors), nor could write if he would (it makes too much sense given the unusual nature of its composition).

1. It is **God-centered** (not man-centered). This is significant in light of the fact that nearly all other great religious writings (produced by man) are anthropocentric.
2. It is **monotheistic** from the beginning. In spite of critics' attempts to find polytheistic patterns in the early parts of the Bible which would parallel man-made religions, the Bible centers its message around one God from Genesis to Revelation.
3. The doctrine of the **Trinity**, which has long been a puzzling philosophical question, is not what you expect from man's mind. It sustains monotheism, and at the same time, provides an explanation for the diversity in all nature.
4. The only sensible explanation of **creation** is offered by the Bible. Man's best explanation for origins (evolution) is plagued by contradictions and inadequacies. Other ancient creation stories are full of mythical creatures and multiple gods making war or love with each other.
5. The only adequate explanation of **man's basic nature** is found in the Bible. The authors of the Scripture are unanimous in their description of man's depraved condition and enduring dignity.
6. The only plan of **hope** for man (apart from human merit) is presented in the Biblical plan of salvation. It is unlikely that a mortal would design a plan that so discredits human merit.
7. The **ethics** of the Bible have been unsurpassed by the noblest of this world's moralists. Would one expect the New Testament with its claim, "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek," to be a natural result of the Jewish men who were used to write it?
8. The extent of Biblical revelation goes **beyond the experience of man**. The Biblical record looks backward (before history) and forward (beyond history) with authority and clarity.
9. The **continuity** of the Bible is amazing. It is a collection of 66 books which have been written by over 40 different authors — kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, physicians, statesmen, scholars, poets, and plowmen — who lived their lives in various countries and experienced no conference or agreement one with another, and written over a period of not less than sixteen hundred years of human history. In spite of these facts, the Bible appears as a homogeneous, uninterrupted, and orderly account of the whole history of God's dealings with man, consistent in its doctrine, its ethical base, and its purpose.
10. The **literary** character of the Bible is recognized (even by its critics) to be superior and in many cases (Job, Psalms, Ruth) unsurpassed.
11. The Bible's capacity to **stimulate** creativity is amazing. The themes and idioms of the Bible have been the catalyst for the greatest artists in several fields — Shakespeare, Milton, Handel, Bach, Raffael, Michelangelo, and many others. The French, German, and English languages were groomed by the early translations of Scripture.
12. The Bible's **power** to bring about moral and ethical change is seen in a statement by the historian, John R. Green, in his *Short History of the English People*:
"No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than the change that passed over England during the years that parted the middle of the reign of Elizabeth from the meeting of the Long Parliament. England became the people of a book and that book was the Bible."
13. Man's **scientific** study has yet to uncover a fact that contradicts the material in the Bible. There are many man-made theories, which do not agree with the Biblical record, but the fact of a proven contradiction between a solid scientific fact and the Biblical record does not yet exist.

14. The Bible has an enduring **freshness** and a universal appeal, which is found in no other extant writing. It remains a world best seller.
 15. The Bible appears to be nearly **indestructible**. It has survived attacks on many fronts — from Diocletian’s edict in 303 A.D. to destroy every Bible, to Voltaire’s statement in 1850 that by 1950 the Age of Science would make the Bible obsolete.
 16. Luther compared the Scriptures to “A lute player who always plays only one little song – Christ, promised and sent.”
- C. **It is reasonable to believe that the New Testament Writers told the truth.** (This list is taken from *I don’t have enough Faith to be an Atheist* by Geisler and Turek, pp275-293)
1. The NT writers included embarrassing details about themselves.
 - They often failed to “get it” with respect to Jesus’ teaching. Mk.9:32, Lk.18:34, Jn.12:16
 - They seem disengaged. Mk.14:32-41 (They fell asleep at critical times.)
 - They are rebuked by Jesus. Mk.8:33
 - They were cowardly. Matt.26:33-35
 - They were doubters. Jn.2:18-22, 3:14-18, Matt.12:39-41, 17:9,22-23
 2. The NT writers included embarrassing details and difficult sayings of Jesus.
 - Jesus is considered “out of his mind.” Mk.3:21,31
 - Jesus is not believed by his own brothers. Jn.7:5
 - Jesus is thought to be a deceiver. Jn.7:12
 - Jesus is deserted by many of his followers. Jn.6:66
 - Jesus “turns off” Jews who had believed him. Jn.8:30-31,59
 - Jesus is called a drunkard. Matt.11:19
 - Jesus is called “demon possessed.” Mk.3:22, Jn.7:20, 8:48
 - Jesus is called a “madman.” Jn.10:20
 - Jesus has his feet washed by a prostitute. Lk.7:36-39
 - Jesus is hung on a tree (under a curse). Deut.21:23, Gal.3:13
 - Jesus declares, “The Father is greater than I.” Jn.14:28
 2. The NT writers left in demanding sayings of Jesus. Matt.5-7
 3. The NT writers distinguished Jesus’ words from their own. I Cor.7:10-12
 4. The NT writers include events related to the resurrection that they would not have invented.
 - Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea, (member of the Sanhedrin).
 - Women were the first witnesses to the resurrection.
 - Priests were converted.
 - The Jewish explanation of the empty tomb.
 5. The NT writers include more than thirty historically confirmed people in their writings. If these references were not accurate they would have been exposed by early critics of Christianity.
 6. The NT writers include divergent details. The Gospels contain different but not contradictory details suggesting that they did not copy each other or try to smooth out differences. Critics claim that the Gospel’s similarities indicate that they copied from

each other and that their differences indicate that they cannot be trusted. How can the critic have it both ways?

7. The NT writers challenge their readers to check out verifiable facts, even facts about miracles.
 - Luke’s overt assertion of accuracy to Theophilus in Lk.1:1-4.
 - Peter’s claim that they did not follow cleverly devised tales but were eyewitnesses to Christ’s majesty (II Pet.1:16).
 - Paul’s bold declaration to Festus and King Agrippa about the resurrected Christ in Acts 26.
 - Paul’s restatement of an early creed that identified more than 500 eyewitnesses of the risen Christ in I Cor.15.
8. The NT writers describe miracles like other historical events: with simple, unembellished accounts. The apocryphal forgery known as the Gospel of Peter contains a description of the resurrection that is full of outlandish descriptions that are quite different from the canonical Gospel’s accounts.
9. The NT writers abandoned their long-held sacred beliefs and practices, adopted new ones, and did not deny their testimony under persecution or threat of death.

Pre-Resurrection Belief	Post-Resurrection Belief
Animal sacrifice	Unnecessary because of Christ’s sacrifice
Binding Law of Moses	Nonbinding because it was fulfilled by Christ’s life
Strict monotheism	Trinity (three persons in one divine essence)
The Sabbath	Replaced by Sunday worship
Conquering Messiah	Sacrificial Messiah
Circumcision	Replaced by baptism and Communion

D. “It is written . . .” Matthew 4:1-11

“1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” 4 But He answered and said, “It is written, *‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’*” 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, *‘He will give His angels charge concerning You’* and *‘On {their} hands they will bear You up, Lest You strike Your foot against a stone.’*” 7 Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, *‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’*” 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, “All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me.” 10 Then Jesus said to him, “Begone, Satan! For it is written, *‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’*” 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and {began} to minister to Him.”

E. Other great religious books

1. **The Koran** – The Islamic holy book believed by Muslims to be the revelation of Allah to Muhammad in CE 650.

2. **The Book of Mormon** – The Mormon holy text that is authoritative along with the *Pearl of Great Price*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Protestant Bible*. It was written in 1830 by Joseph Smith.
3. **The Bhagavad-gita** (The holy song) – This is the Hindu holy book. It is the best known and the most frequently translated of Vedic (Vedanta was the first Hindu sect to arrive in the United States in 1895) religious texts. It is written by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Pradhupada who is the founder and spiritual master of the International Society of Krishna consciousness.

The Point

The uniqueness of the Bible underscores its authority.

Response

Head

I am to understand that:

The Scripture is to be taken as the inspired Word of God.

Heart

I am to believe that:

The Scripture can be trusted as authoritative all that it affirms.

Hands

I am to behave by:

Seeking to seriously study and know what the Bible teaches.