

From Acorn to Oak

Why We Believe the Bible is the Word of God, Part 3: Unity and Consistency

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Did you ever invite a like-minded group of friends over to your house and discover during a conversation that a number of these kindred spirits disagreed with each other on a subject on which you thought you all would be in complete harmony? You have also likely played the old parlor game, Rumor, whereby a group of people sit in circle, and someone begins by telling a story to a person next to him or her. By the time the story is told to the last person in the group, everyone is shocked to hear how it has changed so dramatically as this person tells all assembled what he or she heard.

Both of these experiences reflect common human behavior. In the light of these realities it is highly unlikely that over 40 authors writing throughout a 1500-year period would be in complete agreement. Think of the differences in national origin, culture, language, experience, occupation, and personality in addition to other factors that normally produce disagreement, especially when addressing often controversial subjects...unless God intervened and guided their writing.

In the previous essays we have looked at four reasons why it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is God's Word and therefore true. We considered that Jesus, himself, affirmed the Old Testament; eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection and other events wrote the New Testament; historical writings and archeological findings confirm Scriptural statements; and the Bible contains an extraordinary number of fulfilled prophecies, far exceeding the number people could attribute to "chance." Now let's consider another reality that supplies sufficient evidence to convince one who is sincerely seeking the truth.

The Bible is unique in its unity and consistency, even while being written by over 40 authors throughout a 1500-year span.

Examining the earliest manuscripts over against each other and our modern versions reveals an extraordinary consistency. Significantly, many more manuscripts, written much closer to the time of the originals and the events they report, exist for the Bible, far more, than is available for any other writings from ancient times. For example, Herodotus' *History* was written in the period of 460-400 B.C.. The earliest copy of a total of only eight is dated about A.D. 900, a span of 1300 years. In contrast the New Testament was written in the period of A.D. 40-95. The earliest copy we have was written about A.D. 125, and fragments exist that were written only a few years after the original. In contrast to the eight extant copies of the *History*, over 24,000 early manuscripts of the New Testament exist.

When the manuscripts of the Bible are studied carefully, variations in them, e.g., spelling errors, omissions, dittography, are found to be essentially inconsequential. Noted authority in the field of New Testament textual criticism, Sir Frederic Kenyon, writing in his classic work, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, has said,

no fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading...It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain. Especially is this the case with the New Testament. The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world. Scholars are satisfied that they possess substantially the true text of the principal Greek and Roman writers whose works have come down to us, of Sophocles, of Thucydides, of Cicero, of Virgil; yet our knowledge of their writings depends on a mere handful of manuscripts, whereas the manuscripts of the New Testament are counted by hundreds, and even thousands. (p. 55)

The bottom line of these observations and all the other scholarship that has been amassed on this subject is that enough evidence exists to satisfy the inquiring mind, which is also truly willing to consider sound reasoning, that the Bible is God's Word. Further, we can be certain that the Bible, which is the basis of our doctrine and of our greatest hopes, is true and trustworthy.