

Is The Bible From God?

Adapted from Greg Koukl
Stand to Reason Apologetics Ministry

As we converse with our friends about the Christian faith, inevitably we will make reference to the Bible and what it reveals about creation, man, evil, Jesus etc. No longer can we assume a general acceptance of the Bible as supernaturally inspired and authoritative. Instead, we must be prepared to answer our friends' questions and/or objections of the Bible's authority.

The challenge can be reduced to a simple question: "What kind of book is the Bible?" There are only two plausible answers. The Bible is merely a book by man about God, or it is a book given by God through man, to man.

If the Bible is merely a book by man about God, then the Bible is a record of human wisdom marked by human limitations. That's all. If the Bible is a book given by God through man, to man, then God is the ultimate author and His word is the last word. Further, being essentially a supernatural book, it would likely bear supernatural marks, God's fingerprints in a sense.

Do we have any good reasons to think God has spoken supernaturally in the Bible? The way to answer this question is to look at the book itself. Here are six reasons it is reasonable to believe the Bible is God's book, six evidences of supernatural authorship conveniently paired with parts of the hand so you won't forget.

The "Pinky" - Prophecy

For the first evidence, think "pinky—prophecy." The Bible has fulfilled prophecy—detailed, precise, predictions relating to individuals and entire empires given with hairsplitting accuracy.

Daniel gives prophecy so exact it reads like history written after the fact. For one, at the threshold of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years of Babylonian captivity for Judah (Jer. 29:10), Daniel is given the amazing "70 weeks" prophecy. Identifying the specific time of Messiah's first coming and His death, this prophecy was fulfilled in the exact 173,880-day time period Daniel predicted (Daniel 9:24-25, cf., Luke 19:41-44).

There were dozens of specific prophecies fulfilled in Jesus' life alone. His own prediction that the temple would be destroyed stone by stone (Luke 21:5-6) was dramatically fulfilled 40 years later when Roman legions under Titus destroyed Jerusalem.

Is fulfilled prophecy sufficient in itself to make our case for divine authorship? Maybe not for some. Even so, it's an important piece of a cumulative case for the Scripture's Divine authorship.

The Ring Finger – Unity of Message

A wedding ring, symbolic of marital unity, reminds us of the second evidence for the Bible's supernatural origin—a remarkable unity of purpose and plan despite its diverse origins.

The Bible consists of sixty-six books written by forty or more authors from diverse backgrounds (rabbis, warriors, shepherds, kings, historians), in a diversity of conditions (dungeons, deserts, battlefields, palaces, pastures), on a diversity of controversial subjects, over a fifteen-hundred-year period of time.

The Bible doesn't read like sixty-six different stories, though. Instead, a profound harmony of perspective is woven through the account from Genesis to Revelation as God progressively unveils His rescue plan for fallen creation.

No individual writer understood the plan completely. Each in his time, as if guided by an unseen hand, added his piece to the puzzle. Later, at the coming of Christ, all the pieces come together, revealing the full picture of God's strategy for salvation that had been unfolding for ages. This remarkable continuity defies naturalistic explanation.

The Large Finger – Life's Big Questions

The largest finger brings to mind the Bible's ability to address the big issues of life in a coherent way that's also entirely consistent with our deepest intuitions about reality. Simply put, the worldview of the Bible makes sense.

First, the fundamental questions vexing mankind for millennia are all confronted in Scripture: What is life's meaning? Who is God? What does He want? What makes man special? Why is there evil? What went wrong? How can we fix it?

Second, we are all intuitively aware of certain unavoidable facts. The universe is filled with order, meaning, and moral significance. Man is a unique creature, distinct from all other living things in his transcendent nobility, but is deeply damaged and morally broken, plagued by guilt he desperately tries to suppress.

The biblical worldview takes each of these things seriously. The universe is filled with order, meaning, and morality by a holy Creator who made us for friendship with Him. Yet we rebelled against our Sovereign, severing that relationship, damaging our own souls, and crippling the created order.

Evil is the wreckage left behind by our rebellion. Man is noble because he bears God's image. Man is cruel because he is fallen. He feels guilty because he is guilty. Though our hearts long for restoration, reconciliation, and forgiveness, our wills remain defiant. Only God can rescue us.

Deep inside we already know most of these things. The Bible simply connects the dots, then offers the sole solution to the central problem. The problem is personal guilt that comes with rebellion. The solution is forgiveness that comes with surrender, what the Bible calls "repentance."

The Bible has supernatural insight. Its assessment of the problem and its antidote for the cure both resonate with our deepest longings, and also fit our common-sense intuitions about the world and ourselves.

The Index Finger – Historical Accuracy

The index, or "pointing," finger reminds us that the Bible points to history for verification. It's a reliable, detailed record from the distant past of events that have profound spiritual significance. This is important for two reasons.

First, a book allegedly given by God must get its history right. And it does. Menahem Mansoor, professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, has affirmed, "Biblical archaeology's greatest significance is that it has corroborated many historical records in the Bible."

Here is one example of the historical accuracy of the Bible. The Bible records that the Hittites were a powerful force in the Middle East from 1750 B.C. until 1200 B.C. (Genesis 15:20, 2 Samuel 11, and 1 Kings 10:29). Prior to the late nineteenth century, nothing was known of the Hittites outside the Bible, and many critics alleged that they were an invention of the biblical authors.

However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, archaeologists in Turkey discovered a city which proved to be the capital of the Hittite empire. In the city they discovered a massive library of thousands of tablets. These tablets showed that the Hittite language was an early relative of the Indo-European languages.

The New Testament documents are the best historical documents of the ancient world when approached using the standard canons of historical research untainted by naturalistic (anti-supernatural) presuppositions. There are five reasons historians take the New Testament material seriously.¹¹

First, the accounts are early. As ancient records go, the narratives were written very close to the events they report.

Second, multiple, independent, primary source documents verify each other. In addition to the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the writings of Peter and Paul, secular writings corroborate the New Testament's accounts.

Third, the New Testament documents include details of eyewitness testimony: times of day, weather conditions, local customs, names of provincial rulers, and other minutia characteristic of authentic accounts.

Fourth, the Gospels include embarrassing details. Jesus' disciples are petty, slow to understand, arrogant, and unfaithful. Peter denies Christ; the rest flee. Women, disrespected in the ancient world, are the first to witness the risen Christ. Why include these unflattering details if the Gospels are works of fiction?

Fifth, there was no motivation for the writers to deceive. Those who lie, do so out of self-interest. A testimony that brings torment, torture, and execution is not likely to be fabricated. The earliest disciples—those who were in a position to know the truth—signed their testimonies in blood. Peter wrote,

"We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16).

His claim fits all the facts.

The historical documents of the Gospels record Jesus' claim to be God. They also faithfully document the miracles and resurrection from the dead that substantiate this claim. Jesus' acts of power give His words tremendous authority (John 20:30-31).

If these things really happened, then Jesus is no ordinary man, and the book He endorsed as divine is no ordinary book. History itself is our ally, here.

In a dramatic reversal of New Testament scholarship over the last 50 years, the majority of scholars—even secular ones—now affirm four facts of history. One, Jesus of Nazareth died on a Roman cross and was buried in a tomb. Two, the tomb was empty Sunday morning. Three, numerous people (including skeptics like James and Saul) experienced what they thought was the resurrected Jesus. Four, belief in the resurrection launched the early church.¹⁶

What historians do not agree on is what best explains these four facts of history. But there aren't that many options. No explanation fits the evidence better than the one given by those previously gutless disciples who now put their lives on the line for this testimony: He who was dead is alive. He has risen.

The Bible records supernatural events in history to support its claims.

Thumbs Up – Transformed Lives

"Thumbs up" was the emperor's sign that a gladiator had won the right to live to fight again. "Thumbs up" reminds us that the Bible supernaturally changes people's lives in deep, profound, and irreversible ways.

This is the acid test of God's influence on revelation, its ability to dramatically transform. Whether old or young, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, noble or of mean birth, regardless of culture or country or era, the Bible has a revolutionary impact on those who heed its counsel.

And it's promised in the text:

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things passed away. Behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

When people consistently obey this book, something radical happens, both to individuals and to whole cultures.

Yes, people can change on their own. However, obedience to Scripture changes us in ways we could never have accomplished by ourselves (we've tried). The Bible has a supernatural impact in human lives.

The Fist - Perseverance

The clenched fist reminds us that the Bible is a fighter. It has demonstrated remarkable survival through time and persecution.

Jesus said,

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matt. 13:31). I

Isaiah wrote,

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever" (Is. 40:8).

In prison himself for the Bible's testimony, Paul promised,

"The Word of God cannot be imprisoned" (2 Tim. 2:9).

No other book in history has seen such concerted attempts to obliterate it—both externally (through destruction) and internally (through criticism)—to no avail. No other book has been printed as much, translated as much, read as much, or quoted as much as the Bible. No other name has been written about as much, pondered as much, sung about as much, or recognized as much all over the globe as the name of Jesus.

The Bible's obituary has been written many times, but it refuses to stay in the grave. It remains today the best selling book of all time. If this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. This defies a naturalistic explanation.

A Verdict And A Confession

The Bible has the stamp of the supernatural: supernatural predictions, supernatural unity, supernatural insight, a reliable record of supernatural events, supernatural impact, and supernatural survival.

Does this prove the Bible is God's book? That depends upon what you consider proof. It's always possible to be mistaken, but we've built a cumulative case here. Our claim is reasonable. Christians do have compelling evidence for the divine authorship of the Bible.

If our friend really wants to know if the Bible is God's Word, they need to read it. Let Jesus speak for Himself. There is a powerful role the Spirit plays that is hard to describe, and is therefore difficult to explain to others.

If you want people to believe in the Bible, encourage them simply to listen to Jesus for a while, then have them draw their own conclusions. Most people respect Jesus. They've just never listened closely to what He's said. They've never allowed His words to have their impact.

Don't get into a tug-o-war with skeptics about inspiration. Instead, invite them to engage the ideas first, then let God do the heavy lifting for you. The truth you're defending has a life of its own because the Spirit is in the words. Once others have listened a bit, any further reasons you give for biblical authority will have the soil they need to take root in.

If all the evidence—subjective and objective—shows that God has spoken in the Bible, then our appropriate response is to bend the knee. Our beliefs bow to revelation, because God Himself is the best the authority to tell us what is right and true and good.

When God speaks, our opinions are silenced. The ancient words are the final word—"ancient words, ever true, changing me, changing you."