

The Bible by Sarah Bowen

What is the Bible?

The Bible is a collection of 66 books, compiled into one volume. Some of these books are letters or lovely poetry, others are books of history and prophecy. Many different people, of different backgrounds and cultures, wrote the Bible over a period of about 1500 years.

The Bible is divided into two distinct parts: The Old Testament and The New Testament. The Old Testament begins with the creation of the Earth and the Flood, and continues with a history of the Israelite nation, from Abraham to Moses and the kings of ancient Israel. The Old Testament ends with some books of practical wisdom about life, as well as books of poetry and prophecy. The New Testament begins with four books that give different accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and continues with a book called "The Acts of the Apostles" which is about the early preaching work that the Apostles did after Jesus' death. This is followed by some letters written by the Apostles to the early church, and finally a detailed book of prophecy, called Revelation, that gives information about the world before and after Jesus Christ returns.

But probably the most amazing thing about the Bible is its claim to be the inspired word of the one true God. In other words, the Bible claims that the people who wrote every part of it were writing down exactly the things that God wanted to be written, as if God spoke the things Himself.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Tim 3:16.

How can we believe such a huge and mysterious claim? How do we know that the Bible was written by a divine hand? And why are people still reading this book after hundreds of years?

5 reasons why I believe that the Bible is the word of God

1. Prophecy: Prophecy = "A prediction made under divine influence and direction" (Funk and Wagnalls Dictionary). "A declaration or description or representation of something future, beyond the power of human sagacity to foresee [or] discern..." (Easton's Bible Dictionary).

Strictly prophecy is not just predicting the future. A prophet was one who "spoke for" another, a spokesman; and prophecy was the message the prophet spoke on behalf of God. But since Bible prophecy contains quite a lot of "prediction", or foretelling future events, for our purposes we'll discuss prophecy in this sense.

Bible prophecy is unique. There is no other book that gives as many detailed and specific prophecies about nations and individuals, over such vast periods of time. There are many prophecies in the Bible, and each one shows us that the Bible was written by God. As the Bible itself tells us "...prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2nd Peter 1: 21, NIV).

Let's take a look at one example of this: The city of Babylon.

The ancient city of Babylon must have been an amazing sight, with its magnificent temples and palaces, and Nebuchadnezzar's hanging gardens, which are said to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. However, even the powerful Babylonian empire could not stand up to the power of the living God who shows Himself as: "....declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10).

Through the prophet Isaiah God revealed the destruction of this huge empire, at the hand of the Medes and Persians. "See, I will stir up against them the Medes..." (Isaiah 13:17).

The prophet Isaiah told of the destruction of the ancient in no uncertain terms: "Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her house..." (Isaiah 13:19-21).

"I will cut off from Babylon her name and survivors, her offspring and descendants, declares the Lord. I will turn her into a place for owls and into swampland; I will sweep her with the broom of destruction" (Isaiah 14: 22-23).

The city of Babylon itself wasn't destroyed completely until the 7th century A.D., but just as the Bible has said, it has never been inhabited since! The ruin of the ancient city is located in modern Iraq, about 55 miles south of Baghdad. Between 1982 and 1989, Iraqi president Saddam Hussein ordered Babylon's walls

rebuilt in the fashion of Nebuchadnezzar II. Unfortunately for Saddam this rebuilding was halted due to the subsequent Gulf War. Today, only a tiny fragment of Babylon's ancient grandeur survives.

It's one thing to predict the destruction of a nation, but quite another to show in detail the scattering and re-gathering of a nation after hundreds of years away from their homeland. Yet, this is exactly what the Bible foretold about the Jews. At one time the Jews lived in Israel. Then the land was invaded and the Jews were dispersed for nearly 2000 years. Despite their subsequent persecution they were never destroyed. Then they slowly began to return to the land of Israel. Whatever your personal feelings about Middle Eastern politics, you cannot deny that it is an incredible phenomenon. What is most amazing is the detailed predictions that the Bible gave of the scattering and re-gathering of the Jews.

Before entering the Land of Israel the Children of Israel (as the Jews are sometimes called) were told that if they were obedient they would live in the land in peace and prosperity. If they were disobedient, however, "the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other" (Deuteronomy 28:64). Despite being scattered they would never be completely destroyed: "Though I make full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you" Eventually the Jews were to be re-gathered and returned to Israel: "I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 11:17). Ezekiel 37 is also interesting in this context.

How could a man have written this without the help of God? It would have been impossible.

With some qualifications we can say that the Bible always says what it means. (The exception to this is where highly figurative language is used in prophecy, such as Revelation or Daniel. The metaphors, however, are always explained.) In light of this, consider this verse from Acts 1 : "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (verse 11). What else could this mean other than Christ will literally return to earth one day?

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God , and there is none like me ... " (Isaiah 46:9).

2. Agreement: Despite the fact that the Bible was written over such a huge period of time, by so many different people, all parts of the Bible are in absolute agreement with one another. There are some differences in the angle that writers take on a given subject, as can be seen in the four different accounts of Jesus' life in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Yet, the Bible can still be read as one harmonious whole because "...all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2nd Timothy 3:16).

Imagine the absolute chaos that would result if human beings tried to write a book with a single message over a 1500 year period!

The New Testament was written hundreds of years after the Old Testament. Yet both parts of the Bible present a unified message, and the New Testament often refers back to the Old. Take a look at just a few examples of this:

- Hebrews chapter 11, in the New Testament, specifically refers to a whole string of people who are recorded in the Old Testament such as Noah, Rahab and David. This shows that the author of Hebrews believed in the accuracy of the historical account given in the early part of the Bible.
- Jesus himself often quoted the Old Testament, and treated the law and prophets of the Old Testament with complete trust, and not partial truth. For example in Matthew chapter 5 Jesus talks a lot about the old commandments from the Law of Moses and adds his own message to them. He was quite adamant that he had not come to do away with the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-18).
- The apostle Paul also clearly believed in the truth of events recorded in the Old Testament, such as creation and the sin of Adam and Eve (1st Corinthians 20-22). Paul states plainly that the way of Christ that he followed agreed with "all things written in the law and the prophets" (Acts 24:14).

God's message of salvation doesn't shift and change: "Praise be to the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting" (Psalm 41:13).

3. Archaeology: There's a huge amount of archaeological evidence that confirms the Bible record of history right from the very early civilizations mentioned in the text, to the life of Christ and his followers. Let's take a look at some evidence of this:

- The ancient city of Jericho destroyed by God in Joshua chapter 6 has been discovered and excavated. Archaeologists generally agree that the date of the fall of Jericho occurred around 1400 B.C, a time which would fit in perfectly with the Biblical record (1 Kings 6:1).
 - There is a wealth of evidence of the Assyrian king, Sennacharib's, unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem (2nd Kings 18-19). For example a hexagonal clay prism called "Sennacharib's Prism", or the "Taylor Prism" contains accounts of eight of the kings' sieges. While Sennacharib wrote extensive records revealing in all his other military victories, it is significant that the prism records only a siege of Jerusalem but NOT a defeat. This is because, as the Bible tells us, God saved the city (2nd Kings 19:34). There is no archaeological evidence to suggest that Sennacharib ever returned to Israel. The Bible gives us an adequate reason- the loss of his army before the walls of Jerusalem (2nd Kings 19:35).
 - In 1948 five ancient Hebrew scrolls were found in a cave at Qumran, near the Dead Sea in Israel. Among the scrolls was the oldest copy of the Old Testament book of Isaiah ever recovered. This discovery led to a full excavation of the caves at Qumran, where eventually a copy of every one of the Bible's Old Testament books was found, except the book of Esther. These texts were about a thousand years older than any existing copies of the Old Testament. Yet the amazing thing is that the manuscripts contained no important disagreements, omissions or differences with the Bible texts that we already had! This remarkable –or can we say miraculous- accuracy must be due to the painstakingly careful way that the Bible was copied from generation to generation. As Millar Burrows, a member of the translation committee put it: "It is a matter for wonder that over something like a thousand years the text underwent so little alteration." Another scholar, Gleason Archer commented of the second Isaiah manuscript found that it "proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 per cent of the text." We can be fairly certain that God's word in the modern Bible that we have has been preserved in most cases just as God intended it to be. (See: Free, J. P, & Vos, H. F. (1992) Archaeology and Bible History. Zondervan: U.S.).
4. Practical help on how to live The Bible is simultaneously a book of amazing wisdom, that stretches our minds to think of God and His ways, and practical advice, that shows us a better way to live. Clearly human beings generally do a pretty terrible job of living with one another harmoniously when we are left to our own devices. However, submission to God's wisdom from the Bible, coupled with His guidance through prayer can go a long way to helping us to make healthier decisions, have better relationships and have some measure of peace of mind. After all, it makes sense to consult our Creator on what is best for us. God is the only person who can direct our lives, as He says: "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come..." (Isaiah 46:10).

The Bible also gives people like us, in the 21st century, practical advice for living. For example, the book of Ecclesiastes paints us a realistic and balanced picture of the cycle of life of being born and dying; mourning and dancing; loving and hating. The writer of Ecclesiastes shows us that ultimately all of this is absolutely meaningless without God because eventually everyone dies (Ecclesiastes 3). Yet, the Bible offers us a practical alternative to this empty existence, it says "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). It also gives us solutions to specific situational problems:

Problem: We never seem to have enough money. Even when our income increases there's never enough to get everything that we want. God recognised this issue long ago: "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?" (Ecclesiastes 5:1)

Solution: God tells us that "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1st Timothy 6:6). Paul also writes: "Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:6). Again, Proverbs urges us to search for wisdom from God, rather than riches because "whoever trusts in riches will fall; but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf" (Proverbs 11:29).

Problem: It's difficult to make decisions in life.

Solution: God says: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6). There's a huge wealth of advice on what's good for us and what is bad for us in the Bible, just waiting for us to take hold of it. God will guide us if we read His word and pray to Him.

Problem: Sometimes life can seem like a constant strain, as if there is no way we can ever de-stress.

Solution: Jesus says that God will provide the things that we need. He says: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6: 34). Isaiah says of God: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26: 3). Many people in the Bible record confirm to us that God does help and guide human beings. David says: "How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those that fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you" (Psalms 31:19).

Problem: The future seems so uncertain. We can't be sure if one day there will be a nuclear war that will destroy the world as we know it.

Solution: God promised Noah that he would never again destroy the earth: "...never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done" (Genesis 8:20-22). So we can be sure that no nuclear war, or anything else, will entirely obliterate the world. God has always kept His promises in the past, therefore we can be certain that He will in the future.

However, we can also be sure that God will bring His judgments upon the earth, as Isaiah says "For with fire and His sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord" (Isaiah 66:16). So while we can rest assured that God will never completely destroy the earth again, as He did at the time of the flood, it's important to remember that what we do now still matters. God desperately wants us to turn from our own way and follow His righteous way. "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promises...He is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2nd Peter 3:9).

5. Faith: Belief and confidence in a person, statement or thing as trustworthy. i.e. In God and the scriptures (Bible) (Funk & Wagnalls Dictionary).

We've looked at a wealth of evidence that proves that the Bible is indeed what it says it is: the inspired word of the living God. We've seen prophecies in the Bible fulfilled; we've considered the harmony of the Bible message; we've seen clear archaeological evidence that supports the Bible truth; and we've also seen that the Bible can help us in many practical ways. However, because we can't see Him, in everyday life it's easy to forget that God exists, and that we have an obligation to Him.

God has written down for us everything that we need to know in order to know and believe in Him through the Bible. Yet we still need a certain amount of faith to believe that He exists, every minute of every day. Hebrews 11:1 says that "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." While we can have a great knowledge of the accuracy and wonder of the Bible, we still need faith. Faith is the essential ingredient that keeps us believing and moving forward, even when life seems difficult. Faith helps us to "see" God's promises in the Bible as a reality as real as a tree, a chair or a face in the world around us. "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2nd Corinthians 4:18).

I have faith in God's promises in the Bible, and so I believe that the Bible is God's word, and that this wisdom should be my guide. My faith is not perfect but the Bible helps me, and other people, to develop our faith, because "...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Just a little faith opens up to us the opportunity to share in the wonderful future that the Bible describes: "No eye has seen, no ear heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1st Corinthians 2:9).

Having established that the Bible is truly what it claims to be, the inspired word of God, shouldn't we want to find out more about what this book says about this world and us?

"This is eternal life: that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" John 17:3