

Reasons To Believe: Is The Bible Really God's Word?

If a non-Christian friend of yours asked you why you believed the Bible was God's Word, how would you answer? Would you be ready to give a reason for your faith?

When the Apostle Paul sought to answer the objections of the Jews in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-48), he referred repeatedly to Scripture as a reason for his faith. When he found a promise of the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament, he attributed that promise to God Himself, believing the Old Testament to be God's own Word.

"We tell you the good news," Paul said: "What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.' The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.' So it is stated elsewhere: 'You will not let your Holy One see decay'" (vv. 32-35).

Paul was talking to Jews. He could assume that they would share his belief in the inspiration of the Old Testament. But do we Christians have reasonable cause to believe the Bible is God's Word? Could we reasonably ask a non-Christian to look at evidence and then give the Bible the kind of respect we do?

A CLASSICAL ARGUMENT

One word of caution before we begin to look at these evidences. While we believe we can give sound reasons for believing the Bible is God's Word, we should not expect these reasons to force non-Christians to faith. Apologetics is more the job of removing potholes in the road to the cross than pushing someone's car along that road. God the Father calls men to Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit; our task in giving reasons for faith is to be tools by which the Holy Spirit can work to remove someone's resistance to the gospel.

R.C. Sproul, in a brilliant essay, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," summarized the Christian argument for the inerrancy (and inspiration and authority) of the Bible this way:

Premise A--The Bible is a basically reliable and trustworthy document.

Premise B--On the basis of this reliable document we have sufficient evidence to believe confidently that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Premise C--Jesus Christ being the Son of God is an infallible authority.

Premise D--Jesus Christ teaches that the Bible is more than generally trustworthy: it is the very Word of God.

Premise E--That the word, in that it comes from God, is utterly trustworthy because God is utterly trustworthy.

Conclusion--On the basis of the infallible authority of Jesus Christ, the Church believes the Bible to be utterly trustworthy, i.e., infallible.¹

Numerous authors have described the evidences for the general reliability of the Bible. Some, in fact, have done so even though they themselves do not believe the Bible is God's inerrant Word (e.g., John A.T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977]. The more historical and archeological evidence becomes available to us, the more we can trust to the general reliability of the Old and New Testaments alike.

The New Testament clearly indicates that many people witnessed the death of Jesus, and then that many also witnessed Him alive afterward. As Paul put it, "...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ... he was buried, ... he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and... he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (1 Cor. 15:3-8). In the article "The End Was the Beginning" (*Discipleship Journal*, Issue 20, March 1, 1984, pp. 38ff) W.H. Griffith Thomas summarized the arguments for the resurrection of Jesus.

The New Testament, then--a generally reliable and trustworthy set of historical documents--provides ample reason to believe that Jesus really rose from the dead. Jesus Himself claimed that His resurrection would prove His claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God (Mt. 12:40; Mt. 16:4; Mt. 17:22, Mt. 17:23; Mt. 20:18-19; Mt. 26:32; Mk. 9:9; Mk. 10:34; Lk. 9:22, Lk. 9:31; Lk. 24:6, Lk. 24:7). So we do have reasonable cause to believe that Jesus is who He said He was, and therefore that He is an infallible authority.

HOW DOES JESUS VIEW THE BIBLE?

But does Jesus really tell us that the Bible is God's Word?

Jesus referred many times to the Old Testament, and always with the utmost trust in its truth and reliability. He never questioned its truth, but always assumed it (Mt. 8:11; Mt. 24:37; Mk. 2:25; Lk. 10:12; Lk. 11:51; Lk. 17:28; Jn. 8:56; etc.). Jesus exemplified absolute trust in the historical and doctrinal parts of the Old Testament alike (Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13).

One common way of referring to the Old Testament in Jesus' day was to call it "the Law and the Prophets." At the start of His ministry, He explained, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:17-19).

Once when Jesus was arguing with some Jewish leaders who resented His claiming to be equal with God, Jesus quoted from the Old Testament, called it "the word of God," and added, "and the Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn. 10:35), indicating His absolute respect for the Old Testament and His belief that it was God's Word.

Of course before Jesus died and rose from the dead, there was no New Testament. How could He have taught that the New Testament--which did not yet exist--was God's Word?

Jesus promised His followers that the Holy Spirit would so guide their thoughts that they would remember perfectly all that He had taught them, so that they could pass that along to others (Jn. 14:26). It is apparent from their writings that they understood Him to mean that their writings would be of equal value with the Old Testament. Peter, for instance, put Paul's writings on a level with the Old Testament (2 Pet. 3:16), and Paul consistently claimed that his teaching and writing were God's words (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 7:40).

Paul described the Old Testament as "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16), and Jesus' promise to His followers indicates that their writings would be of equally divine origin.

CIRCULAR REASONING?

Is this mere circular reasoning? We are, after all, quoting the Bible in answer to a challenge to the Bible's inspiration.

We're not actually arguing in a circle, but in a straight line. We are quoting the Bible only with the assumption that it is a generally reliable historical document--not with the assumption that it is God's Word. Because it is generally reliable, it gives us reasonable cause to believe that Jesus is infallible. So when we quote Jesus, we have good reason to believe what he says. If Jesus was who He said He was, then whatever He says is true, since God knows everything and doesn't lie. So if Jesus was who He said He was, and if He said that the Bible is God's Word, then the Bible is God's Word.

THE UNIQUENESS, UNITY, AND LIFE-CHANGING POWER OF THE BIBLE

There are some additional reasons to believe the Bible is God's Word, though Jesus' own testimony to that effect is the strongest reason. (Many of these reasons are explained in greater detail in Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, rev. ed. [San Bernardino, Calif.: Here's Life, 1979] and in Josh McDowell's and Don Stewart's *Answers to Tough Questions* [Here's Life, 1983].)

For instance, the Bible is unique. It was written over a period of 1,500 years by more than forty different authors, in three different languages, on three different continents. Its authors ranged from high government officials, peasants, military officers, and fishermen to a prime minister, a cupbearer for a king, religious teachers, and others. It tells of the beginning and end of the world. It claims to be God's Word--a claim made by very few other writings, and substantiated by none but the Bible. It has survived innumerable attempts to destroy it.

The Bible is also amazingly unified. Although it speaks on hundreds of controversial topics, it never contradicts itself. This would be amazing enough for a book as long as it is if it had been written by only one man. It would be even more amazing had it been written by ten contemporaries who were friends. It would be even more amazing had it been written by ten men who were not contemporaries. But it was written by forty authors during 1,500 years from different cultural backgrounds.

The Bible has one unfolding story from beginning to end: God's plan of salvation. This salvation is in Jesus Christ, who is the central theme of the whole Bible. Jesus Himself claimed this: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me..." (Jn. 5:39).

There are lots of other arguments for the inspiration of the Bible,² but let's just mention one other: the Bible has an enormous power to change the lives of people. Throughout history, people who have believed in Jesus Christ and determined to trust their Bibles and read them frequently and carefully have seen their lives changed for the better in ways they could never have imagined possible otherwise. This is one more sign that the Bible is more than a human product: it is the very Word of God.

Notes

1. R.C. Sproul, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," in John Warwick Montgomery, ed. *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1974, pp. 248-249).
2. Several outstanding studies of the evidences that the Bible is God's Word are: John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *God's Inerrant Word* (see note 1); James Montgomery Boice, ed., *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978); R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Zondervan, 1977); Archibald Alexander Hodge and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979); Robert P. Lightner, *The Saviour and the Scriptures* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973); Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970) and *Limited Inspiration* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974); and John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973).

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