

Questions About the Bible

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(excerpted from "When Skeptics Ask")

The Bible has many faces. It can be studied as literature and explored as a set of stories and poetic expressions, or viewed as history which tells us of the beginnings and growth of God's people. For some it is a guide to archeology, pointing the way to buried civilizations. There is a place and a purpose for each of those aspects, but at the basis of all, the Bible is the Word of God. It is God's message to a rebelling world of how it can return to Him. It is a love letter from God to us. But do we take this claim seriously? Or are we interested only in one aspect?

How important is the Bible? The earlier chapters of this book have shown that we can know that God exists, what He is like, how He can overcome evil, that He can perform miracles, and that Jesus is God without ever referring to the Bible as a sacred book. However, it must be said that while these arguments don't rely on the Bible, they are guided by it. They take the path of reason to reach these conclusions, but they are directed by the revelation. Without the Word of God, there is no guarantee that anyone would ever reach these conclusions. Even if they did, there might not be many who found them, and there is no telling how long it would take or how much error might be included along the way. Also, reason can take us only one step farther. That step leads us to the Scriptures as God's Word. If we are to have any knowledge of God's grace and love, then we must have the Word of God. The big question is, "*Is the Bible really a revelation from God?*" That is the question we will try to answer in this chapter.

How Do We Know That the Bible Came From God?

We know that the Bible came from God for one very simple reason: Jesus told us so. It is on His authority, as the God of the universe, that we are sure that the Bible is the Word of God. He confirmed the Old Testament's authority in His teaching, and He promised an authoritative New Testament through His disciples. The Son of God Himself assures us that the Bible is the Word of God.

Jesus Confirmed the Authority of the Old Testament

Jesus spoke of the whole Old Testament (Matt. 22:29), its central divisions (Luke 16:16), its individual books (Matt. 22:43; 24:15), its events (Matt. 19:4-5; Luke 17:27), and even its letters and parts of letters (Matt. 5:18) as having divine authority. He called the Scriptures the Word of God (John 10:35). He said that they had been written by men moved by the Spirit when He said, "David himself said in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:36) and refers to events "spoken of through Daniel the prophet" (Matt. 24:15). In such statements He confirms the authorship of the most often disputed books, like Moses' writings (Mark 7:10), Isaiah (v. 6), Daniel, and the Psalms. He also refers to the very miracles which critics reject as historical events. He cites the Creation (Luke 11:51), Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4-5), Noah and the Flood (Matt. 24:37-39), Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 10:12), and Jonah and the great fish (Matt. 12:39-41). He said, "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of the letter of the Law to fail" (Luke 16:17). The fact that He considered the Scripture to be the final authority is seen clearly in His temptations, when

He defends Himself from Satan's attacks three times with the phrase, "It is written" (Matt. 4:4ff).

"Here," Jesus was saying, "is the permanent, unchangeable witness of the eternal God, committed to writing for our instruction." Such it appears to have been to Jesus' inmost soul, quite apart from any convenience to Him in controversy. In the hour of utmost crisis and at the moment of death, words of the Scripture came to His lips: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Ps. 22:1; Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34, NIV) and "Into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Ps. 31:5; Luke 23:46, NIV).¹

Jesus Promised the New Testament

Jesus told His disciples just before He left them, "These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:25-26). Jesus added, "when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (16:13). These statements promise that the teachings of Jesus will be remembered and understood, and that additional truths would be given to the apostles so that the church could be established. They set the stage for the apostolic era which began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff) and continued until the last of the apostles died (John, about A.D. 100).

During this period, the apostles became the agents of the complete and final revelation of Jesus Christ and He continued "to do and teach" through them (Acts 1:1). They were given the "keys to the kingdom" (Matt. 16:19) and by their hands did believers receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-15; 19:1-6). The early church built its doctrines and practices on "the foundation of the apostles" (Eph. 2:20). It followed the "apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42) and was bound by decisions of the apostolic council (Acts 15). Even though Paul had received his apostleship by a revelation from God, his credentials were confirmed by the apostles in Jerusalem.

Some of the New Testament writers were not apostles, though. How can we explain their authority? They used the apostolic message which was "confirmed to us by those who heard" (Heb. 2:3). Mark worked closely with Peter (1 Peter 5:13); James and Jude were closely associated with the apostles in Jerusalem and were probably Jesus' brothers; Luke was a companion of Paul (2 Tim. 4:11) who interviewed many eyewitnesses to produce his account (Luke 1:1-4). Paul's writings are even equated with Scripture by Peter (2 Peter 3:15-16). In each case (with the exception of Hebrews; we don't know for sure who wrote that book), there is a definite link between the writer and the apostles who gave them information (cf. Heb. 2:3).

Now, if Jesus, who was God in the flesh and always spoke the truth, said that the Old Testament was the Word of God and that the New Testament would be written by His apostles and prophets as the sole authorized agents for His message, then our entire Bible is proven to be from God. We have it on the best of authority—Jesus Christ Himself.

1. John Wenham, "Christ's View of Scripture" in *Inerrancy*, ed. By Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), pp. 15-16.

