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The Characteristics Of the Bible

Some characteristics of the Bible are so remarkable that they indicate a divine origin.

ITS UNITY AMID DIVERSITY

One of the striking qualities of the Bible is its oneness in the midst of so much diversity. Consider its structure: The Bible is composed of sixty-six parts, written by probably forty authors—many unknown to each other—in three languages, over a period of about fifteen hundred years. These men lived in different places, under various governments (Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman).

When the writings of these various men are placed together, their oneness is astounding. Bible themes, facts, and principles reflect that one great Mind was coordinating the writing. Let us look at examples of unity in this unique collection of writings.

Jesus

The chief unity of the Scriptures is Jesus, for the

spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 19:10c). Every Bible book has something to do with the Man of Galilee and His relationship to human beings. It pleased God to sum up all things in His Son (Ephesians 1:10). Someone wrote of Jesus,

In Genesis I see him prophesied as Shiloh. In Exodus, as the passover Lamb. In Leviticus, as the Scapegoat. In Psalms, as the Shepherd. In Canticles [Song of Solomon], as the Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valley, and the Chiefest of Ten Thousand. In Job, as the Daysman. In Isaiah, as the Suffering Servant. In Daniel, as the Holy One. In Jeremiah, as the Branch. In Matthew, as the Messiah. In Mark, as the Miracle Worker. In Luke, as the Christ. In John, as the Word. In Acts, as the Prince of Life. In Romans, as the Deliverer. In First Corinthians, as the Wisdom of God. In Colossians, as the Firstborn of all Creation. In First Peter, as the Chief Bishop. In Revelation, as the Alpha and Omega.¹

Progressive Religions

Another example of the Bible's unity is the development it presents of progressive religions in God's dealings with men: first Patriarchy, then Judaism, and finally Christianity. These three dispensations have encompassed family religion, national religion, and international religion. The logical and climactic development of these religious systems is recorded in the Old and New Testaments, giving a clear and united picture of the whole scope of revealed religion.

Types and Antitypes

A striking example of the unity seen in the sacred writings is in the use of types and antitypes. Old Tes-

¹Anonymous.

tament incidents had New Testament applications. A ladder in a dream had its antitype in Jesus. A portable structure built by Moses signified a spiritual tabernacle not made with human hands. Small, white food items called manna, which rained down from heaven, represented Jesus. A miraculous crossing of the Red Sea was a type of New Testament baptism (see 1 Corinthians 10:2). A wife, her slave, and their sons became an allegory for the explanation of two religions (Galatians 4:22–26). A priest who was a king was a shadow of Christ's role as priest and king. So close is the unity of type and antitype, shadow and substance, that the Old Testament has been called "the New Testament concealed," while the New Testament may be viewed as "the Old Testament revealed."

Completed Stories

Narratives begun in one portion of the Bible, left incomplete for a time, are brought to a conclusion in the last book. The story of the tree of life, mentioned early in the divine record, is finished by John in the Revelation. The story of pain and tears, begun with the first mother, is climaxed by the removal of every tear. The story of curses, begun with the first sin, is completed with the divine assurance "there will no longer be any curse" (Revelation 22:3). The history of sacrifices—started soon after Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden—is brought to a thrilling climax in Revelation's story of the Lion of Judah, who looked like a lamb that had been slain (Revelation 5:6).

Comparisons

The unity that has been described, coming from so much variety of authorship and circumstance, is

even more noticeable when viewed comparatively. If one selected any other group of books from numerous authors writing in three languages over a space of fifteen hundred years, he would be amazed to find any connecting thought. Even if ancient Greek writings were placed in one volume, the only unity would be in their common Greek authorship.

Comparing the Bible with other books of religion only serves to emphasize the striking biblical unity in the midst of diversity. Little unity can be observed in non-biblical religious books. The alleged sacred writings of the Mohammedans, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists "have no unity. They are accumulations of heterogeneous materials, presenting . . . no order, progress, or plan."²

It would be impossible for forty sculptors (many unknown to the others) to chisel parts of a statue without a master plan, yet achieve pleasing results. Likewise, forty artists could not, without one overall coordinator, produce parts of a picture which would be acclaimed as a masterpiece. The parts of a puzzle would not fit unless one person had supervised the cutting. The stones which were fitted into an attractive temple in Solomon's day without the sound of hammer or axe or any tool of iron had to be cut according to pre-planned specifications (1 Kings 6:7). These comparisons emphasize the necessity of a Supervisor to effect the masterpiece of harmony called the Bible. A musical production by a variety of performers demands planning and overall supervision, and the harmonious oneness of the Bible demands no less.

²James Orr, ed., "Bible," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), 1:467.

ITS SIMPLICITY AND DEPTH

A second characteristic of the Bible indicating a superhuman origin is its amazing simplicity coupled with its deep meanings. Bible stories of Joseph, Daniel, and Jesus are sparkingly clear. Through repeated readings, they grip the attention of the young as well as the mature. At the same time, biblical statements have engaged the best of human minds in repeated discussions. The plan of salvation is so simple that one who cannot understand is without reason (Isaiah 35:8; Ephesians 5:17); yet John's visions of what the future holds, no man can fully comprehend. The depth of its riches of knowledge cannot be plumbed (Romans 11:33). The Jewish/Gentile interplay depicted as a grafting into an olive tree has sparked repeated investigation by the best of human minds (Romans 11:16–24).

It is a book unsystematized, and its laws are not set forth in codified statutes; yet its impact on hearts for godliness and goodness and rightness and kindness is unmistakable. Though it commands many specific duties, its focus is on the great principle of love toward God and man. The fact that one Book can be appreciated by both the child and the patriarch indicates a higher than human origin of that Book.

ITS IMPARTIALITY

A third evidence of divine authorship of the Bible is its impartial description of its principal characters. Biographers ordinarily either laud their heroes, minimizing faults, or they overemphasize character defects and misrepresent their subjects. In the Bible, however, there is little of commendation or of condemnation. Usually the reader is the one who assesses the worth

or worthlessness of the one discussed.

In a way quite removed, the Bible sets forth the admirable qualities of Noah and then describes his drunkenness. Like ideal news reporters, Bible writers set forth the excellencies and the sins of David. The Scriptures describe Abraham's deep faith, but they do not hide his falsifying to Pharaoh. The gospel writers must have had strong feelings toward Peter, but their reports simply give untainted facts about him regarding both his devotion to Christ and his denials of Him. The personal ambition of James and John is described with the same vividness as their commitment to Christ.

The Bible writers catered to no one, writing as if they had no favorites, although they were subject to favoritism. Their ability to be impersonal puts them in a realm beyond other biographers and indicates divine guidance.

ITS BREVITY

Another biblical trait pointing toward divine authorship is conciseness. Purely human writers have a continual struggle in their quest for brevity. In this area the sacred penmen have won wide respect. The creation of the universe is vividly portrayed in only thirty-four verses—fewer words than are used in the average newspaper article to tell of a ball game. At least twenty-five hundred years of man's history are recorded in fifty chapters in a single book, the Book of Genesis.

The account of Jesus' baptism requires only five verses, and the stilling of the sea only five. The Transfiguration is described in eight verses, and the account of Jesus' death takes only two chapters. Jesus'

ministry of twelve hundred days is condensed to events of thirty-four days. Stephen, in a one-chapter sermon, set forth nearly two thousand years of history. The death of the first apostle is recorded in the KJV in only eleven words (Acts 12:2).

The human tendency in such narratives is elaboration and wordiness. It would be exceedingly difficult to show restraint and be succinct in telling of such momentous events. A challenge to write a Bible verse in fewer words and at the same time to retain its meaning has not been accepted. The success of Bible writers in condensation without deterioration of material indicates higher than human help.

ITS RESTRAINT

The restraint of Bible writers has made men marvel. The Bible was written for a special purpose, and that purpose was not to satisfy human curiosity. Had they been ordinary writers, the sacred penmen would surely have given details about the identity of Cain's wife, about the place of Moses' burial, about the eighteen silent years of Jesus' life, about Jesus' personal appearance, about the words which He wrote on the ground in John 8:6, 8, about Lazarus' experiences during his four days of death, and about Paul's trip into paradise. Should details of those events become available, even at this late date, they would make newspaper headlines; bestselling books would be published. The fact that Bible writers held to their purpose of giving all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), and did not cater to human curiosity, puts the Bible in a class by itself.

ITS LITERARY EXCELLENCE

The literary excellence of the biblical writings is another characteristic pointing to the superhuman origin of the Bible. Aside from its claims of divinity, the Bible takes first place when considered as a literary composition. One scholar wrote that the "Hebrew prophets exhibit a brilliance in the use of forms" which "gives them a higher rank as poets than any corresponding phenomena in Babylonia or Egypt or elsewhere." The Book of Job "rises high above the parallel specimens in the kindred cultures."

Regarding the New Testament, except for Luke and Paul, the writers apparently were unlearned men (see Acts 4:13). That such men could write books at all is itself a marvel. Few fishermen who had been confined their whole lives to their task would have been able to write anything without committing great faults, but these Bible writers exhibited self-command and self-discipline which continue to hold respect. Literary excellence does not prove the divinity of the Bible, but such a quality is what one would expect from a Book whose origin is in heaven.

ITS PERFECTION

The New Testament claims to be the perfect law (James 1:25), and after two thousand years the claim is still untarnished. Those who live by its teachings find nothing lacking and nothing that can be improved.

A mark of the human origin of anything is that it is improvable. As excellent as were old American school books like *McGuffey's Reader* and *Ray's Blueback Speller*, improvements have long since been made; these textbooks have been replaced. Chemistry books of a generation ago taught that the atom is indivisi-

ble and that transmutation of elements was only an impossible wish of alchemists. Now those chemistry books have become museum pieces.

Generation after generation, the Bible is unchanged and requires no editing. Many have presumed to know more than the Bible, but their new teachings never do for people what the Bible unfailingly accomplishes. If the Bible were of wholly human origin, it would become the first example of any human work never requiring modification, never needing to be updated.

Church creeds, though based on the Bible and penned by scholars, have to be revised over and over again. This is to be expected, since they were not written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit. The fact that the Bible retains freshness and respect in every country and in every age with no revisions makes it unique and requires an explanation.

ITS INDESTRUCTIBILITY

Finally, consider the history which points to super-human protection of the Bible: its amazing ability to exist in spite of the ravages of centuries and in spite of trial by fire. Even when books are not persecuted, only a small percentage survive the generation in which they are written. Uniquely, the Bible presents a freshness and relevance to every new generation.

The nation which produced the Bible also produced other books, but they did not survive. Knowledge about them is available only because of Old Testament references to them (see Numbers 21:14; Joshua 10:13). The surviving Jewish apocryphal books maintain a currency only because of their relation to biblical religion. Someone wrote:

The empire of Caesar is gone; the legions of Rome are smouldering in the dust; the avalanches that Napoleon hurled upon Europe have melted away; the prince of the Pharaohs is fallen; the pyramids they raised to be their tombs are sinking each day into the desert sand; Tyre is a rock for bleaching fishermen's nets; . . . but the Word of God still survives. All things that threatened to extinguish it have only aided it; and it proves every day how transient is the noblest monument that men can build, how enduring is the least word that God has spoken.³

Nations rise and fall, but the Bible lives on. Nero succeeded in killing Paul, but today Nero and his empire are dead. Paul's prison in Rome has ceased to exist, but Paul's Prison Epistles are still living and active.

In A.D. 303, the emperor Diocletian ordered all copies of the Scriptures destroyed. He thought his soldiers and inquisitors were successful; to celebrate his supposed achievement, he had a medal engraved with these words: "*The Christian religion is destroyed and the worship of the gods restored.*" Then, at a place where Bibles had been burned, he erected a monument carrying the inscription "*Extinct is the name of Christians.*" In spite of his efforts, copies of the Scriptures reappeared and multiplied. Twenty years later another Roman emperor, Constantine, began putting Bibles in every church in the empire. The Bible claims indestructibility (1 Peter 1:23), and this victory over the powerful Roman Empire demonstrates that its claim is no idle boast.

Besides physical violence against the Scriptures, unbelievers have made countless attempts to discredit

³Author unknown.

the biblical claims to permanency (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33). The egotistical Voltaire, who died in 1778, predicted that his attacks against the Bible would lead to its extinction within one hundred years. "It took twelve men to start Christianity. One will destroy it," he bragged. However, soon after his death, the British and Foreign Bible Society was founded; it employed Voltaire's writing room as a storeroom for Bibles. The very presses that printed Voltaire's infidel literature were used to print copies of the Bible!

Thomas Paine, who died in 1809, was so proud of his attack on the Bible through his infamous book *Age of Reason* that he boasted, "Fifty years hence, the Bible will be obsolete and forgotten." Again, the same press that printed his book was used to print thousands of Bibles.

No other book has endured such onslaughts as has the Bible. A book purely of human origin certainly could not have survived the vicious attacks that have been brought against the Scriptures.

CONCLUSION

Among admirable qualities of the Bible are its unity, its brilliant simplicity, its impartiality, its brevity, its restraint, its literary excellence, its perfection, and its indestructibility. Some purely human books possess one or more of these eight superior traits, but only one Book has all eight of them. That fact in itself is strong evidence that the Bible is of nonhuman origin.