

Lesson 1:

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

In 1889 a schoolteacher told a ten-year-old boy, "You will never amount to very much." That boy was Albert Einstein.

In 1954 a music manager told a young singer, "You ought to go back to driving a truck." That singer was Elvis Presley.

In 1962 a record company told a group of singers, "We don't like your sound. Groups with guitars are definitely on their way out." They said that to the Beatles.

Many in our modern world have arrogantly claimed that the Bible is an old, outdated, irrelevant book of myths. As we've just seen, though, man is prone to make mistakes. Those who reject the Bible should take the time to look at the evidence for its uniqueness before they come to a verdict.

Uniqueness of the Bible

1. **It is unique in its continuity.** If just 10 people today were picked who were from the same place, born around the same time, spoke the same language, and made about the same amount of money, and were asked to write on just one controversial subject, they would have trouble agreeing with each other. In this respect the Bible stands alone.
 - a. It was written over a period of 1,600 years
 - b. by more than 40 writers from all walks of life.
 - i. Some were fishermen;
 - ii. some were politicians.
 - iii. Others were generals
 - iv. or kings,
 - v. shepherds
 - vi. or historians.
 - c. They were from
 - i. three different continents,
 - ii. and wrote in three different languages.
 - d. They wrote on hundreds of controversial subjects yet they wrote with agreement and harmony.

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- e. They wrote in dungeons, in temples, on beaches, and on hillsides, during peacetime and during war. Yet their words sound like they came from the same source.
 - f. So even though 10 people today couldn't write on one controversial subject and agree, God picked 40 different people to write the Bible—and it stands the test of time.
2. **It is unique in its circulation.** The invention of the printing press in 1450 made it possible to print books in large quantities. The first book printed was the Bible. Since then, the Bible has been read by more people and printed more times than any other book in history.
- a. By 1930, over one billion Bibles had been distributed by Bible societies around the world.
 - b. By 1977, Bible societies alone were printing over 200 million Bibles each year, and this doesn't include the rest of the Bible publishing companies. No one who is interested in knowing the truth can ignore such an important book.
 - c. It is unique in its translation. The Bible has been translated into over 1,400 languages. No other book even comes close.
3. **It is unique in its survival.** In ancient times, books were copied by hand onto manuscripts which were made from parchment and would decay over time. Ancient books are available today only because someone made copies of the originals to preserve them. For example ...
- a. the original writings of Julius Caesar are no longer around. We know what he wrote only by the copies we have. Only 10 copies still exist, and they were made 1,000 years after he died.
 - b. Only 600 copies of Homer's *The Iliad* exist, made 1,300 years after the originals were written.
 - c. No other book has as many copies of the ancient manuscripts as the Bible. In fact, there are over 24,000 copies of New Testament manuscripts, some written within 35 years of the writer's death.
 - d. Being written on material that perishes and having been copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press did not diminish the style, correctness, or existence of the Bible. Compared with other ancient writings, it has more manuscript evidence than any ten pieces of classical literature combined.
4. **It is unique in withstanding attack.** No other book has been so attacked throughout history as the Bible.

- a. In A.D. 300 the Roman emperor Diocletian ordered every Bible burned because he thought that by destroying the Scriptures he could destroy Christianity. Anyone caught with a Bible would be executed. But just 25 years later, the Roman emperor Constantine ordered that 50 perfect copies of the Bible be made at government expense.
- b. The French philosopher Voltaire, a skeptic who destroyed the faith of many people, boasted that within 100 years of his death, the Bible would disappear from the face of the earth. Voltaire died in 1728, but the Bible lives on.
 - i. The irony of history is that 50 years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society moved into his former house and used his printing presses to print thousands of Bibles.
- c. The Bible has also survived criticism. No book has been more attacked for its accuracy. And yet archeologists are proving every year that the Bible's detailed descriptions of historic events are correct.
 - i. "Infidels for eighteen hundred years have been refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today solid as a rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved and cherished and read today than ever before. ...When the French monarch proposed the persecution of the Christians in his dominion, an old statesman and warrior said to him, 'Sire, the Church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.' So the hammers of the infidels have been pecking away at this book for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures. If the book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers have tried their hand at it; they die and the book still lives." (H.L Hastings)

5. It is unique in its influence on surrounding literature.

- a. "If every Bible in any considerable city were destroyed, the Book could be restored in all its essential parts from the quotations on the shelves of the city public library. These are works, covering almost all the great literary writers, devoted especially to showing how much the Bible has influenced them." (Cleveland B. McAfee, The Greatest English Classic)
- b. "From the Apostolic Fathers dating from A.D. 95 to modern times is one great literary river inspired by the Bible –Bible dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias, Bible lexicons, Bible atlases, and Bible geographies. These may be taken as a starter. Then at random, we may mention the case bibliographies around theology, religious education, hymnology, missions, the biblical languages, church history, religious biography, devotional works, commentaries, philosophy of religion,

evidences, apologetics, and on and on. There seems to be an endless number." (Bernard Ramm)

6. **It is unique in its archaeological support.** No other ancient book is questioned or maligned like the Bible. Critics looking for the flyspeck in the masterpiece allege that there was a long span between the time the events in the New Testament occurred and when they were recorded. They claim another gap exists archaeologically between the earliest copies made and the autographs of the New Testament. In reality, the alleged spaces and so called gaps exist only in the minds of the critics.

a. Manuscript evidence for other ancient writings:

- i. Aristotle's Ode to Poetics was written between 384 and 322 B.C. The earliest copy of this work dates A.D. 1100, and there are only forty-nine extant manuscripts. The gap between the original writing and the earliest copy is 1,400 years.
- ii. There are only seven extant manuscripts of Plato's Tetralogies, written 427–347 B.C. The earliest copy is A.D. 900—a gap of over 1,200 years.

b. Manuscript evidence for the New Testament.

- i. Jesus was crucified about A.D. 30.
 - ii. The New Testament was written between A.D. 48 and 95.
 - iii. The oldest manuscripts date to the last quarter of the first century, and the second oldest A.D. 125. This gives us a narrow gap of thirty-five to forty years from the originals written by the apostles.
 - iv. From the early centuries, we have some 5,300 Greek manuscripts of the entire New Testament.
 - v. Altogether, including Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic, we have a whopping 24,633 texts of the ancient New Testament to confirm the wording of the Scriptures.
 - vi. So the bottom line is, there was no great period between the events of the New Testament and the New Testament writings. Nor is there a great time lapse between the original writings and the oldest copies. With the great body of manuscript evidence, it can be proved, beyond a doubt, that the New Testament says exactly the same things today as it originally did nearly 2,000 years ago.
- c. Other writings that corroborate the New Testament. Critics also charge that there are no ancient writings about Jesus outside the New Testament. This is another ridiculous claim.

- i. Writings confirming His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection include Flavius Josephus (A.D. 93),
 - ii. the Babylonian Talmud (A.D. 70–200),
 - iii. Pliny the Younger's letter to the Emperor Trajan (approx. A.D. 100),
 - iv. the Annals of Tacitus (A.D. 115–117),
 - v. Mara Bar Serapion (sometime after A.D. 73),
 - vi. and Suetonius' Life of Claudius and Life of Nero (A.D. 120).
7. **It is unique in how it was assembled.** Another point of contention arises when Bible critics have knowingly or unknowingly misled people by implying that Old and New Testament books were either excluded from or added into the canon of Scripture at the great ecumenical councils of A.D. 336, 382, 397, and 419.
- a. In fact, one result of these gatherings was to confirm the Church's belief that the books already in the Bible were divinely inspired. Therefore, the Church, at these meetings, neither added to nor took away from the books of the Bible.
 - i. At that time, the thirty-nine Old Testament books had already been accepted,
 - ii. and the New Testament, as it was written, simply grew up with the ancient Church. Each document, being accepted as it was penned in the first century, was then passed on to Christians of the next century.
 - iii. So, this foolishness about the Roman Emperor Constantine dropping books from the Bible is simply uneducated rumor.
8. **It is unique in its fulfilled prophecies.** Prophecies from the Old and New Testaments that have been fulfilled also add credibility to the Bible.
- a. The Scriptures predicted the rise and fall of great empires like Greece and Rome (Daniel 2:39, 40),
 - b. It foretold the rise of a future leader by name 150 years before it happened (Isaiah 45:1). This leader, Cyrus, was also part of another amazing prophecy in Daniel (gave decree to rebuild Jerusalem - Daniel 9:25).
 - c. The book of Daniel prophesied regarding the coming Messiah 483 years later. Jesus fulfilled this prophecy to the day.
 - d. The Bible foretold the birthplace of Christ, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14).
 - e. The Bible foretold that Christ would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13), die by crucifixion (a method of execution not yet used - Psalm 22), be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9).

- f. Jesus predicted the destruction of both Jerusalem and the Jewish temple. This came true in A.D. 70 when the Roman commander Titus destroyed the entire city.
- g. And hundreds and hundreds more (some say about 2000 so far).
- h. Jesus promised that every part of the Bible would eventually be shown to be true:
"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled." (Matthew 5:18 NKJV)

9. It is unique regarding its claims for its inspiration. The Bible claims to be God's only written revelation.

- a. It claims that it is, in its entirety, the "inspired by God". (2 Timothy 3:16)
- b. It claims that every word is pure (i.e. no mistakes). (Proverbs 30:5)
- c. It claims it was written under the Holy Spirit's leadership and guidance. (2 Peter 1:20-21)
- d. It claims that everything it says about everything is right. (Psalm 119:128)
- e. It makes many other supporting and related claims to those listed above.

The Obvious Conclusion

These facts do not prove that the bible is the Word of God, but they DO prove that it is absolutely unique (different from all others, having no like or equal).

Anyone seeking truth ought to consider a book that has all of these unique qualifications.

Content and Layout of the Bible

1. General information.

- a. The Bible consists of 66 different "books" (includes "letters") divided up into two volumes: the Old and New Testaments.
 - i. The word "testament" can also be translated "covenant".
 - ii. The Old Testament is related to the original covenant God made with man; the New Testament is related to the new covenant God made with man and is the fulfillment of the old covenant.
- b. Each book is divided into chapters and verses for easy reference. These divisions were added by humans and are not divinely inspired (though extremely helpful).
- c. There are 1189 chapters in the Bible, 929 in the Old Testament and 260 chapters in the New Testament; 31,103 verses in the Bible, just over 23,000 in the O.T. and almost 8,000 in the N.T. (23,145-Old, 7,958-New); 774,746 words in the Bible.

2. Old Testament

- a. The O.T. covers the time period before Christ came, from the creation of the world to about 400 B.C., a history of God's people and much more.
- b. The Old Testament can be divided into FOUR major parts:
 - i. "The Law", from creation to Israel as a people in preparing to enter the promised land (Israel), first five books of the Bible, Genesis-Deuteronomy; 25% of the O.T.
 - ii. History, Israel enters the promised land, kingdom established / divided / lost, Israel in captivity and returning to promised land, Joshua-Esther; 33% of the O.T.
 - iii. Poetry / Wisdom writings, Israel's worship and God's wisdom, Job-Song of Solomon; 15% of the O.T.
 - iv. Prophecy, writings of the prophets God sent to Israel to warn them and encourage them during the kingdom and exile years; Isaiah-Malachi; 26% of the O.T.

3. Between the Testaments

- a. There was about a 400 year gap between the Old and New Testaments.
- b. There were no prophets or revelation during this time period.

- c. This period included Socrates and Aristotle and saw the rise of Alexander the Great and the worldwide spread of Greek culture. The Great Wall of China was built during these years. Rome became a world empire that controlled Israel by the time Christ came.

4. New Testament

- a. The New Testament covers the time period from just before Christ was born through His death and through the lives of His apostles, probably from about 3 B.C. to near 70 A.D. (mid-90's A.D. at the latest).
- b. The New Testament can also be divided into FOUR major parts:
 - i. The Gospels - the life and teachings of Christ, Matthew-John; 45% of the N.T.
 - ii. History - the ministry of the apostles after Christ left the earth, Acts; 14% of the N.T.
 - iii. Letters ("epistles") - the letters written to the churches and individuals, mostly by Paul, but also by James, Peter, John, and Jude; Romans - Jude; 35% of the N.T.
 - iv. Prophecy - the only book of prophecy in the N.T., Revelation; 6% of the N.T.

5. Overarching Subject of Scripture

- a. "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and **these are they which TESTIFY OF ME.**" (Jesus' words, John 5:39)
- b. In some way or another, every part of the Bible is connected to and about the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - i. Either directly: pointing to Him in the future, describing Him in the present, or pointing back to Him in the past.
 - ii. Or indirectly: the impact and significance of what He was going to do in the future or what He did in the past; or symbolically through the tabernacle, priesthood, persons, stories, themes, etc. of the Bible.
- c. Bible study takes on a new richness and depth when it is seen through the lens of Jesus Christ.