

“The Most Unique Book in All the World”

Various passages

The book that I am holding here in my hands is the most unique book in human history. It is one of the oldest books in the world, and despite its ancient age, it is still a modern bestseller. Tyrants have burned it, scholars have dissected it, and God’s people cherish it. It is the most quoted, the most published, the most translated, and the most influential book that has ever existed.

Over the next couple of weeks, I hope to answer questions such as:

- What is the Bible?
- How do we know it is the Word of God?
- How did we get the Bible?

To begin with, no other book on earth can **compare** with the Bible. It stands alone from all the other books that have ever been written because it alone is the very Word of God with the power to transform individual lives and entire cultures. It is the truth of God that has been revealed by God to humanity. Because of sin, we never would have stumbled upon truth by ourselves. We need a revelation of God of Himself. God had to speak into our world that is deafened through sin.

We ache to hear the voice of God because our souls are uniquely shaped to respond to God’s voice. We’ve been made in God’s image. And even if we don’t recognize it, we were created with a yearning for divine revelation. God took the initiative to communicate His truth, to shine the light of truth into our darkness. It is not by coincidence that, thousands of years ago beginning with early human history, God called a particular people to record His words in a way that they would be preserved and available even after the memories of His miraculous

works faded. God began to inspire a book, a written record that would reveal who He is, who we are, what our problem is, and how we can be saved.

The book that you hold in your hand wasn't an afterthought, nor is it strictly the product of human imagination. Even before God separated light from darkness He had already determined that He would reveal Himself through spoken words and written words. His very first act of creation was to speak light into existence!

The Bible is the revealed outline of the plan of God from eternity past in which God spoke in real time and space to real people. The palmist said:

Psalm 119:89—“Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.”

What do we mean when we refer to the Bible as God's Word? Two things to remember as we begin...

The Word of God as a PERSON

In John 1, Jesus Christ is referred to in Scripture as the “Word” who was in the beginning with God, and the “Word” who was and is God. He is the divine ‘Logos’ or reason and rationale behind the universe. He is the wisdom behind creation itself, the One through whom all things came into being. And He is also the One who is upholding all things by His Word of power.

In Revelation 19:13, the apostle John sees the risen Lord Jesus in heaven and says, “The name by which He is called is The Word of God.” Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh who came to dwell among us.

Its God the Son who in His person as well as in His words has the distinct role of communicating the character of God to us and expressing the will of God for us.

The Word of God as SPEECH

There are times in Scripture where we see God speaking directly, or speaking to various persons such as Adam or Abraham, or speaking through the prophets and revealing His will to them. This comes in the form of:

- God's decrees

Sometimes God's words take the form of powerful decrees that cause events to happen or even cause things to come into being. Evidence of this is seen in the act of creation itself.

Genesis 1:3 - "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light."

The psalmist tells us in Psalm 33 that it was by the word of the Lord that the heavens were made. These powerful, creative words from God are often referred to as His decrees.

A 'decree' of God is a word of God that causes something to happen. These include not only the events of the original creation, but also the continuing existence of all things.

Hebrews 1:2-3 - "In these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the Word of His power."

- God's words of personal address

In the Bible, we read of God sometimes communicating with people on earth by speaking directly to them. Examples of this are found all throughout Scripture. In Genesis, we read of God giving specific commands to Adam. After their sin in chapter 3, He speaks to the serpent, to Eve, and to Adam. Another example found in Exodus 20 and the giving of the commands.

In the New Testament, at the baptism of Jesus, God the Father speaks with a voice from heaven and says, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Wayne Grudem - *“In these and several other instances where God spoke words of personal address to individual people it was clear to the hearers that these were the actual words of God: they were hearing God’s very voice, and they were therefore hearing words that had absolute divine authority and that were absolutely trustworthy. To disbelieve or disobey any of these words would have been to disbelieve or disobey God and therefore would have been sin.”*

How we approach the Word of God reveals our approach to the God of the Word!

- *God’s words through human lips*

We frequently see in Scripture where God raises up a prophet through whom He speaks. God tells Moses in Deuteronomy 18 what this involved.

Deuteronomy 18:18-20 - **“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to My words that he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak in My name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.”**

God makes a similar statement to the prophet Jeremiah and says that He put His own words in Jeremiah’s mouth according to 1:9. We should point out the fact that anyone who claimed to be speaking for God, but had not received a genuine message from God, was always severely punished.

Claiming to speak for God, yet misrepresenting God, is a serious offense to a holy God. Preachers and teachers must beware!

- God's words in written form

In addition to God's words of decree, God's words of personal address, and God's words spoken through the lips of human beings, we also find in Scripture several instances where God's words were commanded to be put in written form. The first of these is found in the narrative of the giving of the two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments.

God Himself engraved His words to Moses on those stone tablets.

Deuteronomy 31:9-13 reveal further writing that was done by Moses, as it says Moses wrote down the law that he was given by the Lord God. Joshua was commanded by God to write down further truth that was given (Josh. 24). To disbelieve these words that were written down was to disbelieve God Himself.

Jeremiah 30:2 - "Write in a book all the words..."

In the New Testament, Jesus promises His disciples that the Holy Spirit who would come would bring to their remembrance the words which He had spoken. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:37 that his words are a command of the Lord.

2 Peter 1:21 - "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Benefits of having God's Word preserved and written down:

- accurate preservation of God's words for subsequent generations; without this the truth would become lost from one generation to the next

- opportunity for repeated inspection of words that are written down permits careful study and discussion, which leads to better understanding and more complete obedience
- accessible to many more people than they are when preserved merely through memory or oral interpretation

The focus of our study is the Word of God in its written form, the Bible. In fact, all that God wants us to know, He has revealed right here in these 66 books. We are not add to this Word, and we must not ever take away from it.

The Bible, the only written Word of God, is the only form available for study, for public inspection, for repeated examination, and is the basis for our discussion. It tells us about and points us to the Word of God as a person—Jesus Christ—whom we do not now have present in bodily form on earth. We are no longer able to observe and imitate His life and teachings firsthand, which is why He gave us His written Word.

It is profitable for us to study God's words as we have them written down and preserved in Scripture. In fact, it is His written Word that He commands us to study and mediate upon day and night. This is so we can understand His truth and do His will.

Joshua 1:8 - "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success."

It is the Word of God in the form of written Scripture that is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. (see 2 Tim. 3:16)

QUESTION #1 — *Why is it important that God gave us His Word in written form?*

When we consider God's Word in its written form, the Bible, there are several crucial things we need to understand about its uniqueness. In other words, there is nothing else like it. There no other Word of God other than the one we have sitting on the table in front of us. While it is true that there are other religious books, none of these are authoritative and binding like Scripture is. Other world religions claim to have superior scriptures, but their claims are false. The Bible is unique and unparalleled.

Reason #1 — The Bible is unique in its ORIGIN

First, a bit of a history lesson...

The English word 'Bible' comes from the Latin word 'biblia' (books) which descended from a Greek word 'byblos.' That Greek word 'byblos' described papyrus, an ancient writing material that was made from reeds that grew along the Nile River in Egypt. In ancient days long before the printing press, people would stitch or paste together pieces of papyri and roll them together to create scrolls used for writing.

No later than the first century, papyri and other writing materials began to be stacked and folded to form what were known as a 'codex,' which was the predecessor of our modern book. As codexes grew in popularity, the meaning of 'biblia' broadened to include both scrolls and codexes. The Jews were the first to use this term to refer to their writings. The early Christians sickly picked up the same word to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures together. Ever since then, the word 'Bible' has referred to the collection of ancient texts that make up this book that we now hold in our hands. Obviously, your Bible is a thick book made up of thousands of words and pages, written in ink, written on

paper, and bound in custom leather. It is made up of 66 books divided up under two major divisions. It was Tertullian in the early third century who used the terms “Old Testament” and “New Testament” to distinguish the Hebrew Scriptures from the Christian Scriptures, and we’ll talk more about that a little bit later on.

You say, “Ok, that’s great. But where did the Bible come from?”

In short answer, it came from God to us! Even right now as we speak, God is revealing His truth to all people at every moment in a ‘general’ way. In other words, God has revealed Himself to all of humanity through creation itself. This point is made in Psalm 19 as well as in Romans 1. The heavens above and the world around me may in fact declare God’s glory and power, but they do not declare His will or His plan of salvation. God has revealed these marvelous truths only in His Word. Thus, humanity needed ‘special’ revelation from God. God chose to reveal Himself in particular ways to particular people. It was for this reason that God chose Abraham and his descendants, the Hebrew nation.

Romans 3:2—“...the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.”

Beginning at least as early as Moses, God began to unveil His His truth in written propositions, and these words were so precious that no one was to every change them. This is emphasized repeatedly through Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32. In the centuries that followed God’s initial written revelation, men continued to write as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:20-21—“Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Think of what those inspired writings involved:

- some chronicled historical events
- some composed psalms and proverbs
- some included prophecies that called God's people to return to Him

Beyond this, there is a single purpose behind each of these inspired writings that make up the Bible. Down through the centuries, God was breathing out words of Scripture in such a way that the writers were revealing a greater message than they themselves could clearly see. Every written word of the Old Testament served to highlight humanity's need for a living Word who was yet to come. The written Word points us to our need for Christ.

John 5:39—“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me.”

Taken together, all the writings of the Old Testament testified in perfect agreement that it was only through faith in a future Savior that anyone's sins could be forgiven. This Savior would be God's greatest revelation of Himself, the living Word of God sent to earth in human flesh.

It is this point that the writer of Hebrews makes as he begins his letter...

Hebrews 1:1-2—“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.”

One of the greatest statements that the Bible makes about itself can be found in Isaiah 55. In this passage, pay careful attention to what the Lord says about the importance of His authoritative and successful Word:

Isaiah 55:10-11 - “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

This serves as an unconditional guarantee, one that is still good even thousands of years after it was originally given. No other book or piece of literature in the world even comes close to comparing itself or competing with this one. The Bible is God’s Word, the written revelation of Himself to humanity.

So the Bible is made up of 66 books that are Spirit-inspired and penned by many different people over a period of about 16 centuries. They are words from God that have been given for the express purpose of pointing fallen humanity to Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior. Yet if we are to gain a true understanding of the Bible, we have to move beyond knowing merely what the Bible is made up of, such as its composition. We need to know what it is.

Timothy Paul Jones — *“In a fantasy novel by C.S. Lewis, a character named Eustace looks at a star and points out, ‘In our world...a star is a huge ball of flaming gas.’ Another individual corrects him by saying, ‘That is not what a star is, but only what it is made of.’ To understand the stars in the world of Narnia, Eustace needed to know not only what stars were made of but also what they were.”*

Everything that we are going to talk about over the next few weeks will hinge on the fact that this book came from God. Scripture is unique because it is not the word of man, but of God. Some people will challenge this claim because they say their book is Scripture or on the same level as Scripture. For instance, Mormons make this claim about the Book of Mormon, and other cults make the same boast about the writings of their founders. Islam makes the same boast about the Koran.

The problem is that anyone can step forward and claim that he or she has received a revelation from God. So how do we know which claim to believe? Thankfully, we don't have to guess, because there are stringent tests that any writing must meet to be validated as the true Word of God.

- *Jesus testified to the Bible's uniqueness*

The most important proof of the Bible's uniqueness is the testimony of Jesus to the Scriptures. The main reason we know the Bible is God's Word is that Jesus said so. He used the word 'Scriptures' on a number of occasions to describe the Old Testament writings, whether Law or Prophets.

Jesus had a very high view of Scripture.

He also made a statement in the Sermon on the Mount that no one can ignore:

Matthew 5:18 - "Truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

To reject the Bible is to reject Jesus Himself, since it is the Bible that speaks of Him. Jesus said so in Luke 24:27!

- *The Bible testifies to its own uniqueness*

Hundreds of times in the Old Testament the prophets said ‘the word of the Lord’ came to them. Many other times God spoke directly through the patriarchs or the prophets to His people, who never failed to acknowledge that it was God who spoke.

A remarkable statement of God’s own uniqueness:

Isaiah 43:10-11 - “Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and there is no savior besides Me.”

If God is unique among all the so-called gods that man has come up with, then God’s Word is unique as well. A classic argument for the Bible’s validity is the way that the Word so naturally and continually—without the slightest self-consciousness or apology—refers to itself as the Word of God.

Another proof of the Bible’s uniqueness is the very nature of the truths that it teaches. The Bible gives unmistakable evidence that its thoughts come from God and not man. For instance:

Isaiah 55:8-9 - “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

That is a very strong claim! If the Bible is indeed unique, then its thinking should be so far higher than our thinking that we could never figure it out on our own.

This is exactly the case with Scripture.

Such an argument may not satisfy the skeptics, but the fact is that the doctrines of Scripture, such as man’s total ruin by sin and his helplessness to save himself, the incarnation of God Himself to save humanity—these are utterly apart from

any other religious teachings on earth. That's because they do not have earth as their origin, but heaven itself.

Someone has well said that the Bible is the only book that has the courage to tell us the truth about ourselves.

- *The Bible's perfect unity testifies to its uniqueness*

The Bible is remarkably unique in the way that it has come down to us. The unity of its message is nothing short of a miracle, given the fact that it was written over a period of 1600 years by more than 40 different people, who lived in several different countries with different cultures and came from every kind of background you can imagine.

The 'scarlet thread' of Christ our Redeemer runs all the way through the Bible—from the first prophecy of a Savior and God's covering of Adam and Eve to the last chapter of Revelation that invites the redeemed to spend eternity with God. The Bible's message is consistent and unified from beginning to end.

Psalm 119:160—“The sum of Your word is truth.”

- *History testifies to the Bible's uniqueness*

Think about the Bible as a work of historical literature for just a minute. The point is that if people accepted the same standards of validity for the Bible that they readily accept for other historical documents, they would have to admit that the Bible is the most widely attested book ever written. One test of the validity of any historical record is its proximity to the life of the person whose history it records. One reason the history of George Washington is considered reliable is that much of it was written during his lifetime by people who did see and know him, and more of it was written in the years soon after his death.

The principle is this—the closer the historical record is to the actual person's life, the more valid it becomes.

The very latest part of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, was written around 90 AD, approximately sixty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The writer was an eyewitness of Jesus' life, the apostle John, so that gives the record added weight.

All of this is amazing testimony to the Bible's trustworthiness. By comparison, some of the famous writings of antiquity, such as those that tell of people like Julius Caesar, were recorded hundreds of years after the events they describe. Many critics attack the early dates for various books of the New Testament, because they know that if they admit the Gospels and Epistles were written so soon after Jesus' life and death—mostly by eyewitnesses—their case against the Bible is severely weakened.

Another test of the Bible's historical validity is the number of existing manuscripts that corroborate it. We are told that ten copies exist of the account of Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon, one of the most famous events of ancient history. Yet the fact of his crossing has never been seriously questioned by historians.

But the Bible puts that record, and almost any other historical record, to shame!

We have about 5,000 copies of the New Testament in existence from fragments of a single verse to entire books.

These copies all agree on the basic doctrines of the faith and the important facts of Jesus' life, although there are many differences of words and the order of events. This kind of record is unheard of in historical circles, yet the Bible continues to come under attack for one reason—UNBELIEF.

Reason #2—The Bible is unique in its COMPOSITION

The Bible has two major parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The first 39 books of the Bible that make up the OT were written and preserved or more than 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus. The New Testament was written after His ministry.

There are four major divisions in both the OT:

- The Pentateuch (5 books)
- History (12 books)
- Poetry (5 books)
- Prophets (17 books—5 major, 12 minor)

There are also four divisions that make up the 27 books of the NT:

- Gospels (4 books)
- History (1 book)
- Epistles (21 books)
- Prophecy (1 book)

The Bible is composed of 66 books, 1189 chapters, and 31,102 verses. The earliest copies of the Bible didn't have chapter and verse divisions. These were added later for the sake of convenience. It was Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is credited with dividing the Bible into chapters in the year 1227. Individual verses were added about 300 years later in 1551 by a printer in Paris whose name was Robert Stephanus. You can thank those two guys for being able to conveniently find your place on Sunday morning...

Reason #3—The Bible is unique in its CLAIM

A book that is unique in its origin should also be unique in its content and in what it teaches, and this is true of the Bible because it teaches what no other book does. The Bible claims to teach the whole truth about God, man, creation, sin, salvation, and many other subjects. Consider:

- *Only the Bible teaches about a triune God*

Other religious books may teach that there is a God, but only the Bible teaches that God is a triune Being. The Word of God is unique in affirming that God is one in three—three distinct persons who share the same divine essence. (Matt. 28:19)

We know the persons of the Godhead are distinct because of statements like this made by Jesus:

John 5:17 - “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”

John 14:26 - “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 have said to you...I am going to the Father.”

John 10:30 - “I and the Father are one.”

- *Only the Bible teaches the divine truth about Jesus*

Jesus testified to the truth of Scripture, and the Scripture also testifies to the truth about Jesus. The Bible’s teaching of Christ’s virgin birth, sinless life as perfect Man and eternal God in a human body, atoning death, and triumphant resurrection are enough to set this Book apart from all the others. The Bible presents Jesus as the unique God-Man, totally unlike anyone else in human

history. One minute He was hungry because He was Man, but the next minute He was creating enough food to feed 5,000 people because He is God. He slept because He was tired, yet He also raised people from the dead. He died on the cross because He was Man, yet He stepped out of the grave because He is God.

John 7:46 - “Never has a man spoken the way this Man speaks.”

- *Only the Bible teaches the whole truth about man*

The Bible’s teaching about the origin and nature of humanity also sets it completely apart. Other religious writings have their stories and myths about how the human race began, but the Bible is alone in portraying man as not only the unique creation of God, but as utterly ruined by sin and completely helpless even to improve himself, incapable of saving himself, apart from God’s own intervention. Because it is the revealed truth of God, the Bible explains and probes the depth of human nature in a way no other book does. The testimony of countless people is that even though they thought they were reading the Bible, they realized that the Bible was reading them. The reason for this is that the Bible is alive!

Hebrews 4:12 - “For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

The Bible goes as deep into a person as you can go.

- *Only the Bible teaches the whole truth about salvation*

Every other religion in the world known to humanity tells you what you must do to make yourself acceptable to God. But only the Bible tells you what God has already done to save you.

There are really only two kinds of religions in the world—the kind in which you do your best to reach up to God, and the kind in which God gave His best to reach down to you. The Bible is unique in its message that salvation is by God’s grace through faith alone in God’s Son. (Faith vs. Works)

- *Only the Bible teaches history in advance*

The phrase ‘teaching history in advance’ may sound like an oxymoron, and it would be for any other book but the Bible. The Word of God teaches us about history hundreds of years before it happens—this is prophecy.

If we have no other validation of Scripture but its fulfilled prophecies, we would still be on very solid ground.

There have been many so-called prophets in history, and some of them seemed to make some accurate predictions. But the Bible’s standard is 100% accuracy, whether the prophecy is one hundred or five hundred years in advance of its fulfillment. For example, the prophecy that Jesus would be born in the village of Bethlehem was written about seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. Its fulfillment is recorded in Matthew 2:5-6.

No prophet in any holy book has ever claimed to prophesy the future on the scale of the Bible. The Bible is unique in origin and unique in claim. Notice also:

Reason #4—The Bible is unique in its IMPACT

Consider the incredible impact that the Bible has had on the world, an impact that is unlike any other book in history. The Bible has transformed entire cultures and peoples. It has brought blessing and light wherever it has been welcomed.

I love the story of the unbelieving anthropologist who visited a primitive tribe that had accepted the gospel, seeking evidence Christianity. The chief told the

scientist that he knew Christianity was true. When his visitor asked the chief how he knew that, he replied, “Because if it weren’t, we would eat you.”

Our country is far from perfect, but perhaps more than any other nation, many of our laws and ideas were intentionally based on the truth of God’s Word. And even though our nation has strayed far from God, His Word still has a profound impact on our culture and ways of thinking.

Reason #5—The Bible is unique in its PRESERVATION

The Bible has survived several thousands of years of scrutiny and hostile rejection, even though kings and powers and thinkers have been trying to destroy it for centuries.

Think about it...

How many books have not only survived for several thousand years, but are still being read, debated, and sold around the world today? I can think of only one.

Bible societies committed to the distribution of God’s Word tell us that when they go into a country where Scripture is scarce, people stand in line for hours and days just to receive a copy.

(illus. of Video of group opening Bibles)

Imagine people passing around any portion of the Bible they can get their hands on and memorize all they can. Would to God that we demonstrate this same measure of hunger for God’s Word! Our lives, our homes, and our churches would be radically different.

No book in history has been preserved like the Bible. Of course, why wouldn’t it be if God is its Author? He is going to take very special care of His perfect Word.

Nations have outlawed it, tried to destroy every copy of it, and have murdered people for translating and printing it.

Psalm 119:89 - “Forever, O Lord, Your Word is firmly fixed in the heavens.”

Isaiah 40:8 - “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever.”