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① THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE

An old story is told of two men who became lost in the forest. When night fell they realized the danger they were in and began frantically looking for the way home.

As the men moved through the dark, frightening woods, they suddenly spotted a light in the distance and made their way toward it. The light was shining from an old cabin, but as one of the men approached the cabin and peeked in the window, he drew back in fear. The cabin belonged to a huge man who was well known in that region for being an eccentric hermit. Many scary stories had been told about him over the years, although no one knew for sure if he was really dangerous.

The man looking in the window quickly crawled back to his friend, being careful to stay hidden.

“What’s the matter?” his friend asked.

“It’s that hermit,” the first man replied. “There’s no way I’m going to knock on his door!” So the two men huddled in the dark woods.

After about an hour, they were so hungry and cold they realized they couldn’t just stay in the forest all night. So they decided to take a risk and ask the hermit for shelter. But before they knocked they decided to have another look in the window, just to see what he was doing.

The second man volunteered this time, and he snuck up to peek in the window. He stared for a few seconds, then came running back to the other guy with a big smile of relief on his face.

“It’s OK!” he said excitedly. “He’s reading his Bible!”

There is no other book on earth that can turn fear into joy and doubt into assurance the way the Bible can. The Bible stands apart from and is unique among all other books and so-called sacred writings, because it alone is the very Word of God with the power to transform individual lives and entire cultures. One of the great statements the Bible makes about itself is found in Isaiah 55:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. (vv. 10–11)

You will never find an unconditional guarantee like this in any other piece of writing—especially a guarantee that is still good some 2,600 years after it was first made. In fact, you will never find another book that can compete with the Bible in any form or fashion whatsoever. It is without question the *transforming* Word of God.

The Bible’s uniqueness may be comforting to you and me, but the world has never been quite sure what to do with the Word. Some simply try to ignore it, but that’s as impossible as trying to ignore a lion in your living room. Some people put the Bible alongside the great works of philosophy that human beings have written, or cat-

egorize it as a book of wise sayings and moral lessons. To still others the Bible is a book of guidance and principles for life—and it is all of these things, but also far more. We could never exhaust the subject of the Bible’s uniqueness, but I want to begin by considering several things that set the Word of God apart.

THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS ORIGIN

Everything we are going to talk about in this book hinges on the fact that the Bible came from God. Scripture is unique because it is not the word of man, but of God.

Now some people will challenge this claim because they say their book is the Word of God. Mormons make that claim for the *Book of Mormon*, and other cults say the same about their founders’ writings. And of course, Muslims make a similar claim for the Qur’an (we’ll have more to say about this later).

The problem is that anyone can step forward and claim that he or she has received a revelation from God. So how do we know which claim to believe? Thankfully, we don’t have to guess, because there are stringent tests that any writing must meet to be validated as the true Word of God. Since the Bible claims to be the unique revelation of God, its words must stand out from all other words. It must be self-authenticating and superior to all other books. We will see how completely the Bible stands up to these tests and validates its claim to be unique.

Jesus Testified to the Bible’s Uniqueness

The most important proof of the Bible’s uniqueness is Jesus’ testimony to the Scriptures. The main reason we know the Bible is God’s Word is that Jesus said so. He used the word *Scriptures* on a number of occasions to describe the Old Testament writings, whether the Law or the prophets (see, for example, Matthew 21:42; 22:29; 26:56).

Jesus also made a statement in the Sermon on the Mount that no one can ignore. “Truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away,

not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18).

When we want to emphasize a statement we often say, “Now mark my words.” Jesus said that when it comes to the Bible, we can mark not only the words as true, but also every letter and even the smallest portions of the letters. In other words, the Bible is binding, authoritative, and dependable.

One implication of this is that to reject the Bible is to reject Jesus and accuse Him of being a liar. Many people who want to claim Jesus don’t want to accept the Bible as His Word. But Jesus ruled out that option when He tied His life and ministry completely to the fulfillment of Scripture. Jesus used the strongest language possible to declare that the Bible is God’s Word.

A Muslim once told me, “I don’t believe your holy book, but I believe Jesus was a great prophet.”

“OK, let’s discuss that,” I said. “How great a prophet was Jesus?”

“Oh, he was a great prophet just like Mohammed.”

Then I asked him, “Could Jesus be a great prophet on a par with Mohammed, and yet be a persistent liar?” My Muslim friend agreed that Jesus could not be a persistent liar and a great prophet at the same time.

Then I pointed out to him the inconsistency of Islam’s view of Jesus. “But that’s the position you have to take if you say you believe Jesus was a true prophet and yet reject the Bible, because Jesus affirmed again and again that the Bible is God’s Word. Even your holy book, the Qur’an, records Jesus as saying that the Bible is God’s Word. My holy book doesn’t say that Jesus ever affirmed the Qur’an as God’s Word. So was Jesus lying when He said the Bible is true and will be fulfilled down to the smallest stroke of its letters?”

You see, we don’t have to be afraid to assert the uniqueness of Scripture, because everything Jesus said and did proved the Bible to be true.



The Bible Testifies to Its Own Uniqueness

It would take another book to deal with all of the Scripture references where the Bible either explicitly or implicitly refers to itself as God’s Word. Of course, when we say the Bible speaks of itself as God’s Word, we are talking about the testimony of the authors of Scripture who recorded God’s revelation.

For example, hundreds of times in the Old Testament the prophets said “the word of the Lord” came to them. Many other times God spoke directly through the patriarchs or the prophets to His people, who never failed to acknowledge that it was God who spoke.

One great statement of God’s uniqueness is found in Isaiah 43, where the Lord said: “Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and there is no savior besides Me” (vv. 10–11). If God is unique among all so-called gods, then His Word is unique.

A classic argument for the Bible’s validity is the way that the Word so naturally and continually, without the slightest self-consciousness or apology, refers to itself as the Word of God. This factor has to be taken into account, for if it were otherwise and the Bible was constantly trying to defend itself or insist that it was true, we would have reason to doubt its claims—much like a judge and jury might begin to doubt a witness who kept loudly insisting that he was telling the truth.

Another proof of the Bible’s uniqueness is the very nature of the truths it teaches. What I mean here is that the Bible gives unmistakable evidence that its thoughts come from God and not man. We began this chapter by looking at Isaiah 55:10–11. Now I want to consider verses 8–9, which also make a strong case for the Bible’s uniqueness: “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.’”

That’s a very strong claim, so if the Bible is indeed unique, then its thinking should be so far higher than our thinking that we could never figure it out on our own. And that is exactly the case with

Scripture. This argument may not satisfy the skeptics, but the fact is that the doctrines of Scripture, such as man's total ruin in sin and helplessness to save himself, and the incarnation of God Himself to save mankind, are utterly apart from any other religious teachings. Someone has said that the Bible is the only book that has the courage to tell us the truth about ourselves.

Clearly, the Bible did not originate with men. The apostle Peter gave us the definitive word on God's revelation. "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20–21). No author ever wrote a word of Scripture until the Holy Spirit moved him to write.

The Bible's Perfect Unity Testifies to Its Uniqueness

The Bible is also unique in the way it has come down to us. The Bible's unity of message is nothing short of a miracle, given that it was written over a period of about fifteen hundred years by forty or more different people, who lived in several different countries with different cultures and came from every kind of background imaginable.

Just try bringing together a liberator and national leader (Moses), a military general (Joshua), two kings (David and Solomon), a shepherd (Amos), a tax collector (Matthew), some fishermen (Peter and John), and a rabbi (Paul), have them write down even the simplest message, and see if they can agree with each other. That wouldn't happen even if they were in the same room at the same time working with the same set of facts, let alone separated by hundreds of years.

The thin red line of our Redeemer and His blood runs all the way through the Bible—from the first prophecy of a Savior and God's slaying of animals to cover Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15, 21), to the last chapter of Revelation that invites the redeemed to spend eternity with God (Revelation 22:17). The Bible's message is consistent



and unified from beginning to end. I love the psalmist’s statement: “The sum of Your word is truth” (Psalm 119:160).

Now don’t let anyone intimidate you on this one. Someone will say, “Yeah, but the Bible is full of contradictions.” That’s an old charge that has never been demonstrated, and those who make it usually can’t point to one example. Let me tell you, the world has had about two thousand years to prove this charge, and yet the Bible still stands. The best answer to this charge is to hand the skeptic a Bible and ask him to show you an example of a contradiction. Most people have no idea what to do because they’re just repeating a line they’ve heard.

In the 1970s a mechanic came forward after the death of billionaire Howard Hughes, claiming that Hughes had made him his heir because the man had once rescued Hughes when he found him staggering around in the desert. The mechanic supposedly had Hughes’s true will, naming him as heir.

This mechanic’s story had all kinds of holes in it, and it didn’t take skeptical officials very long to expose his claim as bogus. We’re talking about one man’s story that didn’t even depend on anyone else’s validation, and yet he couldn’t make it work. But even though the Bible has been examined, dissected, and attacked by the greatest minds in history, no one has ever made a charge of inconsistency or contradiction stick against God’s Word. You can relax, too, because it is never going to happen. No one but God could make one perfectly unified document out of sixty-six books. The unity of the Bible is like that of the human body, in which every part can only be explained in reference to the whole (see Psalm 119:160a).

Now someone might say, “You’re just using circular reasoning here. You’re going to the Bible to authenticate the Bible.” OK, then let’s turn to other sources outside of the Scripture to help verify its truth and corroborate the Bible’s witness to itself.

History Testifies to the Bible’s Uniqueness

When I make this argument I am not talking about the Bible as a supernatural document, but as a work of historical literature. The

point here is that if people accepted the same standards of validity for the Bible that they readily accept for other historical documents, they would have to admit that the Bible is the most widely attested book ever written.

To show you what I mean, we can take any figure from history who is no longer on the scene. How do we know that George Washington was our nation's first president? Nobody alive today can say, "I have seen George Washington. I've met him and heard him speak, and I know he was real." We accept the historicity of George Washington because we trust the historical record we have about him. And the same can be said for many other people we could name from history.

One test of the validity of any historical record is its proximity to the life of the person whose history it records. One reason the history of George Washington is considered reliable is that much of it was written during his lifetime by people who did see and know him, and more of it was written in the years very soon after his death. The closer the historical record is to the person's life, the more valid it becomes.

Well, guess what? The Bible comes through with shining colors on this score. The very latest part of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, was written in the 90s A.D., about sixty years after Jesus' death. But it was also written by the apostle John, an eyewitness to Jesus' life, so that gives his writings added weight.

This is amazing testimony to the Bible's trustworthiness. By comparison, some of the famous writings of antiquity, such as those that tell of people like Julius Caesar, were recorded hundreds of years after the events they describe. Many critics attack the early dates for various books of the New Testament, because they know that if they admit the Gospels and Epistles were written so soon after Jesus' life and death—mostly by eyewitnesses—their case against the Bible is greatly weakened.

Another test of the Bible's historical validity is the number of existing manuscripts that corroborate it. We are told that ten copies exist of the account of Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon, one of the most

famous events of ancient history. The earliest of these manuscripts was written hundreds of years after the event, yet the fact of Caesar’s crossing has never been seriously questioned by historians.

But the Bible puts that record, and almost any other historical record, to shame. We have about five thousand copies of the New Testament in existence, from fragments of a single verse to entire books. These copies agree on the basic doctrines of the faith and the important facts of Jesus’ life, although there are many differences of words and the order of events. This record is unheard of in historical circles, yet the Bible continues to come under attack.

But I can say it again. Fear not the doubts of the skeptics, for in God’s Word we have an authentic historical record. The Bible runs into trouble with its critics because of its supernatural, convicting character, not because it is of doubtful authenticity.

THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS TEACHING

A book that is unique in its origin should also be unique in its content and what it teaches. The Bible qualifies on this point because it teaches what no other book does. The Bible claims to teach the whole truth and nothing but the truth about God, man, creation, sin, salvation, and any other subject it touches on. Let’s consider some of the Bible’s unique truths.

Only the Bible Teaches About the Trinity

Other religious books may teach that there is a God, but only the Bible teaches that God is a triune Being. God’s Word is unique in affirming that God is “one in three”—three distinct Persons who share the same divine essence (see Matthew 28:19).

If the doctrine of the Trinity sometimes keeps you up at night trying to figure it out and explain it, join the crowd. Theologians have been trying to do that for centuries, and yet the truth of the Trinity remains a mystery. Other religions reject it, and Muslims use it to claim that Christians are the “infidels,” or unbelievers,

because they say we are polytheists who worship various gods, while they are the true monotheists who worship only Allah.

But the mystery of the Trinity does not negate the fact that God has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I liken the Trinity to a pretzel, which has three holes that are distinct yet completely intertwined and interconnected, all sharing the same piece of dough.

We know the Persons of the Godhead are distinct because of statements like this by Jesus: “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working” (John 5:17). Jesus also promised that God would send the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ resurrection (John 14:26). But at the same time Jesus also said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Three yet one is the glory and the mystery of the Trinity, and only the Bible teaches it.

Only the Bible Teaches the Whole Truth About Jesus

Jesus testified to the truth of Scripture, and the Scripture also testifies to the truth about Jesus. The Bible’s teaching of Christ’s virgin birth, sinless life as perfect Man and eternal God in a human body, atoning death, and triumphant resurrection are enough to set this Book apart from all others.

The Bible presents Jesus as the God-man, totally unlike anyone else in history. One minute He was hungry because He was man, but the next minute He was creating enough food to feed five thousand people because He is God. He slept because He was tired, yet He also raised people from the dead. He died on the cross because He was man, yet He walked out of the grave because He is God. The guards who were sent to arrest Jesus one time came back so awed that all they could say was, “Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks” (John 7:46).

Mohammed said he was a prophet whose job was to point people to Allah, the god of Islam. But Jesus said, “I am the true God.” Not only that, but He received worship that only belongs to God. The apostle Thomas confessed after Jesus had answered his doubts,

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“My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Far from rebuking or correcting Thomas, Jesus pronounced as blessed those who believe in Him without seeing Him (v. 29).

Philip said to Jesus at the Last Supper, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us” (John 14:8). Jesus answered with a statement of His equality with God: “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (v. 9).

Perhaps the most startling claim Jesus made to His deity is when He said to the Jews one day, “Before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58). That blew their minds, because they understood that Jesus was claiming to be the pre-existent God, the One who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and called Himself, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). The whole truth about Jesus is that He is the God-man, and the Bible alone teaches that.

Only the Bible Teaches the Whole Truth About Man

The Bible’s teaching about the origin and nature of mankind also sets it totally apart. Other religious writings have their stories and myths about how the human race began, but the Bible is alone in portraying man as not only the unique creation of God, but as utterly ruined by sin and completely helpless even to improve himself, to say nothing of saving himself, apart from God’s intervention.

Because it is the revealed truth of God, the Bible explains and probes the depth of human nature in a way no other book does. The testimony of countless people is that even though they thought they were reading the Bible, they realized that the Bible was reading them. This is so because the Bible is alive. Hebrews 4:12 says that God’s Word is “living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

You cannot get any deeper into a person’s life than to divide between the soul and spirit, the immaterial part of man. The Bible

tells us our deepest needs, and explains why nothing or no one can meet those needs except God.

We are creatures of dust, and yet the Bible says we breathe the very breath of God. We are deeply flawed by sin, and our nature is depraved—which means that on our own we are incapable of doing anything good that would commend us to God. The world is surprised when a sinner sins because the world doesn't believe that human beings are sinners by nature and by choice. You won't find that truth anywhere but in the Bible.

Only the Bible Teaches the Whole Truth About Salvation

Here's another unique characteristic of Scripture. Every other religion known to mankind tells you what you must do to make yourself acceptable to God. But the Bible tells you what God has already done to save you.

There are really only two religions in the world—the kind in which you do your best to reach up to God, and the kind in which He gave His best to reach down to you. Unlike any other religious book, the Bible says we are saved by grace and not by works (see Ephesians 2:8–9).

Even though I know that men's hearts are sinful and they don't want God, it still amazes me at times that people would reject God's free offer of salvation. Everything that needs to be done to save us has been done. Most people want to do something to try to save themselves, but the Bible has no loopholes a person can squeeze through to make it into heaven apart from the blood of Jesus Christ.

Only the Bible Teaches History in Advance

Teaching history in advance sounds like an oxymoron—and it would be for any book but the Bible. God's Word teaches about history hundreds of years before it happens, which is called prophecy. If we had no other validation of Scripture but its fulfilled prophecies, we would still be on very solid ground.

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There have been many so-called prophets in history, and some of them seemed to make some accurate prophecies. But the Bible's standard is 100 percent accuracy, whether the prophecy is one hundred or five hundred years in advance of its fulfillment. It's not even worth discussing other prophets' records, because no prophet in any holy book has ever claimed to prophesy the future on the scale of the Bible.

One of the Bible's most amazing prophecies to me is one of its most familiar: the prophecy that Jesus Christ would be born in the village of Bethlehem. This prophecy was given in Micah 5:2, which was written about seven hundred years before Christ's birth. Its fulfillment is recorded in Matthew 2:5–6.

The time frame of this alone is miraculous, but it's even more so when you consider that Bethlehem is just a dot on the map. In other words, the chances of prophesying Jesus' birth and getting it right by accident are zero.

And don't forget that biblical prophecy isn't limited to religious events. The book of Daniel contains the progression of the Gentile world powers in the centuries before Christ, written hundreds of years before Alexander the Great and the Greeks defeated the Medo-Persian Empire and then were in turn defeated by the Romans. You can close your Bible and open your history book, and you'll find that God tells the story of world history in advance—because the Bible is unique in its teaching.

THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS IMPACT

We are going to consider two more ways in which the Bible demonstrates that it is unique, and then I want to ask you an important question before we go on to the next chapter.

In some ways we have already made the point that the Bible has had, and continues to have, an influence that is unequaled by any book in history. My point here is simply to reinforce the incredible impact that God's Word has made on the world. God promises in Isaiah 55:11 that His Word will always accomplish the purpose

for which He sends it. That is obvious from the influence the Bible has in this world.

The Bible Has Changed Millions of Individuals

When I was a student at Dallas Seminary, we used to hear a story that was told about the late Dr. Harry Ironside, who was one of the great Bible teachers in the early half of the twentieth century and a frequent lecturer at the seminary.

The story goes that Dr. Ironside was preaching in a town once when a local atheist challenged him to prove the existence of God and tried to argue that atheism was as beneficial a way of life as Christianity.

Dr. Ironside challenged the man to a contest. “I want you to find one hundred people whose lives have been changed and made better by atheism, and I will find one hundred people whose lives have been radically changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We’ll meet here tomorrow, and see which way is the true way.” Needless to say, the man couldn’t meet the challenge, because only the Bible has life-changing power.

The Bible Has Changed Entire Cultures

The Bible has also changed entire cultures. I love the story of the unbelieving anthropologist who visited a primitive tribe that had accepted the gospel, seeking evidence against Christianity. The chief told the scientist that he knew Christianity was true. When his visitor asked the chief how he knew that, he replied, “Because if it weren’t, we would eat you.”

Closer to home, William Wilberforce was an Englishman who was elected to Parliament in 1780. He served there for many years, and in the course of time he became convinced from reading his Bible that slavery was wrong. He learned of the evils of slavery in the British Empire and launched a long and exhausting struggle to end the practice. Slavery was eventually outlawed, and Wilberforce is

credited with being the main force behind the change. And he was changed by reading his Bible and allowing the Holy Spirit to convict his heart.

The United States is far from perfect, but perhaps more than any other nation, many of our laws and ideas were intentionally based on the teachings of God's Word. And even though our nation has strayed far from God, His Word still has a deep impact on our culture and ways of thinking.

The Bible has also influenced and changed cultures in areas such as science and literature, a legacy we can still see today even though the secular world is working hard to erode its influence. But nothing will change or bring down God's Word.

THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE IN ITS PRESERVATION

Someone has said that although a blacksmith's anvil may take many blows from the hammer, the anvil stands firm while the hammers break. The Bible is an anvil that has shattered the hammers of many who have tried to destroy it.

The Bible is also unique in its preservation. It has survived for several thousand years, even though kings and the world's mightiest powers and intellects have been trying to destroy it for centuries.

Think about it. How many books have not only survived for several thousand years, but are still being read, debated, and sold around the world today? I can only name one. Bible societies tell us that when they go into a country where Bibles are scarce, people stand in line for hours and even days to receive a copy. Chinese university students pass around any portion of the Bible they can get their hands on and memorize all they can. Would to God that American college students would start doing this!

No book in history has been preserved like the Bible. Why wouldn't it be, if God is the author? He is going to take care of His Book. Nations have outlawed the Bible, tried to destroy every copy, and killed people for translating and printing it. People like William

Tyndale and John Wycliffe are among the heroes of the faith who dedicated their lives to making sure we have the Bible in our hands.

The Bible records an amazing story in Jeremiah 36, an attempt made by King Jehoiakim of Judah to destroy God's message that the prophet Jeremiah had recorded on a scroll. The king cut up the scroll and burned it (vv. 22–23), but God simply told Jeremiah to get another scroll and write His Word on it again.

The eighteenth-century French philosopher Voltaire despised the Christian church and boasted that within fifty years of his death, Christianity would be extinct and people would have to go to a museum to see a Bible. Yet after Voltaire died, his house was acquired by the French Bible Society and used to print and distribute Bibles.

God says His Word will stand forever (see Psalm 119:89; Isaiah 40:8). "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away," Jesus declared (Matthew 24:35). There is no destroying the Bible, because it is the eternal Word of God.

IS THE BIBLE UNIQUE TO YOU?

That may seem like an unusual question, but I'm not asking if you believe that the Bible is the true Word of God. I pray that you do—or, if not, that you will by the time you finish reading this book.

My question has to do with the fact that so many of the people who say with their lips that they believe the Bible is the one and only Word of God don't say it with their lives. That is, they don't allow the Word to shape their lives, and the way we know this is by the large number of Christians and church people who go to every other source but the Word for the solution to their needs and problems.

You see, what we really believe in our heads always shows up in our feet. If the Bible is the last place we go for help, we can't expect God to get excited about helping us. If our attitude is that we only go to the Bible when all else has failed, we may go years without getting things right.

This is why the Bible seems to have no life or power for so many of us. We read it, but find it unhelpful or even boring. Voltaire was

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dead wrong about the Bible being only a museum piece, but many Christians treat it that way when they display it on their shelves or coffee tables, but don't live by it.

But let me tell you, when the Word of God gets down into your heart, you will be different! When you understand that the Bible is the very breath and mind and heart of God on paper, then you'll discover it's alive. And you'll understand why Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).