

# ***“The Bible—Our Firm Foundation”***

## **A Self Study Resource**

### **The Ultimate Guide**

Take a moment to imagine that you are going on an unguided safari adventure through Africa and since you don't know much about the area or the environment, you want to bring along some books that would help you on journey. With that situation in mind, take just a minute to think as many books as you can that might be helpful. (Pause) What did you come up with? (Encyclopedia, Dictionaries, Atlas, Physicians Desk Reference, Guidebooks to Plants, Animals, Food, Cities, Etc.) Now imagine that after many weeks of traveling across the hot Africa wilderness, you are fighting to survive and you must choose only one book to keep with you, what would it be?

Well, this hypothetical situation reminds me a true story about a famous explorer named David Livingstone who set out to explore the continent of Africa. And when he began he packed 76 books weighing almost 180 pounds in three separate bags (how would you like to carry those?) He had numerous books for all foreseeable occasions, but as his expedition continued he realized that they could no longer carry the weight of these books. So he began getting rid of them until he was finally left with just one book. It was the Bible. For David Livingstone the Bible was the ultimate guide for his life.

### **What is the Bible?**

Today I would invite you to consider the statement that the Bible is truly the ultimate guide for faith and life because the Bible is God's Word to us. In ***II Tim 3:16*** the apostle Paul writes, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” In this passage the apostle Paul makes an extraordinary claim about the Bible when he writes that “All Scripture is God breathed.” In other words, he is claiming that the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God and not simply some man-made writing. For many people this is just an accepted part of their faith, but other people wish to go further in demonstrating the truth behind this claim. And perhaps the first place to look is at the uniqueness of the Bible.

## **The Uniqueness of the Bible**

Despite the Bible's own claim to be the Word of God, many people in today's society act like the Bible is just another religious book. They ask questions like "Why do you believe the Bible is true and not some other religious book like the Koran or Confucius?" or "How is the Bible different than any other book?" Sadly many people have never really thought about this, and even Christians know very little bit about the uniqueness of the Bible.

For those who are interested in researching the uniqueness of the Bible, one of the most helpful books I found on this subject is a book entitled Evidence That Demands A Verdict by Josh McDowell. And the interesting story behind this book is the fact that before the author was a Christian he actually wanted to show how the Bible wasn't unique and wasn't reliable. But as he examined the evidence, he came to the opposite conclusion, and it changed his life. And I'd like to share just a few of his findings in the pages that follow.

# ***The Uniqueness of the Bible***

Many people today would say that the Bible is just like any other book. But those who say such things should really look at the facts. Here are a few of the ways in which the Bible is unique:

## **The Bible Is Unique In Its Composition**

Did you know that the Bible was written by *over 40 authors* from all walks of life *during a 1,500 year span of time* on three different continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe) in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek)? Some of the authors were Joshua a military general, Solomon a king, Daniel a prime minister, Amos a herdsman, Luke a doctor, Paul a Rabbi, Matthew a tax collector, and Peter a fisherman. No other book can claim this much variety in authorship.

## **The Bible Is Unique In Its Unity**

Despite the variety of authors *the Bible has a unified subject from beginning to end: God's salvation of mankind through the death of His Son Jesus*. Once Josh McDowell asked a book salesman at his home to consider whether 10 authors from one walk of life, one time period, and one language could even agree on one controversial subject. After thinking for a while the man responded "No" and two days later he committed his life to Christ.

## **The Bible Is Unique In Its Honesty**

Most people writing about the heroes of their time and place tend to magnify their strengths and hide any flaws. Yet, the Bible very honestly deals with the sins of its characters (such as Abraham lying to the Egyptians, David sleeping with Bathsheba, the disciples deserting Christ during his crucifixion). The only character without flaws is God's own Son Jesus who gave His life as a perfect sacrifice for sin.

## **The Bible Is Unique In Its Prophecy**

Josh McDowell identifies over 61 major fulfilled prophecies which point to Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament (McDowell, 144-166) and hundreds more have been identified. One scholar calculated that the probability of just eight of these prophecies being true of any one particular person was one in 100,000,000,000,000,000. With approximately 5 million people alive today, the odds of any person alive today fulfilling even eight of these prophecies is one in 20 million. No other religion or cult can verify anywhere near this type of evidence. (McDowell, 22)

## **The Bible Is Unique In Its Historical Accuracy**

Numerous attempts have been made to discredit the stories of the Bible as just myths and legends. Yet, the historical and archaeological evidence for the Bible is overwhelming. Renowned Jewish archaeologist Nelson Glueck once wrote, "No archaeological discovery has ever controverted (contradicted) a biblical reference." William Albright states, "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition." (McDowell, 65) Cambridge scholar Canon Westcott said "There is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ" (Little, 30)

## **The Bible Is Unique In Its Textual Evidence**

The Bible has more manuscript evidence than any 10 pieces of classical literature. Despite persecution and criticism, the earliest manuscripts of the Bible are more numerous and accurate than any other book. For comparison, Homer's Iliad which was written in 900 BC has 643 existent copies (the earliest one was from the time period of 400 BC). The New Testament of the Bible was finished around 100 AD and over 24,000 ancient texts exist (the earliest copy is from 125 AD). There is no comparison.

## **The Bible Is Unique In Its Translation & Circulation**

By the 1960's the complete Bible has been printed in around 250 languages and dialects and certain books had been translated into 750 more. In addition it is the most published, the most read, and the most quoted book of all time. Nearly 90 million copies were printed in 1966 alone. This book is clearly the all time best seller.

Information from this handout was gathered from Evidence That Demands A Verdict by Josh McDowell and Know Why You Believe by Paul Little.

Well, after you look at the evidence, does the Bible sound like just any other book to you? No it doesn't. The Bible is unique. It is God's inspired word to us and as a result of this we can put our trust in it as the ultimate guide and authority for our faith and life. In fact, Jesus has this to say about the Bible in **Luke 6:47-48**. He says, "Luke 6:47 "I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. "So according to Jesus the Bible is the only authority upon which we can build our lives. It is our rock and our sure foundation in life. Okay.

Now that we know a little bit about the uniqueness of the Bible I would like to you to consider the reliability of the Bible

### **The Reliability Of The Bible**

Throughout the ages people have argued against the reliability of the Bible. For example, some people have claimed that the Bible is full of contradictions & errors. Back when I was a student on the University of Florida campus I remember a guy standing in the Plaza one day handed me a little tract as I walked by. Now it was not too uncommon for people to hand out tracts, Bibles, coupons, or just about anything on this college campus, so I politely took it and kept walking to class. However, when I started to read this pamphlet I was surprised to find that it was a list of "Bible Contradictions." And the author of this pamphlet claims that the Bible is full of hundreds of discrepancies and errors, and he went on to list 29 of them.

So with that challenge against the reliability of the Bible in your mind, listen to these words from **Matthew 5:17-18**. Jesus says "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." Obviously Jesus held a very high view of the Old Testament scriptures and believed that every single mark was reliable and trustworthy.

Today Christians extend this belief and hold that the whole of God's word (both Old Testament & New Testament) is fully correct and thus free from errors in the whole and in the part. Theologically speaking this belief is known as the doctrine of inerrancy, and it is a statement that the Bible in its original manuscripts is completely true. Because Scripture is an expression of God Himself, we believe the Scripture reflects God's character. In other words "as God is, so is Scripture." If God is completely honest and true, then also His Word must be completely honest and true (see Prov. 30:5-6, Num. 23:19, Ps. 89:35, Heb. 6:18). If God is perfect, then His Word must also be perfectly free from errors in whole and in part.

But some may object and say what about the history and science found in the Bible? Is that all true? Well, on the one hand the Bible is not a historical textbook. Rather it is the story of salvation. Therefore many historical events are ignored or lightly passed over because they are not immediately relevant to the purpose of the book—which is to bring people into a personal relationship with God. So historical events are cited only if they relate to God's story of salvation—not as they relate to world news.

However, on the other hand, our Christian faith is a historical faith, based on God's saving acts in history. So when the Bible tells us the story of salvation, it tells us a lot of history as well. And we believe that whatever scientific and historical assertions are found in Scripture are reported accurately from the perspective of the original observer. And after more than 100 years of attacks on the Bible, the overwhelming conclusion is that the Bible has been to prove the Bible as more reliable—not less.

Perhaps some of you remember as a child playing a game called the telephone game. Basically the telephone game works by forming a line and telling a sentence or short story to each person one at a time. Once the first person has heard the story, he or she will tell it to the next person and so on. Then the last person will have to decipher what the story was. Now if this last person wants to get the most accurate version of the story, how do you think he or she could go about it? Well, basically there are two ways to do this. This person could ask someone who was very close to the original source or this person could ask each one together and see if the stories line up.

From this silly little game a person can actually learn quite a bit about the reliability of the Bible. In scholarly circles two of the most common tests for textual reliability are the time gap test (the person closest to the original source is likely the most reliable) and the number of agreeing manuscripts. And if we look back at that worksheet I gave you on the uniqueness of the Bible we see that the Bible is the most outstanding piece of ancient literature ever recorded. When you compare it against other ancient works of literature there is no comparison. And any honest scholar who studies ancient works would have to admit the reliability of the Bible (unless he or she enjoyed making up fictional tales of conspiracy theories with absolutely no evidence).

So if the Bible is reliable, how does a person deal with these so-called contradictions in the Scriptures? Well, it is possible that one author be quite different from another author depending on the situation or purpose for writing. And sometimes two different writers will include different details in a story because they are writing from different vantage points. Therefore, I would say that a person should take the approach that an *apparent contradiction* should always be regarded as that—*apparent*. Because we haven't fully understood the text correctly yet, it apparently needs clarification. And looking over the list 29 contradictions from my college days, I would have no trouble clarifying these for that person (if he was indeed interested).

### **The Composition Of The Bible**

Well, now that you know more about the uniqueness and reliability of the Bible, I would like to share about the composition of the Bible. And as we begin to think about the composition of the Bible, let's look at an important passage in **2 Peter 1:20-21**. In these two verses Peter is talking to us about the origin of Scripture and here is what he says, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretations. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Although Peter was only an common fisherman when he started following Jesus, here was a person with significant knowledge of fulfilled prophecy. As he lived with Jesus and saw him die, he was an eyewitness to literally dozens of prophetic statements

being fulfilled right before his eyes. Obviously Peter had some time to think about this important question of “Who wrote the Bible?” And I am sure he wrestled with the questions of how come the message is so consistent, but the tone and approach sounds so very different in different sections.

In thinking about the question “How did God give the Bible to us?” Martin Luther suggests this answer. “God gave us his written word by inspiring chosen prophets, evangelists, and apostles, giving them the thoughts and words to write.” According to Bible and even those who helped write it down, God is the primary author of all Scripture. Even though God could have just buried this book somewhere in Israel for us to discover, he chose to speak through certain human beings to deliver his message of salvation. And I think that this is significant for a couple of reasons:

In the 1st place this is significant because it shows us the power of God’s Word. When God chose to deliver his message of salvation to the world He did this by speaking through the inspired words of the Bible and by sending us the “Word made flesh” in the person of his Son Jesus Christ (see John chapter 1).

In the 2nd place this is significant because it shows us the importance of the messenger carrying the message. Although God could have delivered His message of salvation in any way He wanted, He decided that the personal message of God’s love and forgiveness should be delivered by personal messengers.

So God speaks through humans to humans, but what we find in the Bible is ultimately God’s word. And this word is communicated in different ways:

**1. The written word**, which includes primarily the Bible, but this also includes to some extent biblical truths that are written in sermons, stories which still communicate God’s word in different words.

**2. The spoken word**, which includes primarily reading the Bible out loud, and also sermons, and personal testimonies and speeches, and conversations that communicate God’s word (not all speeches that say they are God’s word, are God’s word, however).

## The Power Of The Bible

Now that you have considered the uniqueness of the Bible, the reliability of the Bible, and the composition of the Bible, let's take a moment to think power of the Bible. In 2 Tim 3:15 Paul says the scriptures are able to make one wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and in Romans 1:16 he says that the Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. In other words, God's Word is tremendously powerful. When God speaks, things happen. And here are just a few examples.

Examples:

1. How did God create everything? By His Word. See Genesis 1:3,6,9,14,20,24
2. How did Jesus raise the dead? By His Word. See John 11:43 (Lazarus)
3. How did Jesus calm the storm? By His Word. See Matthew 8:26-27
4. How does the universe continue to function so smoothly? By His Word. Hebrews 1:3

So when God speaks things happen in our lives. If there is no word from God, there is no creation. If there is no Bible, there are no Christians, there is no church. Through the Bible, faith is created, people believe, and the church comes to life.

Now we know that the Word of God is sufficient for creation and salvation, but what else can the Bible do? Well, I believe that the Bible is sufficient for all our actions:

First of all the Bible is *sufficient to resist temptation*. In the story of the temptation of Jesus, how did Jesus fight off the attacks of Satan? That's right. He quoted God's word. In Ps. 119:9-11 the psalmist writes "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word....I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." So the Bible is completely powerful to help us live holy lives and to stay away from the temptations of Satan.

In addition, the Bible is completely *sufficient for guidance in life*. Have you ever wondered about what God's will is for your life, what school you should go to, or who should you marry. I know that I have. And in Psalm 119:105 we find these familiar words to us. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Notice that it



doesn't say that God's word is a spotlight that can see down the road. Rather as a lamp God's word is sufficient to guide you day by day and step by step in life.

Finally, I would say that the Bible is fully sufficient for the work of the ministry and the guidance of the church. As Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:17, the Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for rebuking, for correcting and training in righteousness. So the Bible is an amazingly powerful tool for ministry, and it is powerful because it is God's word given to us.

### **Conclusion**

Although a person could conceivably argue at great lengths for and against the value of the Bible, it seems to me that at some point a person ultimately must judge the book not from its cover, but by reading it! A Bible may in fact be the most powerful book in the world, and it is clear that its message has changed thousands upon thousands of lives and its words have shaped the direction of history. However, the Bible will do absolutely no good for you unless you read it and consider its message. At the heart of the Bible is the idea that the Christian faith is not about a bunch of rules and regulations, but rather it is about a relationship with a God who loves you and His Son Jesus. As you open the pages ask God to speak to and reveal himself in this day just as he has been doing for thousands of years to literally billions of people.

# **“The Bible—Our Firm Foundation”**

## **A Self Study Questions For Review**

*“The Bible, including both Old and New Testaments as originally given, is the verbally and plenary inspired word of God and is free from error in the whole and in the part, and is therefore the final authoritative guide for faith and conduct.”*

### **A. The Uniqueness Of The Bible**

According to II Timothy 3:14-17 what is the Bible?

In what ways is the Bible unique

### **B. The Reliability Of The Bible**

In Matt. 5:17-18 what does Jesus say about the reliability of the Bible?

*The Principle Of Selectivity—The Bible is not a historical textbook. It is the story of salvation. But Christianity is a historical religion. Christianity is about God’s purposes being accomplished in human history. To tell the story of salvation, the Bible tells us a lot of history.*

### **C. The Composition Of The Bible**

What does II Peter 1:20-21 tell us about who wrote the Bible?

### **D. The Power Of The Bible**

What does Romans 1:16-17 say about the power of the Bible?

How can the Bible make a difference in your life today