

IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

by

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CHAPTER ONE

IT SEEMS TO BE

Think for a moment of –

1. THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK – THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

(1) Its Origination.

In this respect no book has such a history as the Bible. Almost all books, except dictionaries, encyclopedias, and such like, are the productions each of an individual, and certainly each is the product of one generation, but not so the Bible. This King of books is the result of productions extending over some sixteen hundred years, a period as long as from Diocletian to King George V., and is the work of some forty authors (the “Critics” would probably say of some four hundred!).

The Bible, therefore, slowly grew under the hands of many men, in different countries, and across fifty-five generations. Before Christ came to this world the books which form our Old Testament had been collected, and were regarded as sacred books. Josephus said, “No one has dared either to add anything to them, or to take anything from them, or to alter anything. All Jews regard them as the teaching of God, and abide by them, and would gladly die for them.”

None of the Apocryphal books were included in the Old Testament Canon. The thirty-nine books which are in our Old Testament constituted our Lord's Bible, neither more nor less. In like manner, the New Testament was a growth, within a much briefer period of time, and at the end of three centuries these twenty-seven books were distinguished from all contemporaneous writings as being Holy Scripture, and the judgment of men, guided, we believe, by the Spirit of God, with reference to the books in both Testaments, was not challenged for over fifteen centuries. When all the facts concerning the origin of these books are considered, we can only say, the Bible is a literary marvel, and a moral miracle. But think further of:

(2) Its Preservation.

Not less amazing is the way in which these Scriptures have been preserved. We now know that writing was among the most ancient of arts, one practiced from the very beginning. There is no reason to doubt that Noah took records with him into the ark; records which, in some form or another, had been accumulating for a millennium and a half.

These were preserved from the flood, and constituted the basis of the earliest of writings. These, as they grew, were preserved, by divine Providence, through all the changing fortunes of Israel – in Egypt, in the Wilderness, in the Land, and in Babylonia. Collected during the inter-Testament period, they were alike a record of the past and a vision of the future, greatly cherished by the Jews.

To these the New Testament writings in due course were added, the former being written in Hebrew, and the latter in Greek. All the original documents are lost, but what they contained has been preserved in manuscripts, versions, and the writings of the Fathers.

The history of this preservation is a wonderful one. Through the dark Middle Ages, extending across a thousand years, monks in their monasteries occupied themselves by making copies of the Word of God. This brings us to the fifteenth century, the greatest in the story of the Bible since the canon was settled, for it was then, as Professor Goldwin Smith has said, that “Greece arose from the dead with the New Testament in her hand” ; and then, also, that printing was invented.

But dark days were ahead, and before this great Book could become the glad possession of the people, it had to be suffered for and bled for. Nobly did the translators and reformers do their work, a work which could no more be destroyed than their spirit could be crushed. Then came our great Authorized Version in 1611. Through all these long ages these Writings were preserved, on the one hand from corruption, and on the other from destruction, and this cannot but be regarded as another miracle. In connection with the external history of the Bible, one other thing must be noticed.

(3) Its Circulation.

The circulation of the Scriptures is a wonder which few appreciate, because figures do not readily impress us. But in this instance we should spare a few moments to think into these facts: the British and Foreign Bible Society provided for its war service alone 8,000,000 volumes of the Word of God, in 75 languages. In the year 1917-1918, the same society issued and circulated, in addition to the above, 9,387,182 Bibles or portions, and its output during the four years of war amounted to 40,000,000. Since the foundation of the Society, in 1804, it has issued over 293,000,000 copies of the Scriptures, 97,000,000 of which have been in English. These Scriptures are now being produced and circulated in 511 different languages.

This is the record of one society only. Add to the above totals the Scriptures which have been scattered by the Scripture Gift Mission, the Trinitarian Bible Society, the National Bible Society of Scotland, and others, and we shall then begin to apprehend the magnitude and the marvel of this work. Such a circulation could not have been possible except for the art of printing, and it is not without significance that the first complete book printed by the inventor of this art was a Bible, about 1445.

Judging, therefore, by the external history of the Bible, its wonderful origination, miraculous preservation, and amazing circulation, this is no work of unaided man; it can be nothing less,

surely, than the Word of God. Yet this is the least part of the evidence. More wonderful than the external history of the Bible is its internal power. So look now at:

2. THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK – THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

Let three things only be said about this.

(1) *It is Human, yet Divine.*

Yes, the Bible is human, though some, out of a zeal which is not according to knowledge, have denied this. Those books have passed through the minds of men, are written in the language of men, were penned by the hands of men, and bear in their style the characteristics of men. Christ said, “**A body hast thou prepared me**” (Hebrews 10: 5).

The body was not Christ, yet Christ could not have been manifested without a body. Christ was divine, but his body was human. As with the Incarnate so with the Written Word. The spirit is divine, but the form is human; the thought of God has been given a body in the language of men.

The modes of human expression are everywhere in evidence. The Scriptures are not all cast in one mold; there are here history, as in the Kings; Wisdom, as in Proverbs; Drama, as in Job; Poetry, as in the Psalms; Apocalypse, as in the Revelation; and Ethic, as in James. Those are the modes of human thought and expression, and the Bible follows them.

Then again, turn where we will in this library, we are face to face with personality and style. Paul is Paul, and John is John, and no one could imagine the writings of the one coming from the pen of the other. When God would give a revelation to men he did not do violence to human personality and style, but, rather, made use of these.

And in yet another sense is the Bible human. Not only has it come to us through men, but it is all about men – great men, fallible and erring men. Abram lied, David lusted, and Peter cursed – that is human enough. The Bible does not give us in human language the story of angels, but of men, and that is why it is read by men as no other book is; that accounts for its circulation and its power.

Truly the Bible is a *human* book. And yet *it is divine*. Language, style, and subject matter notwithstanding, this Book is more than human.

There are other great human books in the world, but none can compare with this, because none other is also divine. There are thoughts here which the human mind could never have created, and projects which the human will could never have embarked upon. Even the sin of man and man the sinner are not looked at from the human side, but from the divine. History itself is seen in these pages to be, not an agglomeration of fortuitous happenings, but a plan of God.

If the unique glories of this revelation had not been mitigated by human shadows, could we have looked upon them, and lived? And the shadows without the glories would only have driven us to despair. But both are here.

The Bible is divine, for it is the Voice of God, and it is human, for it is in the language of men, and what flesh is to spirit, speech is to thought. Further,

(2) *It is Manifold, yet One.*

It is a Library, yet it is a Book. How remarkable that it is called *The Bible (o Biblios)*, seeing that there are here sixty-six books, shorter or longer, but it is not without reason.

How manifold is the Bible. It treats of a hundred subjects of the first importance, such as – The Origin of the Universe, The Creation of the Race, The History of Sin, The Divine Principles of Government, The Rise and History of Israel, The Incarnation of God, The Life and Death of Jesus Christ, The Institution and Progress of the Church, The Evangelization of the Gentile World, The Future of Israel, The Story of the Conflict Between Darkness and Light, The Final Facts and other subjects innumerable.

Here we read of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome, Israel, Syria, and a host of smaller powers. Abram and Amraphel, Nimrod and Noah, Rebekah and Rameses, Joshua and Jezebel, Daniel and Darius, Pilate and Paul, and a multitude of others move across the stage of this story. Every variety of character and subject is found in this Book, making it the one dateless and universal Book; no one will call into question its manifoldness.

And yet it is *One*. The many colors make its light; the thousand threads weave its pattern; the countless themes reveal its subject. From beginning to end the theme is Redemption; and from beginning to end the subject is Christ. Here is a wonderful thing – law, and history, and drama, and poetry, and wisdom, and prophecy, and ethic, and apocalypse, all bound up in a single volume. Can such a mixture be anything but a muddle? Ordinarily that could be the only result; but here all is in perfect harmony, all these books dovetail into one another in such a way as to be inseparable; these many parts in the Temple of Truth are essential to one another.

The Bible is a Library, and yet it is a Book, and that is true of no other collection of works in the world. Once again, it can be said of the Bible that,

(3) *It is Ancient, yet Modern.*

How ancient it is difficult for us to realize. Here, for instance, is a poem over three thousand three hundred years old – Psalm 90. How was life viewed at that distance from our day?

Abram, the Bedouin sheikh, lived his life and made his contribution to world-history *four thousand years ago!* The king of Egypt whose embalmed body may be seen in the museum in Cairo was contemporary with Moses, about three thousand four hundred years ago.

Cities, such as Nineveh and Babylon, once thought to be impregnable, and empires such as the Assyrian and Roman, once regarded as indestructible, have long since crumbled to dust, and are now chiefly of archeological interest.

When Ezra was a youth in Babylon, the battles of Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis were fought; Pindar was writing his Odes, and Aeschylus his Tragedies, and Confucius was inaugurating an age in China.

And it will be well to remember that Nehemiah was contemporary with Herodotus, “the father of history,” and with the great Socrates. These are names that take us into a remote past, and to that past the Old Testament belongs. Paul was contemporary with Seneca and Pliny, and John reached to the time of Tacitus and Suetonius. All that seems and is far away. The Bible is a very ancient Book. Its last chapters were written over eighteen hundred years ago, and its first chapters probably fifty-five hundred years ago!

But it is difficult to believe it because the Bible *is so modern*. The ink might scarcely be dry on the page. There are millions of books of recent date which are already out of date, but this old Book is the most modern of all. Why do not men leave the Bible alone? If they believe it to be a pious fraud, or a collection of myths, why, having said so, are they not done with it?

The answer is, *because they cannot*.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge said that for him the most convincing proof of the divinity of the Bible was that it found him at deeper depths of his being than any other book. That is what the Bible does with all of us, whether we acknowledge it or not; and that is why we cannot leave it alone. I suppose the most recent thing in print is the newspaper. But is it more recent than the Bible?

Dr. Joseph Parker has written eloquently on this point. He says:

“What a book is the Bible in the mere matter of variety of contents! Everything seems to be in it - poem, narrative, intelligence, judgment, battle, prayer, song, anathema, and benediction. The bush is common enough. But what of the fire which makes the shepherd turn aside? The bread is such as has been used at supper, yet presently it will symbolize the body of Christ! Paul is almost in heaven, yet in the very height of his anticipation he asks for his parchments and his cloak, and he knows exactly where both are left.

“Whole pages are taken up with obscure names, and more is told of a genealogy than of the day of judgment. Stories are half told, and the night falls before we can tell where victory lay. Where is there anything to correspond with this? Not in any book, certainly; but in actual life there is the selfsame thing over again without the loss of one line. If the seer could print for us what he sees on any one day in the year he would print a second edition of the Bible. We should have it all over again, including, perhaps, something even of creation itself, with its light, its ascending and descending waters, its trees bringing forth each after its kind, its sunny day, its starry night; but the humanity would be the same, still more vividly family life, love, fear, envy, covetousness, magnanimity; chosen people and alien lands; temples warm with the fire of the Lord, and houses of vain and corrupt idolatry; the noise of war and the song of peace; shepherds keeping their flocks and soldiers listening for the foe; David in the wilderness and Jonah on the sea; weird dreams, spectral hands on the wall, baffled magicians and truth-telling prophets; psalms for which no music is good enough, and proverbs that glisten with wit. All these, and more, we should have on every or any day in the year if the sun could but print as well as shine!

“This is just the Bible. It is a page torn out of the volume of human life, only torn by the hand of God, annotated by his Spirit.

“What is the daily newspaper but a revised translation of the Bible, often, indeed, with God left out in the spelling, though he cannot be left out in reality. Take to-morrow's newspaper in one hand, and the Bible in the other, and see if the paper be not full of repetitions, and if there be not something like an echo in all its utterances.

Is that true? Then this ancient Book is the most modern of all, this first Word is also the last. It is true of the Bible as of Christ, just because it is of Christ, that it is the Alpha and the Omega; it is the A and the Z of literature.

What Calvin said of the Psalms is true of the whole Bible, it is “a perfect anatomy of the human soul,” and until entirely new elements are introduced into the field of human nature and experience, this oldest Book will remain the most modern. After what has here been said, in answer to the question, What evidence is there that the Bible is the Word of God! Is it too much to claim that It seems to be! Does not the history of the Book, its external evidence, as seen in its origination, preservation, and circulation, point to that? And does not the content of the Book, its internal evidence, as seen in its humanity and divinity, its manifoldness and unity, its antiquity and modernness, point to that?

Truly, it seems to be, and yet that is the least part of the evidence.

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