

“THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLE”

Wednesday Night Bible Study

August 11-18, 2021

Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)

¹² For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

By using evidence *external* to the Bible, I want to establish in your mind that the Bible is unique, and that there is no other book like it in the world. Something is said to be unique if it is the only one of its kind, if it is solitary in type or character, if it is without parallel, if it is incomparable. Webster’s online dictionary lists these definitions: **1 : being the only one : sole 2a : being without a like or equal : unequaled b: distinctively characteristic : peculiar sense 1 c: able to be distinguished from all others of its class or type : distinct sense.**

Using that dictionary definition of “unique,” can the Bible be shown to be unique? Can the Bible be shown to be the only book of its kind, without parallel?

Following the lead of Josh McDowell’s book, *Evidence for*

Christianity...Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith, I think anyone with an open mind can be shown that the Bible is unlike any other book in the world.

You do not have to be a scholar of ancient eastern languages to come to a conclusion about the uniqueness of the Bible. Neither do you have to be a schooled theologian. You are quite capable of coming to the right conclusion about the Bible yourself, if you will consider the facts.

Seven ways in which facts lead an honest inquirer to conclude that the Bible is unique:

First, THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS CONTINUITY

As I’ve said in previous studies, the Bible is the only book that was written over about a fifteen-hundred-year span of time.

The Bible is the only book that was written by more than forty authors from every walk of life, including kings, military leaders, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, tax collectors, poets, musicians, statesmen, scholars, and shepherds? For example:

- Moses was a political leader and a judge, trained in the universities of Egypt.

- David was a king, a poet, a musician, a shepherd, and a warrior.
- Amos was a herdsman.
- Joshua was a military general.
- Nehemiah was a cupbearer to a pagan king.
- Daniel was a politician, the prime minister of two foreign countries.
- Solomon was a king and a philosopher.
- Luke was a physician and an historian.
- Peter was a fisherman.
- Matthew was a tax collector.
- Paul was a rabbi.
- And Mark was Peter's secretary.

What a collaboration to have produced the Bible from such a diverse group of authors.

The Bible was written in different places.

- Moses wrote in the wilderness.
- Jeremiah wrote in a dungeon.
- Daniel wrote on a hillside and in a palace.
- Paul wrote from within prison walls.
- Luke wrote while traveling.
- John wrote while in exile on the isle of Patmos.

The Bible was written at different times.

- David wrote in times of war and sacrifice,
- While Solomon wrote in times of peace and prosperity.

The Bible was written during different moods.

- Some of the Bible's authors wrote from the heights of joy.
- While some wrote from the depths of sorrow and despair.
- Some wrote during times of certainty and conviction.
- While others wrote during days of confusion and doubt.

The Bible was written on three continents.

- While most of the Old Testament was written in Asia,
- A portion of it was written in Africa.
- And portions of the New Testament were written in both Asia and Europe.

The Bible was written in three languages.

- There is, first of all, **Hebrew**, the language of the Israelites and practically all of the Old Testament. In **2 Kings 18:26-28** and in **Nehemiah 13:24**, it is called “**the Jews’ language**,” and in **Isaiah 19:18** it is called “the language of Canaan.”
- Then there is **Aramaic**, the “common language of the Near East until the time of Alexander the Great (sixth century B.C. through the fourth century B.C.). **Daniel chapters 2 through 7** and most of **Ezra chapters 4 through 7** are written in Aramaic, as are occasional statements in the New Testament. Most notable was Jesus’ cry from the cross, ‘**Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani**,’ which means “**My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?**” (**Matthew 27:46**)
- Finally, there is **Greek**, the language comprising almost all of the New Testament. It was also the international language spoken during the days of Christ’s earthly ministry, as English is becoming in the modern world.

Have you ever given thought to the fact that the Bible was written in a wide variety of literary styles?

- The Bible includes, at a minimum, such diverse literary styles as ***poetry, historical narrative, song, romance, didactic treatise, personal correspondence, memoirs, satire, biography, autobiography, law, prophecy, parable, and allegory.***
- Additionally, the Bible features one literary type found nowhere else; ***the Gospel form.***

Have you ever given thought to the fact that the Bible addresses hundreds of controversial subjects, subjects that create opposing opinions when mentioned to people or discussed by people?

- The hot topics in the Bible include ***marriage, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, adultery, obedience to authority, truth-telling and lying, character development, parenting, and the nature and revelation of God.***
- Yet from Genesis through Revelation the Bible’s more than forty writers addressed these various topics with an amazing degree of harmony.
- And in spite of its diversity, ***the Bible presents a single unfolding story: God’s redemption of human beings.*** Theologians Norman Geisler and William Nix put it this way: “The ‘***Paradise Lost***’ of **Genesis** becomes the

‘Paradise Regained’ of Revelation. Whereas the gate to the tree of life is closed in Genesis, it is opened forevermore in Revelation” (Geisler/Nix, GIB’86, 28).

- The unifying thread throughout is salvation from sin and condemnation to a life of complete transformation and unending bliss in the presence of the one, merciful, holy God, through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Finally, has it dawned on you that, among all the people described in the Bible, the leading character throughout is the one, true, living God made known through Jesus Christ?

- Consider first the Old Testament: The Law provides the ***“foundation for Christ,”*** the historical books show ***“the preparation” for Christ,*** the poetical works ***“aspire” to Christ,*** and the prophecies display an ***“expectation” of Christ.***
- In the New Testament, the “Gospels . . . record the historical ***manifestation*** of Christ, the Acts relate the ***propagation*** of Christ, the Epistles give the ***interpretation*** of Him, and in Revelation is found the ***consummation*** of all things in Christ.”
- **From cover to cover, the Bible is Christocentric.**

We cannot resist concluding, with these considerations in mind, that the Bible is unique in its continuity.

Second, THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS CIRCULATION

It is not unusual to hear about books that have hit the bestseller list selling a few hundred thousand copies. It’s much rarer to come across books that have sold more than a million copies. Rarer still to find books that have passed the ten-million mark in sales. It staggers the mind, then, to discover that the number of Bibles sold reaches into the billions. That’s right, billions! ***More copies have been produced of its entirety as well as selected portions than any other book in history.*** Some will argue that in a designated month or year more of a certain book was sold. ***However, no other book even begins to compare to the Scriptures in terms of its total circulation.***

According to the United Bible Societies’ *1998 Scripture Distribution Report*, in that year alone member organizations were responsible for distributing ***20.8 million complete Bibles*** and another ***20.1 million testaments.*** The total number of copies of the Bible or portions of the Bible distributed in ***1998*** reached a staggering ***585 million - and these numbers only include Bibles distributed by the United***

Bible Societies! To put it another way, if you lined up all the people who received Bibles or Scripture selections in 1998, and handed a Bible to one of them every five seconds, ***it would take more than ninety-two years to do what just the United Bible Societies accomplished in 1998 alone.***

As *The Cambridge History of the Bible* states, ***“No other book has known anything approaching this constant circulation.”*** A critic would indeed be correct in asserting that *“This doesn’t prove that the Bible is the Word of God.”* ***But it does demonstrate that the Bible is unique.***

Third, THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS TRANSLATION

The Bible was one of the very first major books to ever be translated. Around **250 B.C.**, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek and given the name ***Septuagint***. The work was originally produced for Greek-speaking Jews living in Alexandria, Egypt who could no longer read Hebrew.

The numbers of translations of the Bible into other languages are every bit as impressive as its sales numbers. Most books are never translated into another language. Among the books that are, most are published in just two or three languages. Far fewer books see translation figures rise into the teens. ***Yet, according to the United Bible Societies, the Bible (or portions of it), has been translated into more than 2,200 languages! Worldwide, no other book in history has been translated, retranslated, and paraphrased more than the Bible.*** No other book in history comes close to comparing with the Bible in its translation activity. It is unique in that respect.

Fourth, THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS SURVIVAL

Consider the Bible’s survival through time. Although it was first written on perishable materials, and had to be copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press, the Scriptures have never diminished in style or correctness, nor have ever faced extinction. Compared with other ancient writings, the Bible has more manuscript evidence to support it than any ten pieces of classical literature combined. John Warwick Montgomery observed that “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.” Bernard Ramm wrote about the accuracy and number of biblical manuscripts: ***“Jews preserved it as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. . . They kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word and paragraph. They had special classes of men within their***

culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity—scribes, lawyers, massoretes. Who ever counted the letters and syllables and words of Plato or Aristotle? Cicero or Seneca?” John Lea, in his 1929 book, *The Greatest Book in the World*, compares the Bible with Shakespeare’s writings. He said: *“It seems strange that the text of Shakespeare, which has been in existence less than two hundred and eight years, should be far more uncertain and corrupt than that of the New Testament, now over eighteen centuries old, during nearly fifteen of which it existed only in manuscript. . . the text of every verse in the New Testament may be said to be so far settled by general consent of scholars, that any dispute as to its readings must relate rather to the interpretation of the words than to any doubts respecting the words themselves. But in every one of Shakespeare’s thirty-seven plays there are probably a hundred readings still in dispute, a large portion of which materially affects the meaning of the passages in which they occur.”*

Now consider the Bible’s survival through persecution. The Bible has withstood vicious attacks by its enemies. Many have tried to burn it, ban it, and “outlaw it from the days of Roman emperors to present-day Communist-dominated countries.” In **303 A.D.** the Roman emperor Diocletian issued an edict to stop Christians from worshipping and to destroy their Scriptures. *“An imperial letter was everywhere promulgated, ordering the razing of the churches to the ground and the destruction by fire of the Scriptures, and proclaiming that those who held high positions would lose all civil rights, while those in households, if they persisted in their profession of Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty.”* Many centuries later, Voltaire, the noted French infidel who died in 1778, said that in one hundred years from his time Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history. But what has happened? Voltaire has passed into history, while the circulation of the Bible continues to increase in almost all parts of the world, carrying blessing wherever it goes. Concerning Voltaire’s prediction of the extinction of Christianity and the Bible in a hundred years, Geisler and Nix point out that **“only fifty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to produce stacks of Bibles.”** The Bible’s enemies come and go, but the Bible remains. Jesus was right when he said, **“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away” (Mark 13:31).**

Third, consider the Bible’s survival through criticism. H. L. Hastings has forcefully illustrated the unique way in which the Bible has withstood attacks of infidels and skeptics:

Infidels for eighteen hundred years have been refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today as solid as a rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved and cherished and read today than ever before. Infidels, with all their assaults, make about as much impression on this book as a man with a tack hammer would on the Pyramids of Egypt. When the French monarch proposed the persecution of the Christians in his dominion, an old statesman and warrior said to him, "Sire, the Church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers." So, the hammers of infidels have been pecking away at this book for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures. If this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers have all tried their hand at it; they die and the book still lives.

Bernard Ramm adds:

A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tomb stone, and committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put.

No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or the so-called fine literature of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? with such venom and skepticism? with such thoroughness and erudition? upon every chapter, line and tenet?

The Bible is still loved by millions, read by millions, and studied by millions.

The Bible is unique in its ability to stand up to its critics. There is no book in all of literature like it. A person looking for truth would certainly consider a book that bears these qualifications.

Fifth, THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS TEACHINGS

Let's consider prophecy. Wilbur Smith, who compiled a personal library of twenty-five thousand volumes, *concludes that whatever one may think of the authority of and the message presented in the book we call the Bible, there is world-wide agreement that in more ways than one it is the most remarkable volume that has ever been produced in these some five thousand years of writing on the part of the human race.* It is the only volume ever produced by man, or a group of men, in which is to be found a large body of prophecies relating to individual nations, to Israel, to all the peoples of the earth, to certain cities, and to

the coming of One who was to be the Messiah. The ancient world had many different devices for determining the future, known as divination, but not in the entire gamut of Greek and Latin literature, even though they use the words “prophet” and “prophecy,” can we find any real specific prophecy of a great historic event to come in the distant future, nor any prophecy of a Savior to arise in the human race. ***Islam cannot point to any prophecies of the coming of Mohammed uttered hundreds of years before his birth. Neither can the founders of any cult in this country rightly identify any ancient text specifically foretelling their appearance.*** Geisler and Nix concur. In their book *A General Introduction to the Bible*—an authoritative standard in its own right—they write:

According to **Deuteronomy 18**, a prophet was false if he made predictions that were never fulfilled. No unconditional prophecy of the Bible about events to the present day has gone unfilled. Hundreds of predictions, some of them given hundreds of years in advance, have been literally fulfilled. The time (**Daniel 9**), city (**Micah 5:2**), and nature (**Isaiah 7:14**) of Christ’s birth were foretold in the Old Testament, as were dozens of other things about His life, death, and resurrection (**see Isaiah 53**). Numerous other prophecies have been fulfilled, including the destruction of Edom (**Obadiah 1**), the curse on Babylon (**Isaiah 13**), the destruction of Tyre (**Ezekiel 26**) and Nineveh (**Nahum 1-3**), and the return of Israel to the Land (**Isaiah 11:11**). Other books claim divine inspiration, such as the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and parts of the [Hindu] Veda. But none of those books contains predictive prophecy. ***As a result, fulfilled prophecy is a strong indication of the unique, divine authority of the Bible.***

Now, let’s consider history. First Samuel through Second Chronicles presents approximately five centuries of the history of Israel. ***The Cambridge Ancient History*** (vol. 1, p. 222) states: ***“The Israelites certainly manifest a genius for historical construction, and the Old Testament embodies the oldest history writing extant.”***

Concerning the reliability of the ***“Table of Nations”*** in **Genesis 10**, One historian concludes: ***“It stands absolutely alone in ancient literature without a remote parallel even among the Greeks. . . ‘The Table of Nations’ remains an astonishingly accurate document.”***

Third, let’s consider the character of the Bible. The Bible deals very frankly with the sins of its characters, even when those sins reflect badly on God’s chosen people, leaders, and the biblical writers themselves. For example:

- *The sins of the patriarchs are mentioned (Genesis 12:11-13; 49:5-7).*
- *The sins of the people are denounced (Deuteronomy 9:24).*
- *King David's adultery with Bathsheba and his subsequent attempted cover-up is revealed (2 Samuel 11-12).*
- *The Gospel Evangelists paint their own faults and those of the apostles (Matthew 8:10-26; 26:31-56; Mark 6:52; 8:18; Luke 8:24, 25; 9:40-45; John 10:6; 16:32).*
- *The disorder within the church is exposed (1 Corinthians 1:11; 15:12; 2 Corinthians 2:4).*

The Bible as a book focuses on reality, not fantasy. It presents the good and bad, the right and wrong, the best and worst, the hope and despair, the joy and pain of life. In this respect, it is unique.

Sixth, THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS INFLUENCE ON LITERATURE

Cleland B. McAfee writes in *The Greatest English Classic*: *“If every Bible in any considerable city were destroyed, the Book could be restored in all its essential parts from the quotations on the shelves of the city public library. There are works, covering almost all the great literary writers, devoted especially to showing how much the Bible has influenced them.”*

Gabriel Sivan writes, *“No other document in the possession of mankind offers so much to the reader-ethical and religious instruction, superb poetry, a social program and legal code, an interpretation of history, and all the joys, sorrows, and hopes which well up in men and which Israel's prophets and leaders expressed with matchless force and passion.”*

Elie Wiesel, renowned Jewish novelist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, has observed, *“An inspired work, the Bible is also a source of inspiration. Its impact has no equal, whether on the social and ethical plane or on that of literary creation. We forget too often that the Bible pertains equally to the artistic domain. Its characters are dramatic, their dramas timeless, their triumphs and defeats overwhelming. Each cry touches us, each call penetrates us. Texts of another age, the biblical poems are themselves ageless. They call out to us collectively and individually, across and beyond the centuries”* (In Epilogue of Liptzen, BTWL, 293).

The historian Philip Schaff (in *The Person of Christ*, American Tract Society, 1913) classically describes the uniqueness of the Bible and the Savior:

This Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.

Bernard Ramm adds:

“No other book in all human history has . . . inspired the writing of so many books as the Bible.”

Finally, THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS INFLUENCE ON CIVILIZATION

Geisler and Nix state:

The influence of the Bible and its teaching in the Western world is clear for all who study history. And the influential role of the West in the course of world events is equally clear. Civilization has been influenced more by the Judeo-Christian Scriptures than by any other book or series of books in the world. Indeed, no great moral or religious work in the world exceeds the depth of morality in the principle of Christian love, and none has a more lofty spiritual concept than the biblical view of God. The Bible presents the highest ideals known to men, ideals that have molded civilization.

Gabriel Sivan observes, *“The Bible has given strength to the freedom fighter and new heart to the persecuted, a blueprint to the social reformer and inspiration to the writer and artist.”*

French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau once asked: *Is it possible that a book at once so simple and sublime should be merely the work of man?”*

The evidence cited in this study for your consideration does not prove that the Bible is the Word of God. *But to anyone with an open mind it clearly indicates that the Bible is uniquely superior to any and all other books.* A professor once

remarked: *“If you are an intelligent person, you will read the one book that has drawn more attention than any other, if you are searching for the truth.”* The Bible certainly qualifies as this one book.

I close with this: If God, the Creator of the universe and all that herein is, had written a book, would His book not be different than all other books? Would you not expect, would you not demand, that God’s book be unique? And so, it is. To all who have joined us in this particular study, I present to you a unique book . . . the Word of God.

- Adapted from Josh D. McDowell, *Evidence for Christianity*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), pages 19-36.
- “Unique.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/unique>. Accessed 11 Aug. 2021.