

# *The Bible: What is it?*

## *2 Timothy 3:15-17*

Of the 332 Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ,<sup>1</sup> not one failed to occur exactly as predicted. Professor Peter W. Stoner used the law of compound probabilities to determine the odds of biblical prophecies being fulfilled exactly as they were predicted. Professor Stoner computed the odds of a single individual fulfilling just eight prophecies pertaining to Jesus Christ. By using the exacting law of compound probabilities, he found that the chances of fulfilling just eight prophecies were 1 in  $10^{17}$ . This is the same as 1 followed by 17 zeros! The following illustration reveals the enormous improbability of these eight prophecies being fulfilled by chance. It is equivalent to covering the entire state of Texas two feet deep in silver dollars, specially marking one of them and having a blindfolded man select the marked dollar **on the first try**. Professor Stoner also calculated that fulfilling 16 of the 332 prophecies would be 1 followed by 45 zeros, and 48 fulfilled prophecies would be  $1 \times 10^{157}$ . Fulfillment of 332 prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ provides indisputable support to the premise that the Bible is inerrant in its content.

Because the Jews held such an intense reverence towards their sacred scriptures, they strove to preserve absolute accuracy of their scriptures with an almost fanatical discipline. They followed an intricate system of safeguards which governed the copying and transcribing of the sacred scrolls

against "scribal slips." Each letter was checked and rechecked. If a single mistake was found, the entire page was destroyed. So exacting and meticulous were the copyists that they counted the exact number of verses, words, and individual letters. They even measured the proscribed space between each letter and calculated the middle word and letter in each book. They constantly compared and cross-checked new copies with these calculations to make sure they agreed. If there was any discrepancy or miscount, they searched until they located the error and corrected it.

Because of God's persevering power and the scribes' reverent attention to editing and detail, the accuracy of the Old Testament has been protected and preserved. As one scholar noted, "It may safely be said that no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted."<sup>ii</sup>

## ***Bible Contradictions***

All "apparent" Bible contradictions have rational answers. Take for example Matthew 1:16 which lists Jacob as the father of Joseph, while Luke 3:23 says Joseph's father was Heli. A cursory reading reveals that the names in the two genealogies differ starting with King David. Then, 20 generations later in Luke's account and 14 generations later in Matthew's account they reunite in Shealtiel (Matthew 1:12, Luke 3:27). Did the writers "trip up" and despoil the messianic lineage of Jesus of Nazareth? Certainly not! Shealtiel was the natural son of Jeconiah and the son-in-law of Neri, who had no son (Shealtiel married his daughter). In fulfillment of Jeremiah 22:24f, the natural line of Messiah shifted from Solomon (Matthew's genealogy) to his brother Nathan, whose lineage is

traced by Luke. While Matthew included the names of women (Rahab and Ruth), Luke did not - thus Mary was not mentioned in his account. In keeping with his male genealogical ancestry, Luke listed Joseph's father-in-law, Heli, who was the **natural** father of Mary. No contradictions.

What about Hebrews 11:17 that says Isaac was an only child, while Genesis lists Ishmael and others as being sons of Abraham? Isaac was the only son **of promise**, the **only one begotten of Sarah**, who was barren (Genesis 17:17). Isaac was the **only** miracle son, the **only** one born of faith and the **only** one that God recognized as rightful heir of the promise. Thus the writer of Hebrews referred to him as the only begotten son of Abraham.

The Bible says in John 16:33 and Acts 14:22 that Christians must endure tribulations; yet many teach that true believers will not have to endure the coming Tribulation Week. Jesus mentioned the latter in Matthew 24:21, "Tribulation, the great one." From this He promised escape (Luke 21:36, Revelation 3:10). In simplistic terms, the solution is seen in the difference between a small (lower case) t and a big (upper case) T. We should expect to experience the small t and hope to evade the big T. The Bible does not contradict itself.

Is it blasphemous to characterize the Bible as being of Divine origin? Consider the following passages:

*"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He (the Word) was in the beginning with God. And the Word became*

*flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1,2,14).*

*"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (God-breathed)..." (2 Timothy 3:16).*

These scriptures unequivocally demonstrate the divinity of the Bible; both its essence and authorship. John 1 plainly calls Jesus Christ the Word - which is the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16, when translated literally from the Greek, reads: *"All Scripture is God breathed..."* The Apostle Peter wrote, *"Knowing this first, that **no prophecy of Scripture is of any private origination (interpretation), for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"** (2 Peter 1:20,21).* The Bible is the breath of God and the product of the Holy Spirit.

In 1882, Ivan Panin, a young immigrant from Russia, was born again just before his graduation from Harvard University. Prior to that time, he was an agnostic who often lectured in favor of atheism. A brilliant mathematician, multi-lingual scholar and literary figure, Panin began to study the Scriptures after his conversion experience. Knowing Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, he began to read them in the original languages. His study soon revealed an elaborate numbering system, primarily utilizing the number seven within the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures (both languages utilize letters rather than numeric symbols for mathematical values). He showed that the Bible is a skillfully designed product of a mathematical mastermind - far beyond any human possibility of deliberate structuring. He presented 43,000 sheets of his research to the Nobel Research Foundation with his statement that it was sufficient evidence to prove the Bible as

being the very Word of God. After reviewing his research, the Foundation said: "As far as our investigation...we find the evidence overwhelmingly in favor of such a statement." He then issued a challenge (and substantial cash award) in newspapers around the world for anyone to successfully refute his discovery of the mathematical design and his conclusion that the Bible was of Divine origin. Not one person, in spite of the substantial cash offer, was able to either dispute or discredit his findings.

More recently, Grant Jeffrey, Yacov Rambsel, Michael Drosnin and a host of noted Hebrew scholars, with the aid of computer technology, have discovered "the signature of God" on the Scriptures. Through a system of "equi-distant lettering," i.e., by counting the same number of letters between characters, certain information has been found hidden in the text of Scripture. Information concerning the assassination of Yitzak Rabin, the rise of the third Reich and Yeshua as Messiah are just a small sampling of actual historical events. This "equi-distant lettering" process has been applied to other writings without success. It is unique to the Bible, again revealing its Divine attribute. Indeed, the Bible **is** a Divine book - the only one in existence.

The Bible's message and theme of redemption is consistent throughout, even though it was written over a 1,600 year period. Redemption was promised by God in Genesis 3:15 and that process continues to the present day. Spanning 50 generations, over 40 writers penned identical prophecies of the future. They consistently described the nature and acts of God and agreed as to actual historical events. None of this was by collaboration of the writers, although a definite design is present in the Holy Scriptures (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Although it was written on three different continents (Asia, Africa and Europe) and in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), the Bible's message is the same - its precepts are consistent and its prophecies accurate.

The manuscript evidence supporting the Bible's accuracy is overwhelming. There are over 5,400 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, over 10,000 of the Latin Vulgate, and at least 9,300 other early versions. A total of over 24,000 manuscript copies or portions of the New Testament are in existence today.

Compared to other ancient writings such as Homer's Iliad or Caesar's Gallic Wars, the Bible has more manuscript evidence supporting its reliability and accuracy of translation than any ten pieces of ancient literature combined!<sup>iii</sup>

So conclusive is the evidence supporting this fact that one prominent scholar noted, "To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament."<sup>iv</sup>

The exacting accuracy of manuscript translation, as well as the massive amount of manuscript material in existence, gives credence to the Bible's durability and consistency.

## **A Closed Book?**

Perhaps the most compelling question concerning the Bible is whether or not it is a finished work. In other words, could (or should) writings subsequent to the first century be included in the Bible? Does the Holy Spirit continue to inspire men to the current day, and, if so, why shouldn't contemporary revelation be considered equal to the inspired writings of the Bible?

Just as holy men of old were moved by the Holy Spirit to **write** the Bible (2 Peter 1:21), likewise were men moved by the Holy Spirit to select those writings that would **compile** the Holy Bible. This collection and compilation became known as the canon, a word which means "measuring rod." The following criteria were used in determining the canon:

- 1. **Prophetic:** Does the book possess a definite prophetic and inspirational quality?*
- 2. **Authentic:** Was the book written by a reputable prophet, authored by an apostle, or someone intimately associated with an apostle?*
- 3. **Circulated:** Was it accepted, collected, distributed, and read by God's people?*
- 4. **Authoritative:** Does its contents and message harmonize with the standards of sound biblical teaching?*
- 5. **Dynamic:** Does it possess dynamic, life-transforming power?*

6. *Approved: Was it endorsed and accepted by future generations of believers?*

The Old Testament canon, or recognized collection of inspired writings, was closed in 425 B.C. with the book of Malachi: "After the later prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel." <sup>v</sup> Noted Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus also recorded that the O.T. canon was closed with Malachi. The Jewish Rabbis accepted all of the current 39 books of the Old Testament (and no others), though they combine 1 and 2 Kings. Jesus and the Apostles quoted from most of them, certifying their authenticity and completeness. The Bible itself enjoins any addition to or subtraction from the Old Testament canon (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32).

After a century of circulation, collection and public reading, the "Muratorian Canon" was published in Rome and contained all of the New Testament except Matthew, Mark, Hebrews, James and 1 and 2 Peter. In A.D. 367 all 27 books of the New Testament were collected and codified by Athanasius of Alexandria. Shortly thereafter, these same 27 books of our modern New Testament were affirmed and accepted by Church Fathers Jerome and Augustine. By the end of the fourth century, the 27 books of the New Testament had been accepted as canon by the church at large. <sup>vi</sup>

Is the canon closed or can additional writings be considered for inclusion in Holy Scripture? The answer to this question is not as simple as it may seem. For



instance, the apocryphal Book of Enoch, though read in churches during the first three centuries, was not included in the canon of scripture. Several other informative and seemingly inspired writings were also excluded from the canon. A partial listing of these books are 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Wisdom of Solomon, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, The Assumption of Moses, The Prayer of Manasses, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Apocalypse of Peter and certain letters written by Paul to the Colossians, Ephesians and Corinthians. These books, though possessing some redeeming qualities, do not meet **all** of the criteria as outlined above, and some contain erroneous and contradictory material. Such is the case with the Koran and The Book of Mormon.

Is it no longer possible to produce an inspired writing? Daniel 12:4 and 9 state clearly that certain revelation will come forth **at the time of the end**. Surely the Holy Spirit is leading and inspiring certain contemporary writers - hopefully what you are now reading contains **some** inspired material. I believe in continuing revelation between God and His Church, but I don't believe such inspiration can be considered as scripture or as an addendum to scripture. Neither do I believe in new or additional revelation that contradicts any of the 66 books of the Bible. Daniel was told that future revelation would serve only to illuminate that which was already written (Daniel 12:4).

To be included in sacred canon, a writing must have the personal endorsement of Jesus Christ. The writer or writings must be validated by Him or the writer/writing must be a personally commissioned eyewitness of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:16, Luke 1:1,2). Jesus authenticated the 39 books of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17,18, Luke 24:44) and quoted from at least 24 of them during His 3 1/2 year ministry. In addition, the statement, "*the Lord (Jesus) spoke,*" appears

over 3,800 times from Genesis to Malachi. <sup>vii</sup> Jesus Himself dictated the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:11-19) and the Gospels were written about Him. Each of the New Testament epistles were written by an Apostle that He personally commissioned. The Apostles alone possessed and thus were authorized to write the Word of God (John 17:6-8). Consequently, all writings of subsequent generations must be excluded from the canon of scripture. The last living Apostle (John) wrote the last book of the Bible (Revelation) at the close of the first century (A.D. 96) - nothing more can be added (Revelation 22:18). All of the information regarding God's intentions for the future lies within the pages of scripture, particularly in the book of Revelation. **All canonical writings must have a personal stamp of approval directly from Jesus Christ.** This requirement eliminates all other writings, such as the Apocrypha, Koran and the Book of Mormon.

*"Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven" - Psalm 119:89*

## ***Inspiration***

Having determined what criteria must be met to be included in the sacred canon, let us now explore the test for determining whether a message/writing is inspired, i.e., given by God. Most so-called inspired writings fail the second and fourth test listed above; *authenticity* and *authority*. Authenticity demands that the writer be a personally commissioned, eyewitness of Jesus Christ Himself. Authoritativeness requires that there be no deviation or contradiction from previously accepted canon. Both the Koran and the Book of Mormon fail these two tests. Neither was written by an Apostle of Christ and both writings include dogma that contradicts prior biblical teaching. Moreover, neither of these books

were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as required by 2 Peter 1:19 and John 16:12,13. Joseph Smith, the author of the Book of Mormon, allegedly received his information from an angel, which is not the biblical mode of revelation in the New Testament: *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel...there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, **or an angel from heaven**, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed"* (Galatians 1:6-8). Messages received from angels, such as those of Dumitru Duduman's, should and must be rejected out of hand.

The Bible is the Word and breath of the living God (2 Timothy 3:16). To know the Word is to know Him. It is inerrant, divine, consistent and complete!

*"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but **the Word of the Lord endures forever.**"*

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## **ENDNOTES**

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**i** John Hagee, *The Beginning of the End* (Cornerstone Church, San Antonio, TX 1996), p. 48.

**ii** William R. Kimball, *How Did We Get Our Bible?* (Christian Equippers International, 1985), p. 6.

**iii** Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, pp. 19, 39-46.

**iv** John W. Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, p.

29.

**v** *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin VII-VIII, 24.*

**vi** *Council of Hippo, A.D. 393 and Council of Carthage, A.D. 397 convened and endorsed the 27 books of the contemporary New Testament as divine canon.*

**vii** *Winkle Pratney, The Holy Bible-Wholly True (Last Days Ministries, Lindale, TX) p. 2.*