

Building Faith

What makes the Bible unique?

The unity of the Bible

Intro: In our last building faith lesson, we looked at the exclusive claims of the Scripture and how many people find them unacceptable, even arrogant. They may contend that all religions have their own “enlightened” founder and sacred book(s) that purport to bring their message from God to man. Consequently they may ask, "How is the Bible different from the other sacred writings of the various religions of the world?" How is it unique?

The Bible is unique in its unity or continuity. (Turn to your TOC in your Bible)

Consider these facts about the origin of the Bible’s message that show the amazing diversity of its creation:

Written over a period of 1500 years

The Law (15th century; 1400 BC)

The book of Proverbs (10th century; 970 BC)

The prophecy of Isaiah (8th century; 750 BC)

The book of Jeremiah (7th century; 600 BC)

The book of Malachi (5th century; 400 BC)

The gospels (1st century AD; 30-70 AD)

Think how human ideas change over such a vast period of time!

By more than 40 authors from every walk of life

Moses (political leader and deliverer of Israel)

Joshua (military general)

David (king, poet, musician, shepherd, and warrior)

Solomon (king and philosopher)

Nehemiah (cupbearer to a king Artaxerxes)

Amos (herdsman and tender of sycamore fig trees)

Isaiah (adviser to Jewish kings)

Daniel (prime minister of Babylon)

Matthew (tax collector)

Mark (Peter’s interpreter and secretary)

Luke (a physician and historian)

Paul (tentmaker and rabbinical understudy)

Peter (professional fisherman)

Think about how hard it is for people from different walks of life to hold common points of view about anything!

In different places

Moses in the wilderness

Jeremiah in a dungeon

Daniel in a palace

Paul in prison

Luke while traveling

John in exile on Patmos Island

Think about how the circumstances often change people outlooks and conclusions!

At different times (in times of war and sacrifice, in times of peace and prosperity)

During different moods (joy and jubilation, sorrow and despair, certainty and conviction, doubt and confusion)

On three continents (Asia, Africa, Europe)

In three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek)

In numerous literary styles (poetry, historical narrative, song, romance, didactic treatise, personal correspondence, memoirs, satire, biography, autobiography, law, prophecy, parable, and allegory)

On numerous controversial subjects (marriage, morality, authority, parenting, the nature of the deity)

Is it conceivable that so many different people living in such differing times and conditions could each produce a volume of work that taken with all the others could be called coherent or cohesive? It seems on the surface to be virtually impossible.

Yet in spite of its diversity, the Bible presents a single unfolding story: God's redemption of man.

This theme is developed slowly but surely throughout the Bible's books over the course of many centuries! We see:

The creation and fall of man into sin and his separation from God's presence & the demonstration of man's continued defiance of God's purpose and the universal destruction of the ancient world (his need for redemption).

The inability of man to learn from past mistakes and the division of the nations to prevent joint rebellion against God (his inability to redeem himself).

The call of Abraham as the family from which will come a redeemer. The preservation and deliverance of His descendants in Egypt and God's use of them His chosen people to display His righteousness and a people through whom to accomplish his redemptive purposes. (God's preparation for Redemption)

The coming of the Redeemer and his accomplishment of God's purpose in His suffering and death and His resurrection from dead. The establishment of the church, the family of the redeemed and their instruction as they await the consummation of the ages when Christ shall return. (the Redeemed Community).

The completion of redemption in the resurrection of the body and man's union with God (Redemption completed).

That theme is clearly seen simply by comparing the first and last book of our English Bible and how themes introduced at the beginning of the OT reappear at the end of the NT.

Comparing Genesis and Revelation

Creation of the heavens and earth

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

Creation of the new heavens and earth

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. (Revelation 21:1)

Separation from the presence of God

therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. (Genesis 3:23)

Eternal access to the presence of God

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, (Revelation 21:3)

Curse on the ground

Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. (Genesis 3:17)

No more curse

And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; (Revelation 22:3)

Loss of access to the tree of life

So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24)

Gained access to the tree of life

And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:2)

Prophecies of pain, sorrow, and tears

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, In pain you shall bring forth children; (Genesis 3:16)

Promises of no pain, sorrow, or tears

and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

The unity of the Bible points to God as its overruling composer.

Being a music major we had to take courses that were intended to teach us to discern the genius of the classical composers, to learn the techniques that they used. We would consider a Beethoven symphony, a composition of several movements. Each in a different key, striking rhythmic diversity, various moods; yet each movement was often bound together by thematic material (a series of notes or melody) that the composer developed in all the varying movements. It was the unifying motif of the composition and the evidence of the musical genius of a single composer.

Could you imagine that forty people living over a period of say a hundred years, most of whom never knew one another, should each write a few lines of music without the awareness of what the other has written and somehow

put them all together to present a four movement symphony of beauty and power? Impossible!

Yet the Bible is such a composition, created in diversity, with a harmony and thematic unity that calls for a single composer!—God Himself!

for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:21)

Conclusion: If indeed the Bible is unique, in a class all by itself, in all these areas, isn't this reason to question the common belief that one religion is as good as another? Isn't it reason to consider its claims and belief its testimony to reveal the only way to God?