

Is the Bible From God?

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This morning, we are back to our brief series of lessons with the goal of strengthening our faith. We started last week with some reminders as to why we believe in God. We looked at the Law of Cause and Effect (the idea that every effect must have an adequate cause), and we studied some reasons why we believe that God is the only sufficient cause of everything we see around us. We then looked at the idea that Design Demands a Designer. We looked at some evidence of intelligent design just in the animal world, and we used that to strengthen our faith in God. And then we looked at the existence of morality, and the idea that morality itself could not have evolved on its own.

This morning, as we remind ourselves that we are living in a world more similar to the crowd in Athens in Acts 17 than to the crowd in Jerusalem in Acts 2, I want us to move on. You might remember that those in the crowd in Acts 2 were Jews who believed in God and trusted his word; so, Peter opened the word of God and pointed out how those passages applied to Jesus. In Athens, though, those pagan philosophers did not believe in God or his word; so, Paul had to back things up a bit. He had to start by arguing for the existence of God, and instead of quoting scripture, Paul quoted one of their own poets. He had to start by establishing that there is a God. Here in Madison, we are Athens. Often, quoting the Bible to people has no effect whatsoever. So, like Paul, we often need to back up, like he did, and start with the assumption that most people in the world around us do not yet believe in God at all.

The next logical step in this process is to establish that the Bible is God's word, so the question is: Is the Bible from God? And I am thankful that Josh has led us in a number of songs about the word of God. Most of us in this room believe what we've been singing. We believe that the Bible is the word of God. But, for those who doubt and for those who might not share this belief, I'd like to give some reasons this morning. And for most of us, this is something of a reminder. We've studied much of this before, but we need to remember. Why, then, do we believe that the Bible is from God?

- I. **One of the first and most significant reasons why we believe the Bible is from God is that THE BIBLE IS A SUPERNATURALLY PERFECT BOOK.**

In other words, the Bible is such a perfect document that its perfection would not be possible without divine intervention. And the Bible does CLAIM to be from God, which we would certainly expect in a book that is

from God. This doesn't prove anything if we don't already believe the Bible, but as you can see on the wall up here, Paul says that ***"All scripture is inspired by God..."*** That word ***"inspired,"*** refers to the Bible's claim that it was "exhaled" by God. It is a "God-breathed" document. And when we look at it, we find qualities that support this claim, starting with the fact that the Bible is supernaturally perfect.

Sometimes we think of the Bible as a book, and it is. The word Bible means book. But the Bible is actually a collection of books. The Bible is like a library. The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by 40 different authors over a period of roughly 1500 years. The authors wrote from several different continents, they wrote in three different languages, they came from vastly different social and economic backgrounds. Some were shepherds, some were kings, some were highly educated, some were commercial fishermen, and at least one trimmed trees for a living. Some were Greek, some were Roman, some were wanderers and had no nation to call their own. And yet when we sit down and read the Bible from cover to cover, we cannot find a single contradiction. We cannot find a single historical error. But instead, we discover uninterrupted unity, the story of God's love from creation until the present.

Can you imagine what would happen if we put 40 authors in a room this afternoon and told them to write a book with three-quarter of a million words spread over 1,189 chapters? I would suggest we couldn't get 40 people to write a single chapter on any religious subject without making mistakes and contradicting each other. In the Bible, though, we have the blending of law, and history, and poetry, and prophecy, and in the end, we cannot find a single mistake. It is miraculously perfect and unified.

Of course, people will claim to have found mistakes. One of my favorites is a man who once refused to believe the Bible because the ark was a huge barge weighing hundreds of tons, and yet a small handful of men managed to carry the ark across the Jordan River – a contradiction! But when we actually read the Bible, we find that there were two different arks – there was Noah's Ark in Genesis, and then there was the Ark of the Covenant a little bit later – one was 450 feet long by 75 feet wide by 45 feet tall, and the other was about the size of this table up here. And in a similar way, many of the other so-called contradictions can be very easily explained just by looking at the surrounding verses – just to make sure we're talking about the same thing, at the same time, in the same sense, and so on.

We don't have time to look at all of the other examples, but if you think you've found a contradiction in the Bible, I would suggest checking out some interesting resources, 1.) *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, by Gleason Archer. He goes through many of these passages where people think they might have found contradictions, and he does a very good job explaining those passages. I would also recommend 2.) www.apologeticspress.org and 3.) www.christiancourier.com.

Beyond not contradicting itself, we also know from the field of archeology that the Bible is historically accurate. As we have defined it before, archaeology is "...the study of human history through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artifacts and other physical remains." We might not have proof for every event in the Bible - we will never find a photograph of Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee, for example - but very single statement of the Bible that can be historically checked or verified has shown that the Bible writers never once made a mistake. We have evidence for the Hitittes, and the "house of David," and Mesha (king of Moab), and King Omri, and King Ahab. We have Sennacherib's Prism, giving Sennacherib's account of the siege of Jerusalem in 2 Kings 19. We actually have an image of King Jehu bringing tribute to the Assyrian King Shalmaneser on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser.

Concerning the New Testament, I would share a quote from Wayne Jackson, a friend of mine and a Christian scholar who spent most of his life preaching and writing out in California. Wayne is the one responsible for the Christian Courier site up here. This is what he says,

In Acts, Luke mentions thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine Mediterranean islands. He also mentions ninety-five persons, sixty-two of which are not named elsewhere in the New Testament. And his references, where checkable, are always correct. This is truly remarkable, in view of the fact that the political/territorial situation of his day was in a state of almost constant change. Only inspiration can account for Luke's precision.

I would also share something from Jerry Moffitt. He says,

Over thirty names [of government officials] (emperors, high priests, Roman governors, princes, etc.) are mentioned in the New Testament, and all but a handful have been verified. In every way the Bible accounts have been found accurate (though vigorously challenged). In no single case does the Bible let us down in geographical accuracy. Without one mistake, the [New Testament] lists around forty-five countries. Each is accurately placed and named. About the same number of cities are named and not one mistake can be listed. Further, about thirty-six towns are mentioned, and most have been identified. Wherever accuracy can be checked, minute detail has been found correct—every time!

We have artifacts verifying these things. We have the Pilate Stone with an inscription of Pilate's name, describing him just as Luke does, as "**Pontius Pilate, prefect [governor] of Judea.**" I have seen this with my own eyes. For years, critics of the Bible claimed that Pilate was made up, that he wasn't a real governor - until 1961 when archaeologists uncovered the cornerstone of a building constructed under his leadership - similar to the plaque inside the front door of our main post office here in Madison, "This building erected in 1991, under George H. W. Bush, President of the United States."

We have the bone box or ossuary belonging to Caiaphas, the high priest who played a key role in the Lord's death. This one was found back in 1990 as construction crews were excavating for a new waterpark just south of Jerusalem. I have also seen this one with my own eyes. It was on loan at a Jewish museum on the southeast side of Cleveland, not far from where Jordan went to school.

We don't have time to go on, but I would encourage all of you to get involved locally with the Madison Biblical Archaeological Society. Their first meeting of the academic year is actually coming up this Saturday, and I absolutely hate that I won't be in town for this. I've actually thought about canceling my speaking engagement up in Rice Lake so I can stay here for this. The meeting is this Saturday at 7 p.m. at the Upper House on the UW campus, and the guest speaker is a professor of Library Science and History at Purdue University. He holds a Ph.D. in Hebrew and Semitic Studies from the UW and has done extensive writing. He'll be speaking on the topic, "Real People of the Bible - What Archaeology Tells Us About David and more than 50 Other Biblical Characters." This lecture is a follow-up to his 2014 article in the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, "Archaeology Confirms 50 Real People in the Bible." In the summary, he says, "All told, counting both published and unpublished results, I find 55 people in the Hebrew Bible and 30 in the New Testament whose historical existence stands documented in writings from their times." This lecture happens to fall on International Archaeology Day, which I am sure is one of those wild party holidays on the UW campus. But I do wish I could be there.

The point here, though, is that the Bible is miraculously perfect. Even with thousands of proper names – thousands of names of people and places and events – not once has anyone ever found a mistake or a contradiction. And the only way this is possible is if God was involved in the process.

II. There is a second reason why we believe that the Bible is from God: Not only is the Bible perfect, but THE BIBLE ALSO CONTAINS A NUMBER OF SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL FACTS THAT ARE HUNDREDS AND EVEN THOUSANDS OF YEARS AHEAD OF THEIR TIME.

Sometimes we refer to this as “scientific or medical foreknowledge.” The Bible is not a scientific or medical textbook (the main point of the Bible is not to teach science; instead, the main point of the Bible is to teach spiritual truth); however, in the teaching of spiritual truth, sometimes the scriptures will happen to mention something from the realms of science or medicine. And when that happens, 1.) The information is always accurate, and 2.) The information is often centuries ahead of its time. And again, I know the verse on the wall up here doesn’t prove this for those who don’t believe the Bible anyway, but the verse up here simply gives the reason why the Bible is accurate in these areas, and the reason is, God’s understanding is *“infinite”* (Psalm 147:5). Those who wrote the Bible knew things that mankind did not know about for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years.

Several years ago, we noted those references in Genesis 15:5 and other passages, indicating that the stars cannot be numbered. For thousands of years, though, scientists have tried – over and over again – to number the stars. And almost always, those numbers are embarrassingly low - in the hundreds, maybe thousands. But as we now know, the stars truly cannot be numbered! And again, that’s not the point of those passages, but when they happen to mention this scientific truth, even when making another point entirely, the statements are accurate. I remember at camp several years ago, one of the astronomers from UW Eau Claire came out to the observatory, and in his lecture, he explained how just recently scientists took the Hubble telescope, and they pointed it at the darkest point in the night sky. They pointed that powerful telescope toward a tiny little piece of the sky where there appeared to be absolutely nothing, where nothing had ever been seen or documented before, and they just left it there for a while as they allowed whatever light might have been there to come in to the telescope. And what they found was amazing – in that little piece of night sky, hundreds upon thousands of stars, far beyond what the human eye could ever possibly see. As the Lord said, the stars cannot be numbered. The deeper into space we look, the more we will continue to find.

Concerning the natural world, you might remember how we studied Job in the Sunday morning class a few months ago, and we had that passing reference in Job 38:16 where God questioned Job and said, *“Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?”* That word *“recesses”* refers to a deep chasm or canyon, something that can only be seen by searching for it, by exploring. For thousands of years, people thought that the oceans were basically nothing more than rather shallow, sandy extensions from one shore to the other - it’s just a wide, smooth, level beach between the continents. It wasn’t until the late 1800’s, though, that British scientists exploring the Pacific Ocean discovered a *“recess”* or a trench nearly 36,000 feet deep, that’s more than 6 miles down. Now we know that there are many trenches in the ocean. How did Job know that, thousands of years before those trenches were discovered?

When it comes to health and medicine, we think back to the Law of Moses and the command from God in Leviticus 17 that the people were not to eat blood. The Lord said, *“For the life of all flesh is its blood...”* (Leviticus 17:14). Today, we know how true this is. Today, we know the importance of blood. We know that our blood carries oxygen, removes waste, carries nutrients, and so on. And today, we think, “Well, obviously! Blood is important!” And yet do you remember what our own enlightened society thought about blood less

than 300 years ago? Just a short time ago, we thought that we could cure diseases by bleeding people. And yet back in 1400 BC, God told Moses that the life is in the blood.

Just a little earlier in Leviticus, God laid out some basic rules for hygiene and public health. Certain animals were not to be eaten, because they were especially vulnerable to passing along disease – pigs, and other scavengers, for example. As far as I can tell, there were no restrictions on eating vegetables under the Law of Moses, but there were very strict rules concerning animals. That right there is an interesting lesson: Animals are more dangerous to eat than vegetables. And I would add: Especially when you are traveling in the wilderness with 2-3 million people. Today, we have instant read thermometers. We know that you have to cook pork to 155 degrees, steaks to 145, ground meat and poultry to 165, and so on. We do this, because we have microscopes. We know what kind of stuff can live on the surface of meat. But in 1400 BC, without this knowledge, God had to tell them, and those instructions were way ahead of their time.

Also in Leviticus, the Lord gave rules for dealing with leprosy and various skin diseases. Think about this: Moses, the author of Leviticus, was raised in Egypt. From history, we know that the Egyptians had some truly bizarre ways of treating various conditions. For example, to draw out a splinter, you were supposed to cover it with worm blood and donkey dung. Well, as you can imagine, a lot of ancient Egyptians died while trying to recover from something as simple as a splinter. They got a splinter, they rubbed donkey dung on it, there were tetanus spores in the dung, and people were dying of lockjaw, all from something as simple as a splinter. The point is: Moses had to know about some of those remedies, but the book of Leviticus is different. The book of Leviticus never tells anybody to rub donkey dung on an open wound. In Leviticus 12 God established the principle of quarantine, something that was not really understood in western medicine until the 1700's, the revolutionary idea that germs can spread.

We could go on and on, but the point here is: The Bible is scientifically and medically accurate and it was accurate hundreds if not thousands of years before its time. For this reason, the Bible must be the result of divine influence.

III. There is a third reason why we believe the Bible must have come from God, and it goes back to THE ACCURACY OF BIBLE PROPHECY.

We are not talking about some kind of weird end-time type thing that people have a tendency to ramble on and on about today, but we are talking about a vast number of incredibly simple but powerful prophecies that are fulfilled all throughout the Bible. We have detailed prophecies about specific nations rising and falling. We have very specific prophecies about cities being destroyed and rebuilt. We have specific and detailed prophecies about people and places that are made hundreds of years before they are fulfilled.

There is so much we could consider here, but I would point out just a few of the highlights concerning the coming of Jesus Christ. There are literally hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament, many of them written anywhere between 500-1500 years before the Lord's birth. And I would point out: For a prophecy to be valid, it needs to be specific, it needs to have been made before the event that takes place, it needs to be more than an educated guess, and it needs to be something that is not controlled by the one making the prophecy. In other words, if I say, "A great leader will arise in the future," that is not a specific prophecy – that does not count! If I were to say, "In one minute, this piece of paper will land on the floor," that again is not a valid prophecy, because I am in control of whether that happens. If I predict that the sun will come up tomorrow, that doesn't make me a prophet; instead, that is an educated prediction based on experience and human reason. With this in mind, then, think with me about some of the prophecies concerning the Messiah:

- He will be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
- He will be from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10).
- He will be from the family of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1).
- He will be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- When He is born, many other children will be murdered (Jeremiah 31:15).
- When He is born, He will be presented with gifts (Psalm 72:10).
- He will be preceded by a messenger (Isaiah 40:3).
- His ministry will begin in a small town in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1).
- He will enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).
- Leading up to His death, He will be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9).
- He will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12).
- He will be accused by false witnesses and will not answer those accusations (Isaiah 53:7).
- He will be wounded and bruised (Isaiah 53:5).
- He will be spit upon (Isaiah 50:6).
- He will be mocked (Psalm 22:6-8).
- His hands and feet and side will be pierced (Psalm 22:16 and Zechariah 12:10).
- He will be killed with others (Isaiah 53:12).
- The people will shake their heads at Him (Psalm 109:25).
- The people will stare at Him as He dies (Psalm 22:17).
- People will gamble for His clothing (Psalm 22:18).
- And yet in spite of this, He will ask God to forgive them (Isaiah 53:12).
- While dying, He will suffer from extreme thirst and cheap wine will be offered to Him (Psalm 69:21).
- Although He will feel abandoned by God (Psalm 22:1), he will commit His spirit into God's hands (Psalm 31:5).
- Through all of this, not a single bone will be broken (Psalm 34:20).
- While He is dying, darkness will cover the land (Amos 8:9-10).
- And after He dies, He will be placed in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9).

We could go on and on. Scholars have estimated that there are well over 300 references from the Old Testament that prophesy various details concerning the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

So again, the Bible is the word of God:

- It is a supernaturally perfect book - perfectly unified, with no contradictions, geographically accurate, accurate with reference to names and political titles in the ancient world, and the deeper archaeologists dig, the more confirmation we have of this.
- Not only that, but secondly, the Bible is years ahead of its time, scientifically and medically, with details that were not known in the ancient world, including some scientific and medical knowledge not really understood until the relatively recent past.
- And then finally, the Bible also shows evidence of God's involvement because of the hundreds of prophecies that we find in it. We have somewhere between 300-400 prophecies just concerning the Messiah, and every single one of those was fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

This kind of unity, this kind of precision and accuracy, would not be possible without some kind of divine intervention. We can know that God exists by looking at the world around us, but this morning we have looked at his word. His word tells us who he is. His word tells us what he has done for us. And his word tells us how to respond.

His word tells us that God sent his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We respond to that sacrifice with faithful obedience. The Bible commands that we repent and be baptized. In other words, we have a change of mind concerning sin, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism, immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you would like to discuss it further, let us know. If you have something we need to pray about, we would invite you to write your concern down and bring it to the front. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com