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# *“Is the Bible Really God’s Word?”*

When my wife Susan and I were first getting to know each other, circumstances put us at a considerable disadvantage. Susan was attending Abilene Christian College, and I was preaching at Clarksville, Arkansas. That means we were separated by about five hundred miles. This difficulty necessitated that we become better acquainted by telephone and by mail.

When I came home from my work in the evenings, I would immediately check my mailbox to see if I had received a letter from Susan. When I did receive a letter from her, it would have characteristics that identified it as being from her. First, it would claim to be from Susan. It would have a return address on the outside of it that belonged only to her. The handwriting would indicate that she had written the letter. The contents of the letter would suggest that it had come from her, for she would be writing about dreams, plans, places, people, and events that were unique to us. Her distinctive signature at the end of the letter would tell me that this letter could not have been from anyone other than Susan.

It is reasonable to believe that the almighty God who made us would want to communicate with us. We are the masterpiece of His creation. Surely, He would want to tell us what He is like, why we were created, and what we are to do while upon the earth. It is also reasonable to believe that any communiqué which He might send to us would have characteristics to identify it as being His unique, divine revelation to man.

We have before us a Bible. We claim that it is from the almighty God who made us. How can we believe this is true?

## **ITS SUPERNATURAL CLAIM**

We have the strongest of reasons for believing that the Bible is God’s message to man. Above all, it claims to be from Him. We would expect this. He would not leave us to guess at who sent this communication to us, but would clearly state in it that it was from Him so we would have no doubts about its origin. This is certainly true of the Bible. From one end to the other, the Bible claims to be God’s Word to man. For example, Peter wrote that “no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21). The prophecies of the Bible, Peter declared, came from God through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Paul also said, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Here Paul was setting forth three truths about the Scriptures. First, he affirmed the origin of the Scriptures: They were “breathed out” from God. Second, he described the function of the Scriptures: They provide God’s guidance for man. Third, he reminded us of the purpose of the Scriptures: They constitute the spiritual revelation which man needs to be complete before God.

If these affirmations are true, then there can be no doubt that the Bible is God’s message for man. Therefore, we might expect it to have characteristics that set it apart from all other books—characteristics that could not be explained any other way than to conclude that the Bible is really from God. Indeed, as we examine the Bible, we see that it does have characteristics which we

cannot explain except by saying, "This book is truly God's Word." What are some of these characteristics?

### ITS SUPERNATURAL ACCURACY

One characteristic of the Bible which can only be explained by saying that it is God's inspired Word is its supernatural accuracy. It has an accuracy that man alone could not have produced.

Since the invention of the movable type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in about A.D. 1440, we have lived in a world of books. Thousands of books come off printing presses each day. All of these books have a commonality: They are imperfect—in each one something has been left out, some information is incorrect, or some parts have been written in the wrong way. Having been created by man, they reveal the frailties of their authors. Man cannot build a perfect house, live a perfect life, or write a perfect book.

What is true of all other books is *not* true of the Bible. It is perfect! It is absolutely accurate. Problems are encountered with translations of the Scriptures, of course; but when the original message is ascertained, we see its perfection. The Bible contains hundreds of names, places, events, times, and prophecies, and yet no errors! How can we explain this? We must conclude that man did not write this book.

Let us consider some examples of its accuracy. Isaiah began prophesying around 739 B.C. This was long before the fall of the southern kingdom in 586 B.C., yet God said through Isaiah in the latter part of his book, "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.'" And he declares of Jerusalem, "She will be built," and of the temple, "Your foundation will be laid"" (Isaiah 44:28). We call this a "name" prophecy. Isaiah called a king by name and predicted—as much as two hundred years before the king lived—that he would initiate the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C., many citizens of the southern kingdom were taken into captivity and were unable to return to their homeland for seventy years. However, the Medes and Persians defeated Babylon in 539 B.C. Soon Cyrus, their ruler, issued a decree on a clay cylinder which exists to this day, allowing the displaced people to return to their native

lands. He encouraged and supported the Jews in returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the city and its temple. Isaiah had prophesied that Cyrus would issue such a decree nearly two centuries before he lived, even calling Cyrus by name. How was Isaiah able to do this? Man alone could not do it—but Isaiah, moved by the Holy Spirit, did.

Obadiah, the shortest book of the Old Testament, says the Edomites were to be destroyed because God's judgment had fallen upon them. These descendants of Esau lived in a rocky mountain range which extended out from the Dead Sea in the lower part of Palestine. They believed they were invincible and boasted that no one could bring them down. At the time of Jerusalem's fall in 586 B.C., the Edomites had laughed and taken advantage of Jerusalem's misfortune, looting the city, capturing survivors, and selling them as slaves. God pronounced judgment on the Edomites for these actions. He announced in Obadiah that "no survivor of the house of Esau" would remain (Obadiah 18). He further said of Esau, "Because of violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame, and you will be cut off forever" (Obadiah 10). This prophecy has been fulfilled. The Edomites vanished from the earth long ago. How do we explain this level of accuracy? Such accuracy is simply beyond man.

The Book of Nahum has been called the funeral song of Nineveh. It is a prophecy concerning the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which had a population of perhaps 600,000 in Jonah's day. The Assyrians, whose empire dominated the world, were especially known for their cruelty and torture. God declared through Nahum that the city of Nineveh would be utterly destroyed (Nahum 1:14). Zephaniah also predicted its destruction, foretelling that Nineveh would become a barren wasteland:

And He will stretch out His hand against  
the north  
And destroy Assyria,  
And He will make Nineveh a desolation,  
Parched like the wilderness. . . .  
This is the exultant city  
Which dwells securely,  
Who says in her heart,  
"I am, and there is no one besides me."  
How she has become a desolation,  
A resting place for beasts!  
Everyone who passes by her will hiss  
And wave his hand in contempt (2:13–15).

In 612 B.C. Babylon wiped Nineveh from the earth. The great city was so completely destroyed that for years it was unknown where it had once stood. Alexander the Great is said to have marched his army across the Nineveh mound, totally unaware that under his feet were the remains of that renowned city. The prophecies uttered by Nahum and Zephaniah were fulfilled to the smallest detail. Today, the area where Nineveh stood is a wilderness, a place to pasture flocks and a habitat for wild animals and birds. How can we account for such accuracy? Obviously, it is supernatural!

In the New Testament, Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem. He warned concerning the temple in Jerusalem, “. . . Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down” (Matthew 24:2). His prediction was so specific that anyone could have identified Him as a false prophet if He had been incorrect. In A.D. 70, however, when Titus and the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem, not one detail of Jesus’ prediction went unfulfilled. Extrabiblical testimony such as Josephus and archaeological investigations verify that Jerusalem was completely destroyed, just as Jesus said it would be.

Could man have made these predictions with such accuracy? No, we cannot explain the absolute accuracy of the Bible except to say that it came from God.

### **ITS SUPERNATURAL CONTENT**

Another characteristic of the Bible which cannot be explained except by saying that it came from God is its supernatural contents. Man could not have created its subject matter.

Let us think carefully about the contents of the Bible, considering first the record of the creation of the world. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. His Word reveals that He separated the light from the darkness and created the vegetation of the earth and seas. He placed the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens, establishing seasons, days, and years. He created the living creatures of the sky and seas, the animals of the earth, and man. Then He put the first couple in the Garden of Eden and gave them one command to keep, thereby showing His sovereignty over them. They broke that command, so God expelled them from the garden and cursed the earth because of their sin. Could some man

or some group of men have imagined this account of the beginning of the world?

What about the record of Abraham? God chose a man named Abram, telling him, “Follow Me and I will make of you a great nation. I will give land to you and your descendants, and through you I will bless all nations of the earth” (see Genesis 12:1, 2). God changed his name to “Abraham” and promised him that he would be the father of a multitude. God repeated His promise to Abraham’s son Isaac and then to his grandson Jacob. God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, and the twelve sons born to Israel became known as “Israelites.” Israel and his twelve sons, a clan of about seventy people, moved to Egypt through God’s providence.

With the passing of time, the Israelites were enslaved by the king of Egypt. During their 430 years in Egyptian bondage, this nation grew to a population of perhaps 2½ million. They cried out to God for deliverance from slavery, and God sent Moses to deliver them. He led them to Mount Sinai, where God gave them His law, summarized by the Ten Commandments, and made them His chosen nation. When this nation turned aside to idols, God sent His prophets to bring them back to Him.

God’s nation divided into two kingdoms in 930 B.C. Eventually, God allowed both kingdoms to be taken into captivity as a chastisement for their sin; but He brought a remnant back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, and they rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple. Through all the apostasy of His nation, God maintained the promise that one day, through Abraham’s descendants, He would bless the whole world. Ultimately, in harmony with the promise God had made to Abraham and later to his descendant David, the Messiah came into the world. Could a man have merely invented this story?

Next, let us consider the record of Christ. A virgin conceived of the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Christ without having sexual relations with a man. Her Son grew to be a man and lived a perfect life, against which no charge of sin could be made. In His preaching, He revealed what God is like and predicted the coming of His kingdom. He worked miracles which even His enemies acknowledged. He submitted to the crucifixion of lawless men, and on the third day He arose from the dead. He demonstrated to His disciples

beyond any doubt that He was alive from the dead. Forty days after His resurrection, He ascended to heaven. Could man have created the story of Jesus? An eighteenth-century Swiss philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, made this comment on the life story of Jesus and its origin:

Shall we say that the gospel story is the work of the imagination? . . . The tone and morality of this story are not those of any Jewish authors, and the gospel indeed contains characters so great, so striking, so entirely inimitable, that their invention would be more astonishing than their hero.<sup>1</sup>

The story of Jesus could not have been invented by an imperfect man, for Jesus and the record of His life are perfect.

Something else to think about is the establishment of the church. On the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit came in an engulfing measure upon the apostles Jesus had chosen. They were baptized in the Holy Spirit's power and influence and began to speak in languages they had not previously studied. Later that day, Peter preached the first gospel sermon. Three thousand people were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, and the church was born. This body of people who had been baptized by faith into Christ lived as Christ's spiritual body on earth, worshiping God and doing the work of Christ. Could someone have fabricated this story?

The Bible was written by forty different men in different places and in different periods of time, yet these sixty-six books blend together with an unmatched unity. This cannot be explained except to say that the mind of God was behind it all. Let us suppose forty different men, each with a different musical instrument, presented a concert. Without consulting each other, they came in, sat down, began to play, and performed a masterpiece of concert music, without a discordant note, perfect in every way. How would we explain such a concert? We would know that each musician had learned the music from the same source. So it is with the Bible. Superhuman accuracy characterizes its books; and it has a sustained unity of subject, with con-

sistent teaching that provides the solution to man's sin problem. How can we explain it? Our conclusion must be that the almighty mind of God orchestrated the writing of each book.

## ITS SUPERNATURAL POWER

A final characteristic of the Bible which indicates that it is from God is its supernatural power. The Bible contains a power that is incomparable to any book written by man.

*The Bible has the power to endure.* We would expect God's Word to be indestructible. Jesus promised, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Peter said, "'The word of the Lord endures forever'" (1 Peter 1:25). Men have sought to remove the Bible from the earth, but they have always failed. Robert Ingersoll, a devoted atheist, said, "In fifteen years, I'll have [the Bible] in the morgue."<sup>2</sup> In fifteen years, Robert Ingersoll was in the morgue—but the Bible was more popular than ever.

*The Bible has the power to enlighten.* In the longest psalm are these words: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). No book in the history of the world has told us so much about ourselves as the Bible. It teaches us how to live wisely, how to get along with others, and how to understand God.

*The Bible has the power to energize.* It is one thing to impart advice, but it is another thing to impart the power to change. We would expect a message from God to be electric with divine power. Jesus said, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63b). The Bible effects complete conversion. The messages of men sometimes produce change, but they cannot produce the complete transformation which the Bible creates. The Bible instills power by which the whole being is brought closer to the likeness of Christ.

*The Bible has the power to evaluate.* We may read the Bible to judge it, only to discover that it judges us. The writer of Hebrews said, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On Education*, Book IV ([http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Jean-Jacques\\_Rousseau](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Jean-Jacques_Rousseau); Internet; accessed 22 February 2012).

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<sup>2</sup>Walter B. Knight, *Knight's Master Book of 4,000 Illustrations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 29.



and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible knows us well, as if its writers had read our thoughts and sifted through our strongest motivations and deepest yearnings.

How can we explain the power of the Bible? Can anyone with an honest heart say that the power of the Bible was instilled within it by man? Can we explain the power of the Bible any other way than to say, "It came from God"?

### **CONCLUSION**

Surely, the characteristics of the Bible itself are convincing proof that it is God's inspired Word. Its accuracy, contents, and power point to the truth that the Bible is God's message to us.

Since the Bible is God's inspired Word, we would be wise to obey it. To neglect its message of salvation would be the saddest mistake anyone could make. The Bible is a book about Jesus. It has been said, "The Bible is not history; it is His Story." God gave us this book to tell us how He loves us and how He wants to save us through Jesus. It tells us to believe in Christ (Acts 16:31), repent of our sins (2 Peter 3:9), confess Christ (Romans 10:10), and be baptized into Christ for the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16). It tells us how, through our obedience to the gospel, the Lord adds us to the spiritual body of Christ, the church. We are instructed by God's Word to live faithfully for Christ so that we will receive an eternal home with Him when life is over.

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