
THE PROOF OF THE SCRIPTURES

THE CHIEF EVIDENCE FOR THE BIBLE'S BEING THE WORD OF GOD IS THE INTERNAL testimony of the Holy Spirit to that truth. Without such testimony the truthfulness of Scripture will never impress itself adequately upon a reader. But that does not mean that there are no rational supports for one's conviction. The rational arguments should be known by the mature Christian as well as by anyone who is just beginning to consider the claims of Christianity.

What are these arguments? Some have already been suggested. First, there are the claims of the Scriptures themselves. The books of the Bible claim to be the Word of God, and, while this in itself does not prove that they are, nevertheless it is a fact to be accounted for. We must ask how books that seem to be right in so many other respects could yet be in error at the crucial point of their self-awareness. Second, there is the testimony of Jesus. His testimony is the greatest argument of all. For even if Jesus were only a great teacher, his regard for the Bible as the ultimate authority in life could hardly be disregarded. Third, there is the doctrinal and ethical superiority of the Bible to all other books. The Bible's superiority has often been acknowledged even by unbelievers and is denied by few who have actually read and studied its pages. Fourth, there is the power of the Bible to affect us as we read it. What produces such results if the Bible is not divine both in its source and its operation upon human lives?

Thomas Watson, one of the great English Puritans, wrote:

I wonder whence the Scriptures should come, if not from God. Bad men

could not be the authors of it. Would their minds be employed in inditing such holy lines? Would they declare so fiercely against sin? Good men could not be the authors of it. Could they write in such a strain? or could it stand with their grace to counterfeit God's name, and put, *Thus saith the Lord*, to a book of their own devising?¹

Here are four good reasons for regarding the Bible as the revealed Word of God, plus a fifth arising out of Watson's argument: the biblical writers would not have claimed divine origin for a book they knew to be purely their own. What follows are five more supports for the same conclusion.

The Unity in Diversity

A sixth reason for regarding the Bible as the revealed Word of God is the extraordinary unity of the book. This is an old argument, but it is a good one nonetheless. It is one that grows in force the more one studies the documents. The Bible is composed of sixty-six parts, or books, written over a period of approximately fifteen hundred years (from about 1450 B.C. to about A.D. 90) by over forty different people. These people were not alike. They came from various levels of society and from diverse backgrounds. Some were kings. Others were statesmen, priests, prophets, a tax collector, a physician, a tentmaker, fishermen. If asked about any subject at all, they would have had views as diverse as the opinions of people living today. Yet together they produced a volume that is a marvelous unity in its doctrine, historical viewpoints, ethics and expectations. It is, in short, a single story of divine redemption begun in Israel, centered in Jesus Christ and culminating at the end of history. The nature of this unity is important. To begin with, as R. A. Torrey notes,

It is not a superficial unity, but a profound unity. On the surface, we often find apparent discrepancy and disagreement, but, as we study, the apparent discrepancy and disagreement disappear, and the deep underlying unity appears. The more deeply we study, the more complete do we find the unity to be. The unity is also an organic one—that is, it is not the unity of a dead thing, like a stone, but of a living thing, like a plant. In the early books of the Bible we have the germinant thought; as we go on we have the plant, and further on the bud, and then the blossom, and then the ripened fruit. In Revelation we find the ripened fruit of Genesis.²

¹Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity: Contained in Sermons upon the Westminster Assembly's Catechism* (1692; reprint ed., London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), p. 26.

²R. A. Torrey, *The Bible and Its Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1904-6), p. 26.

What can account for this unity? There is only one way of accounting for it: behind the efforts of the more than forty human authors is the one perfect, sovereign and guiding mind of God.

Uncommon Accuracy

A seventh reason for believing the Bible to be the Word of God is its uncommon accuracy. To be sure, its accuracy does not prove the Bible to be divine—human beings are also sometimes quite accurate—but it is what we should expect if the Bible is the result of God's effort. On the other hand, if the accuracy of the Bible extends to the point of inerrancy (which we will consider in the next chapter), that would be a direct proof of its divinity. For, although error is human, inerrancy is certainly divine.

At some points the accuracy of the Bible may be tested *externally*, as in the historical portions of the New Testament. We may take the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts as an example. Luke/Acts is an attempt to write an "orderly account" of Jesus' life and of the rapid expansion of the early Christian church (Lk. 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2). That would be an enormous undertaking even in our day. It was especially so in ancient times when there were no newspapers or reference books. In fact there were few written documents of any kind. Yet in spite of this Luke charted the growth of what began as an insignificant religious movement in a far corner of the Roman empire, a movement that progressed quietly and without official sanction so that within forty years of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ there were Christian congregations in most of the major cities of the empire. Does Luke's work succeed? It does so remarkably and with what is apparently total accuracy.

For one thing, both books show amazing accuracy in handling official titles and corresponding spheres of influence. This has been documented by F. F. Bruce of the University of Manchester, England, in a small work entitled *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Bruce writes:

One of the most remarkable tokens of his [Luke's] accuracy is his sure familiarity with the proper titles of all the notable persons who are mentioned in his pages. This was by no means such an easy feat in his days as it is in ours, when it is so simple to consult convenient books of reference. The accuracy of Luke's use of the various titles in the Roman empire has been compared to the easy and confident way in which an Oxford man in ordinary conversation will refer to the Heads of colleges by their proper titles—the *Provost* of Oriel, the *Master* of Balliol, the *Rector* of Exeter, the *President* of Magdalen, and so on. A non-Oxonian like the

present writer never feels quite at home with the multiplicity of these Oxford titles.³

Luke obviously feels at home with the Roman titles; he never gets them wrong.

Bruce adds that Luke had a further difficulty in that the titles often did not remain the same for any great length of time. For example, the administration of a province might pass from a direct representative of the emperor to a senatorial government, and would then be governed by a proconsul rather than an imperial legate (*legatus pro praetore*). Cyprus, an imperial province until 22 B.C., became a senatorial province in that year and was therefore no longer governed by an imperial legate but by a proconsul. Thus when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Cyprus about A.D. 47, it was the proconsul Sergius Paulus who greeted them (Acts 13:7).

Similarly, Achaia was a senatorial province from 27 B.C. to A.D. 15, and again subsequent to A.D. 44. Hence, Luke refers to Gallio, the Roman ruler in Greece, as "the proconsul of Achaia" (Acts 18:12), the title of the Roman representative during the time of Paul's visit to Corinth but not during the twenty-nine years prior to A.D. 44.⁴

This kind of accuracy by only one of the biblical writers is a testimony that may be multiplied almost indefinitely. For example, in Acts 19:38, the town clerk of Ephesus tries to calm the rioting citizens by referring them to the Roman authorities. "There are proconsuls," he says, using the plural. At first glance the writer seems to have made a mistake, since there was only one Roman proconsul in a given area at a time. But an examination shows that shortly before the rioting at Ephesus, Junius Silanus, the proconsul, had been murdered by messengers from Agrippina, the mother of the adolescent Nero. Since the new proconsul had not arrived in Ephesus, the town clerk's vagueness may be intentional or may even refer to the two emissaries, Helius and Celer, who were the apparent successors to Silanus's power. Luke captures the tone of the city in a time of internal disturbance, just as elsewhere he captures the tones of Antioch, Jerusalem, Rome and other cities, each of which had its own unique flavor.

Archaeology has also substantiated an extraordinary reliability for the writings of Luke and for other biblical documents. A plaque has been found in Delphi identifying Gallio as the proconsul in Corinth at the precise time of

³F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1974), p. 82.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

Paul's visit to the city. The pool of Bethesda, containing five porticoes, has been found approximately seventy feet below the present level of the city of Jerusalem. It is mentioned in John 5:2, but it had been lost to view from the destruction of the city by the armies of Titus in A.D. 70 until recent times. The Pavement of Judgment, *Gabbatha*, mentioned in John 19:13, has also been uncovered.

Ancient documents—from Dura, Ras Shamra, Egypt and the Dead Sea—have thrown light on biblical reliability. Recently reports have been received of remarkable finds at Tell Mardikh in northwest Syria, the site of ancient Ebla. Thus far, fifteen thousand tablets dating from approximately 2300 B.C. (two to five hundred years before Abraham) have been discovered. In them are hundreds of names such as Abram, Israel, Esau, David, Yahweh and Jerusalem, showing these to be common names prior to their appearance in the biblical accounts. As they are studied carefully, these tablets will undoubtedly throw much light on customs in the subsequent era of the Old Testament patriarchs, Moses, David and others. Their very existence already tends to verify the Old Testament narratives.

Internal evidence of the Bible's accuracy is also available, particularly where there are parallel accounts of the same events. The Gospel accounts of the resurrection appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ are an example. They are clearly four separate and independent accounts; otherwise there would be no apparent discrepancies. Writers working in collaboration would have cleared up any difficulties. Yet the Gospels do not really contradict each other. They are mutually supportive. Moreover, an incidental detail in one sometimes clarifies what seems to be a contradiction between two of the others.

Matthew speaks of Mary Magdalene and the "other" Mary as having gone to Christ's tomb on the first Easter morning. Mark mentions Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (thus identifying Matthew's "other" Mary), and Salome. Luke mentions the two Marys, Joanna, and "the other women with them." John mentions only Mary Magdalene. On the surface these reports are different, but when they are examined further they reveal a remarkable harmony. Clearly a group of women, including all those mentioned, set out for the tomb. Finding the stone moved, the older women dispatched Mary Magdalene to tell the apostles of the disturbance and ask their advice. While she was gone the remaining women saw the angels (as Matthew, Mark and Luke report) but not the risen Lord, at least not until later. On the other hand, Mary, returning later and alone, did see him (as John discloses). In the same way, John's mention of "that other disciple" who accompanied Peter to the tomb throws light on Luke 24:24; that verse says

that "some of those who were with us went to the tomb," after the women had been there, though Luke mentions only Peter (a singular individual) in his own narration.

These are little things, to be sure. But because they are little, they lend special weight to the impression of the Gospels' total accuracy.

Prophecy

An eighth reason for believing the Bible to be the Word of God is fulfilled prophecy. Here again is an extremely large subject, one clearly beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, it is possible to show briefly the general impact of the argument.

First, there are explicit prophecies. These concern the future of the Jewish people (including things that have already occurred and some that have not yet occurred) and the future of the gentile nations. Above all, many describe the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, first to die and then afterward to return in power and great glory. Torrey cites five passages—Isaiah 53 (the entire chapter); Micah 5:2; Daniel 9:25-27; Jeremiah 23:5-6; and Psalm 16:8-11—and comments:

In the passages cited we have predictions of a coming King of Israel. We are told the exact time of his manifestation to his people, the exact place of his birth, the family of which he should be born, the condition of the family at the time of his birth (a condition entirely different from that existing at the time the prophecy was written, and contrary to all the probabilities in the case), the manner of his reception by his people (a reception entirely different from that which would naturally be expected), the fact, method, and details regarding his death, with the specific circumstances regarding his burial, his resurrection subsequent to his burial, and his victory subsequent to his resurrection. These predictions were fulfilled with the most minute precision in Jesus of Nazareth.⁵

Another writer, E. Schuyler English, former chairman of the editorial committee of *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (1967) and editor-in-chief of *The Pilgrim Bible* (1948), observed that

more than twenty Old Testament predictions relating to events that would surround the death of Christ, words written centuries before his first advent, were fulfilled with precision within a twenty-four-hour period at the time of his crucifixion [alone]. For example, in Matthew 27:35 it is written, "And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting

⁵Torrey, *The Bible and Its Christ*, p. 19.

lots." This was in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, where it is stated, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."⁶

Many of these prophecies have been questioned, and attempts have been made to redate the Old Testament books, bringing them nearer to the time of Christ. But one can bring some prophecies to the very latest date imagined by the most radical and destructive critics, and they are still hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. Moreover, their cumulative witness is devastating. These are facts. They demand an accounting. What will account for them? The only fact that will account for such evidence is the existence of a sovereign God. He revealed in advance what would happen when he sent Jesus for the redemption of our race and then saw to it that such things actually took place.

Much more can be said in reference to prophecy. The preceding material relates only to the coming of Christ. There are also prophecies concerning the scattering and regathering of Israel as well as general and specific prophecies concerning the gentile nations and the capitals of those nations, many of which have been destroyed in precisely the way the Bible had indicated generations and even centuries before. The institutions, ceremonies, offerings and feasts of Israel are also prophetic of the life and ministry of Jesus.⁷

The Bible's Preservation

A ninth reason for believing the Bible to be the Word of God is its extraordinary preservation down through the centuries of Old Testament and church history. Today, after the Bible has been translated in part or whole into hundreds of languages, some with multiple versions, and after millions of copies of the sacred text have been printed and distributed, it would be a nearly impossible feat to destroy the Bible. But these conditions did not always prevail.

⁶E. Schuyler English, *A Companion to the New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 26. The author invites the reader also to compare: Mt. 26:21-25 with Ps. 41:9. Mt. 26:31, 56; Mk. 14:50 with Zech. 13:7. Mt. 26:59 with Ps. 35:11. Mt. 26:63; 27:12, 14; Mk. 14:61 with Is. 53:7. Mt. 26:67 with Is. 50:6; 52:14; Mic. 5:1; Zech. 13:7. Mt. 27:9 with Zech. 11:12-13. Mt. 27:27 with Is. 53:8. Mt. 27:34; Mk. 15:36; Jn. 19:29 with Ps. 69:21. Mt. 27:38; Mk. 15:27-28; Lk. 22:37; 23:32 with Is. 53:12. Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34 with Ps. 22:1. Mt. 27:60; Mk. 15:46; Lk. 23:53; Jn. 19:41 with Is. 53:9. Lk. 23:34 with Is. 53:12. Jn. 19:28 with Ps. 69:21. Jn. 19:33, 36 with Ps. 34:20. Jn. 19:34, 37 with Zech. 12:10.

⁷For a fuller discussion of this interesting area of Old Testament studies see Victor Buksbazen, *The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel* (Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1954) and Norman L. Geisler, *Christ: The Theme of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), pp. 31-68.

Until the time of the Reformation the biblical text was preserved by the laborious and time-consuming process of copying it over and over again by hand, at first onto papyrus sheets and then onto parchments. Throughout much of this time the Bible was an object of extreme hatred by many in authority. They tried to stamp it out. In the early days of the church, Celsus, Porphyry and Lucian tried to destroy it by arguments. Later the emperors Diocletian and Julian tried to destroy it by force. At several points it was actually a capital offense to possess a copy of parts of Holy Writ. Yet the text survived.

If the Bible had been only the thoughts and work of human beings, it would have been eliminated long ago in the face of such opposition, as other books have been. But it has endured, fulfilling the words of Jesus, who said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Mt. 24:35).

Changed Lives

A tenth reason for believing the Bible to be the Word of God is its demonstrated ability to transform even the worst men and women, making them a blessing to their families, friends and community. The Bible speaks of this power: "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether" (Ps. 19:7-9). As discussed in the last chapter, the transformation takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit who works through the Word.

Does the Bible actually transform men and women, turning them into godly persons? It does. Prostitutes have been reformed. Drunkards have become sober. Those filled with pride have become humble. Dishonest people have become people of integrity. Weak women and men have become strong, and all because of the transformation wrought in them by God as they have heard and studied the Scriptures.

A remarkable illustration comes from the life of Dr. Harry A. Ironside. Early in his ministry the great evangelist and Bible teacher was living in the San Francisco Bay Area working with a group of believers called "Brethren." One Sunday as he was walking through the city he came upon a group of Salvation Army workers holding a meeting on the corner of Market and Grant Avenues. There were probably sixty of them. When they recognized Ironside they immediately asked him if he would give his testimony. So he

did, giving a word about how God had saved him through faith in the bodily death and literal resurrection of Jesus.

As he was speaking, Ironside noticed that on the edge of the crowd a well-dressed man had taken a card from his pocket and had written something on it. As Ironside finished his talk this man came forward, lifted his hat and very politely handed him the card. On one side was his name, which Ironside immediately recognized. The man was one of the early socialists who had made a name for himself lecturing not only for socialism but also against Christianity. As Ironside turned the card over, he read, "Sir, I challenge you to debate with me the question 'Agnosticism versus Christianity' in the Academy of Science Hall next Sunday afternoon at four o'clock. I will pay all expenses."

Ironside reread the card aloud and then replied somewhat like this. "I am very much interested in this challenge. . . . Therefore I will be glad to agree to this debate on the following conditions: namely, that in order to prove that Mr. _____ has something worth fighting for and worth debating about, he will promise to bring with him to the Hall next Sunday two people, whose qualifications I will give in a moment, as proof that agnosticism is of real value in changing human lives and building true character.

"First, he must promise to bring with him one man who was for years what we commonly call a 'down-and-outer.' I am not particular as to the exact nature of the sins that had wrecked his life and made him an outcast from society—whether a drunkard, or a criminal of some kind, or a victim of his sensual appetite—but a man who for years was under the power of evil habits from which he could not deliver himself, but who on some occasion entered one of Mr. _____'s meetings and heard his glorification of agnosticism and his denunciations of the Bible and Christianity, and whose heart and mind as he listened to such an address were so deeply stirred that he went away from that meeting saying, 'Henceforth, I too am an agnostic!' and as a result of imbibing that particular philosophy found that a new power had come into his life. The sins he once loved he now hates, and righteousness and goodness are now the ideals of his life. He is now an entirely new man, a credit to himself and an asset to society—all because he is an agnostic.

"Secondly, I would like Mr. _____ to promise to bring with him one woman—and I think he may have more difficulty in finding the woman than the man—who was once a poor, wrecked, characterless outcast, the slave of evil passions, and the victim of man's corrupt living . . . perhaps one who had lived for years in some evil resort, . . . utterly lost, ruined and wretched because of her life of sin. But this woman also entered a hall where Mr.

_____ was loudly proclaiming his agnosticism and ridiculing the message of the Holy Scriptures. As she listened, hope was born in her heart, and she said, 'This is just what I need to deliver me from the slavery of sin!' She followed the teaching and became an intelligent agnostic or infidel. As a result, her whole being revolted against the degradation of the life she had been living. She fled from the den of iniquity where she had been held captive so long; and today, rehabilitated, she has won her way back to an honored position in society and is living a clean, virtuous, happy life—all because she is an agnostic.

"Now," he said, addressing the gentleman who had presented him with his card and the challenge, "if you will promise to bring these two people with you as examples of what agnosticism can do, I will promise to meet you at the Hall of Science at four o'clock next Sunday, and I will bring with me at the very least 100 men and women who for years lived in just such sinful degradation as I have tried to depict, but who have been gloriously saved through believing the gospel which you ridicule. I will have these men and women with me on the platform as witnesses to the miraculous saving power of Jesus Christ and as present-day proof of the truth of the Bible."

Dr. Ironside then turned to the Salvation Army captain, a woman, and said, "Captain, have you any who could go with me to such a meeting?"

She exclaimed with enthusiasm, "We can give you forty at least just from this one corps, and we will give you a brass band to lead the procession!"

"Fine," Dr. Ironside answered. "Now, Mr. _____, I will have no difficulty in picking up sixty others from the various missions, gospel halls, and evangelical churches of the city; and if you will promise faithfully to bring two such exhibits as I have described, I will come marching in at the head of such a procession, with the band playing 'Onward, Christian Soldiers,' and I will be ready for the debate."

Apparently the man who had made the challenge must have had some sense of humor, for he smiled wryly and waved his hand in a deprecating kind of way as if to say, "Nothing doing!" and then edged out of the crowd while the bystanders clapped for Ironside and the others.⁸

The power of the living Christ operating by means of the Holy Spirit through the written Word changes lives. This has been true throughout history. It is a powerful proof that the Bible is indeed the Word of God.

⁸H. A. Ironside, *Random Reminiscences from Fifty Years of Ministry* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1939), pp. 99-107. I have also told this story in *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1975), pp. 226-28.