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The Divine Origin of the Bible

Unique Book with a Unique Message

THE authority of any religion depends upon its origin. Who is pronouncing what is truth? If the origin is purely human, why should we take any notice? The opinions of any man, or group of men, are of no more authority than those of any other men. Though they may appear more logical and be founded upon more reasonable grounds, they are still the products of the human mind. They carry no guarantee of absolute truth.

The major religions of the world are founded upon the writings of men. Buddhism is founded upon the teachings of Buddha, who lived in India in the 6th Century BC. It was some centuries later that his adherents made him a god. Hinduism, originating in ancient Vedism about 1500 BC, evolved through Brahmanism into early Hinduism in the 2nd Century BC, revering the gods Vishnu and Shiva. Confucianism arose from Chinese moral philosophy, which was systematized by Confucius in the 5th century BC. Confucius himself became an object of worship in the 1st Century AD. In each of these religions the worship of the god arose centuries after the promulgation of the original principles. The Muslim religion is in a different category. It arose from the writings of Muhammad in the 8th Century AD and has obvious connections with the ideas of Christianity, which existed centuries before Muhammad.

All these widespread religions claiming millions of adherents, are based upon the original pronouncements of men. Despite all their subsequent philosophical refinements, they have originated in the human mind.

The Christian Religion

But is not the same true of Christianity? Are not its teachings accepted because they are found originally in the writings of men, which make up the Bible?

At first, this appears a reasonable comment. But when we come to examine the writings found in the Bible, we discover that they are in a totally different category from the foundation documents of the religions referred to above. In fact they are so different and manifest such remarkable characteristics that the question arises, Who is really responsible for them? Men did the actual writing, but whose was the thinking that lies behind all of them? The more the writings of the Bible are studied, the more convinced one becomes that there must have been a Mind behind it all,

different from and greater than the mind of men. One 19th Century student, after such an examination, came to the striking conclusion that the Bible is not "such as men would have written if they could, nor could have written if they would" (Henry Rogers, *The Superhuman Origin of the Bible*, 1872).

Let us then take a careful look at the Bible and note its special characteristics. We shall find them so exceptional as to make the Bible unique in the world - a book in fact that we cannot ignore.

There is one important principle to observe in our quest: we must note what the Bible writers say about themselves and their message, and be very wary of what has subsequently been said about them. It is very common today for people to say, "Well, we live in a more enlightened age and we know better". This common error arises from relying alone on human judgement. We shall find good reason seriously to question that assumption.

Many Books, yet One

The Bible exists among us as one book. Yet it is in fact composed of more than 60 books, written by over 40 different authors, and its compilation extended from the days of Moses (1400 BC) to the days of the apostle John (end of 1st Century AD), a period of 1,500 years. Its narrative goes right back to the origin of man. It presents the Lord God of heaven and earth as Creator of all, who has a purpose with the human race, which extends through history right up to the present day; and then goes further and tells what will happen to that race in the future. There is no other book in the world which has such a range and scope as this.

But its writings are not just philosophical predictions. They are rooted in human history, dealing with actual nations and real people. The Bible deals with man's early career, passes a devastating judgement on him at the Flood, and proceeds to detail God's purpose with a particular people, the descendants of faithful Abraham, in their deliverance from the oppression of Egypt and their inheritance of the land of Canaan. It faithfully records the history of that people, the lives of their men of faith, their constant failure to do God's will, the judgements which came upon them through the Assyrians and the Babylonians, and the eventual overthrow of their kingdom. It takes up in the New Testament the record of the coming of Jesus Christ, the preaching of the gospel by his apostles, and ends with their writings to the early communities of believers in the 1st century AD. But the word of prophecy they spoke extends in time into the future.

Now the remarkable fact is that over this long period of 1,500 years the Bible speaks of one God, having one purpose. The earliest books of the Old Testament and the latest of the New are bound together by one outlook and one conviction, so that they become in fact one revelation. How this could be in a world of human fallibility is something we must seek to understand.

The Inspired Word

There is one common affirmation, found in all the writers of the books of the Bible: it is that they were not writing their own words, but the words and thoughts of God.

"The LORD said unto Moses, write these words ..." This becomes the keynote for all subsequent writers. The prophets of Israel all proclaim, "Thus said the LORD . . ." "The word of the LORD came unto me saying ..." The Lord Jesus Christ (whose "Old Testament" was the same as ours, as we know from details given by Josephus in the 1st Century AD) acknowledged the authority of "the law and the prophets"; he used them constantly in his preaching, as did his apostles after him. So there has arisen the principle that the writings of the Bible are the inspired word of God, not

produced by the will of man but by the will of God (2 Peter 1:21). The apostle Paul wrote that all Scripture is "**God-breathed**" (2 Timothy 3:16). The breath of God in them is His very thoughts and His mind.

Testimony to Bible Truth

For the first 300 years of the early Church the unanimous view was that the Old and New Testaments were alike the word of God. John Urquhart (*The Inspiration and Accuracy of the Holy Scriptures*, 1895) adopted a very striking method of demonstrating the point He cited evidence from the writings of prominent men in the early Church, commencing with the 3rd Century and working steadily backwards till he arrived at the very days of the apostle John. Thus he began with Origen (3rd Century); Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (3rd Century); Clement of Alexandria (end of 2nd Century); Tertullian (2nd and 3rd Centuries); Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, Justin Martyr (all of the 2nd Century); then Ignatius, bishop of Antioch and Polycarp, both martyred in the 2nd Century; and finally Clement, bishop of Rome in AD 91.

Urquhart concluded his survey with this comment:

"The meaning of all this testimony is plain. There is no conflict in it. There is but one view of the Scriptures - both of the Old and the New Testament - they are alike the Word of God ... There is one thing more of the utmost importance to our inquiry. This view has not grown. It is not a product of Christian evolution. It has been handed down right from the apostolic times. Were there no other evidence extant as to what the Apostles taught about the Scriptures, I cannot see how the conclusion could be escaped that they must have regarded both the New Testament and the Old as the very Word of God. These disciples of the Apostles would never have spoken so emphatically and unanimously, unless their masters had been equally emphatic and unanimous." (page 31)

But there is still one more comment to be made. The actual writers of these scriptures - the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets, the Gospels and the Epistles and the Revelation - must also have been convinced that they were writing not their own words but the words of God Himself. In fact they say so themselves. And this was maintained in one set of writings for 1,500 years, from Moses to the apostle John, and it is found in no other set of writings anywhere in the world.

But this view of their own words is most unusual. Men do not willingly ascribe the authority of their words, and especially of their ideas, to someone else. They are only too eager to claim the credit for what they write. How then could this unique attitude have been preserved without wavering in the writers of the Bible? There is only one reasonable explanation: there was a Mind behind it all, directing what was written and taught. No men of themselves could have maintained this most unnatural view of their own work over so many centuries.

Human Nature

The Bible maintains one view of human nature from beginning to end.

Man is not only mortal, a creature destined to die after a period of years, but he is morally weak as well. Endowed with the most remarkable powers of intelligence and reason, conscience and will, he is also subject to the pressures of his own desires to please himself. He is constantly under pressure to be self-indulgent, covetous, and above all to defend his own pride. Knowing what he ought to do, he so often fails to do it. In the terms of the Bible, even when men know the will of God, in general they prefer to do their own will instead.

The testimony of the Bible is emphatic and unanimous. Passing judgement on the generation before the Flood because of their "deceit and violence", God declares: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 6:5). In other words he is born with that tendency. Writing 600 years before Christ, the prophet Jeremiah declared that "the heart (of man) is deceitful and desperately sick" (17:9, RV). As a result he declared: "I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (10:23). Man, in other words, does not know what is best for him. He needs the guidance of God.

Jesus' pronouncement, recorded in Mark's Gospel, is the most forthright in the whole Bible. Confronted by Jewish leaders who were rebuking his disciples for not ritually washing their hands before eating, and for eating from 'unwashed pots" (not ritually cleansed), Jesus tells them that real defilement is "what enters into the heart" (or mind); then he delivers this devastating judgement:

"That which proceedeth out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye (envy), blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man." (Mark 7:16-23)

This exposure of the natural tendencies of man has for all of us the disconcerting ring of truth. It is found nowhere else in the world, neither in writings of any substance nor in sustained teaching. It is unique. As a judgement upon ourselves it is unwelcome and unacceptable. Yet it is consistently maintained in the Bible for 1,500 years, from Moses to the Apostle John. How could this have happened? Left to themselves the human authors would never have produced it. There must have been a Mind behind it all - the mind of God Himself.

The Phenomenon of Israel

The career of the nation of Israel presents extraordinary features, not found in that of any other nation. They are the only people who can trace their origin to one man, Abraham the Hebrew, living about 1800 BC, and that can produce written records recounting in great detail, involving persons and places, the triumphs and the disasters of their existence as a nation in the Middle East until 400 BC, a period of 1,400 years. Let us examine a few details in this remarkable history.

There is first the mystery of their sudden emergence as a nation in the land of Canaan (now Israel) about 1400 BC. They have left Egypt as a multitude of considerable power; are soon found, all twelve tribes of them, united in their acknowledgement of one God and submitting themselves unanimously to one Law, called now the Law of Moses. It was a rigorous regime which governed every aspect of their lives. It decreed their life of religious worship: the weekly sabbath (still observed), the three main festivals, including the Passover (still observed), the tabernacle with its priests and obligatory offerings, and detailed laws governing their relations with one another in all aspects of their daily lives. The Ten Commandments have become famous as the brief summary of their individual obligations, but there were many other regulations concerning cleanness and uncleanness, foods to be eaten and others prohibited, reparations to be made and judgements - including death - to be carried out in certain circumstances. And all males had to submit to the rite of circumcision (and still do).

Now this was no "easy law". It was very burdensome. It imposed obligations, demanded sacrifices both of wealth and personal convenience, and required the preservation of an attitude of reverent worship towards their God. It is emphatically not a Law which any people would have chosen for themselves of their own free will: it is too intrusive and too demanding. It is most difficult to get a large group of people to come to one mind on important religious, personal and political issues at

the same time. How then did the whole twelve tribes of Israel come unanimously to accept this Law for themselves?

The answer is to be found in a series of dramatic events which occurred at this special turning-point in the nation's history. The Bible tells us how Israel were brought out from slavery in the land of Egypt by miraculous demonstrations of divine power on their behalf. Pharaoh king of Egypt did not want to let them go and persisted in his obstinate resistance through ten plagues that came upon his nation; ending in the destruction of his army in the Red Sea. In these events the God of Israel carried out judgements on Egypt's elaborate pagan system, demonstrated that He alone was God - "there is no other" - and confirmed Israel in the promise that they were His people.

Now if these great events actually occurred as the book of Exodus says they did, then we can better understand how it was that Israel came unanimously to accept this Law, first in the wilderness and then in the land of Canaan, and why devout ones among them still do to this day. But without this demonstration of divine power, their existence as a nation, unanimously accepting the Law of Moses, is well-nigh impossible to explain.

A Disobedient People

The nation of Israel is unique in preserving comprehensive records of the first 1,400 years of its existence. The detailed and precise records in the historical books of the Old Testament give names, dates of events, and significant political developments, involving other nations of the Middle East. They agree well with what is known from other sources of the circumstances of the period 1800-400 BC. No other nation on earth has a record remotely approaching this.

The remarkable thing is, however, that these historical records - the books of Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah for example - all go beyond the normal functions of historians, for unanimously they pass moral judgements on the characters involved and on the whole nation itself. They record not only that a certain king reigned for so many years, but that "he did evil in the sight of the LORD" or, less often, "he did that which was right . . ."

The portrait of the nation which emerges is that of a people constantly abandoning the true worship of their God and adopting the corrupt idolatrous practices of their pagan neighbours, with the inevitable immorality. The writings of the prophets without exception contain substantial passages exposing Israel's failure to obey their God, and prophesying the judgements which would come upon them, if they did not mend their ways. Those judgements were fulfilled in successive invasions by surrounding nations.

By this time, the nation that had been ruled by Saul, David and Solomon became divided into a Northern kingdom, retaining the name Israel; and a Southern kingdom, called Judah. Each in turn lapsed from the true worship of God who, through His prophets, first appealed for them to turn from their evil ways, and then, when they took no notice, warned of the inevitable judgements that would come upon them. The following are typical of the doom-laden words of the prophets;

To Israel, about 740 BC:

"Notwithstanding they would not hear ... They forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah (idol), and worshipped the host of heaven (sun, moon, stars), and served Baal (god of the Canaanites). They caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold

themselves to do evil, in the sight of the LORD to provoke him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight . . ." (2 Kings 17:13-18, RV)

So the Assyrians invaded the land, captured Samaria, and overthrew the Northern Kingdom about 720 BC.

To Judah, 130 years later:

"Moreover all the chief of the priests and the people trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the heathen ... and the LORD, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers (the prophets) because he had compassion on his people ... But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy . . ." (2 Chronicles 36:14-16)

So the Babylonians came and finally, about 590 BC, captured the city of Jerusalem, burnt down its temple, and carried away captive the most influential of the people. Israel's existence as a state came to an end.

Now the question requiring an answer is this: How did Israel come to preserve records which expose in such forthright terms their faithlessness, depravity and corruption? There is no other nation which has such extensive records in the first place, but even if such existed, they would have consigned such uncomplimentary writings to the rubbish heap and would never have preserved them as national treasures. It has been well observed that if Israel's historical records are not true, then they constitute one long libel on the Jewish people. Why then have they preserved them to this day?

How did such Writings arise?

The related question is equally searching: how did a people manifesting in general the characteristics of all the other nations - national pride, corrupt kings, self-indulgent desire for power and possessions, readiness to adopt other nations' idolatries, allied with a persistent rejection of the enlightened commandments of their God - how did such a persistently wayward people ever produce the elevated moral teaching found in the Psalms and in the Prophets, with its emphasis on personal conduct in truth, mercy, consideration for one's neighbour, and above all reverence for the God of heaven and earth? No other nation did this. How did a morally trail nation like Israel come to produce it?

On human grounds it cannot be explained. But if the record is true, if it really is expressing the will of God and not just of men, then all becomes understandable. There must have been a Mind behind the writings of the Bible greater than the mind of man. On no other principle could the tenor of its teaching have been maintained over so many centuries. And that is why Israel have preserved this book and dared not cast it aside. They know its message came from God.

Unique Prophecy

In the experience of all mankind there is little certain knowledge of the future. We literally do not know what will happen tomorrow, to say nothing of next year, or in a hundred years. The writings of the Bible, however, are unique, for they make bold predictions of international events covering long periods of time.

The nation of Israel provides an excellent illustration. We have seen how first the Northern and then the Southern kingdom were taken into captivity by Assyrians and Babylonians. Though many returned later, it was not long before the Jews were once again under threat, and driven from their land, this time by the Romans in the 1st Century AD. Jesus was the last in the line of the prophets, and he said: "They shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led away captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles . . ." (Luke 21:24).

So it came to pass in AD 70, and that ought to have been the end of the story. Humanly speaking, such a scattered, persecuted and reviled nation should have disappeared from the earth and been long ago forgotten. But the prophets said that they would not disappear and would eventually be restored again to their own land:

"For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah . . . and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it . . . Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth . . . Hear the word of the LORD, all ye nations . . . He that scattered Israel will gather him" (Jeremiah 30:3; 31:8,10)

And so it has come to pass. In our 20th Century the Jews have returned to Palestine and have set up once more an Israeli state with its capital at Jerusalem.

Now who could have foreseen this? Who could have known that Israel would be scattered all over the earth, and yet after nearly 2,000 years some of them would return and re-establish the ancient kingdom? No man or group of men could possibly have known that this would happen. But somebody must have known. It can only be God. It is He who inspired the writings of the prophets to foretell a destiny totally unexpected by the nations of the world.

The Course of History

Daniel was a prominent figure in the court of the King of Babylon about 600 BC. Yet the prophecies in his book show a knowledge of the rise and fall of empires centuries after his time.

The foundation prophecy is Daniel's interpretation of a dream which the King had, in which he saw a great image composed of various metals, and then saw it destroyed by a large stone which brought it crashing to the ground. This image, said Daniel (who ascribed his understanding to God), represented four great empires and their aftermath. He identifies the first as Babylon itself; the next two are explicitly named in other parts of his prophetic book as Persia and Greece. The fourth, strong and terrifying, can only be the Roman Empire, which eventually broke up into separate kingdoms.

And so it came to pass. The Bible is primarily concerned with the Middle East and the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. In Daniel's day, 600 BC, the greatest empire was that of Babylon. It was succeeded by the empire of the Medes and Persians about 530 BC, and that in turn was overthrown by Alexander the Great of Greece about 330 BC. The fourth and greatest dominion of them all was the Roman, which from the 2nd Century BC to the 5th Century AD, a period of six to seven hundred years, grew so as to dominate all the territories of the Middle East (including Israel), the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, as well as much of Europe. But this mighty Roman Empire was not to be followed by a fifth, but was to be broken up into separate nations with no cohesion. The nations of Europe today are the heirs of this disintegration.

Now it is undeniable that the history of the territories of the Middle East, of the Mediterranean area and of Europe has followed, over 2,500 years, from Daniel's day in 600 BC to the present day,

precisely the course foretold by Daniel. How could he possibly have known the course of history for centuries into the future? Yet somebody must have known. Daniel said the God of heaven had revealed it to him. It is the only explanation which makes sense.

But in that case we had better take note of the conclusion of the interpretation of the King's dream. It foresaw the destruction of the image, and the setting up finally of a new empire:

"In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; it shall break in pieces all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44)

In view of the truth of Daniel's forecast of the previous empires of the world, we had better take this last development seriously, for the next great empire will be the Kingdom of God. But more of that shortly.

The Course of Civilisation

For the last 300 years the philosophers have confidently expected the quality of human life in the world to improve. The theory of biological evolution was accompanied by theories of social and religious evolution as well. "The March of Progress" was the great expectation. The 19th Century was an age of great optimism. Technical advances in industry, resulting from the growth of scientific knowledge, led to vastly increased production of goods and greater wealth for some sections of society. Acts of Parliament controlling health and housing aimed to improve social standards. Education was extended gradually to all and was confidently expected to result in an improved moral tone in society. As men became better off, crime would diminish. As they became better educated, they would appreciate literature, music and art. Progress was the watchword. The human race was on the march towards a new age.

What a disconcerting shock the 20th Century has proved! Two world wars have produced millions of people destroyed or injured, incalculable human suffering and damage to property. Efforts to prevent such catastrophes occurring again have failed. The League of Nations collapsed with the rise of Mussolini in the 1920s, and Hitler in the 1930s, and the United Nations manifests its powerlessness to stop grave conflicts in the world. The growth of nuclear weapons poses an ominous threat to the existence of the whole human race, and to cap it all the economies of the nations are plunged into crisis, with numerous unemployed in all the major nations.

But the moral collapse is even more significant. The sophisticated nations have turned their backs on religion, but have found nothing effective to put in its place. The divorce rate rises and so does the crime rate. New diseases appear, especially AIDS, which has already made serious inroads in Africa and threatens to spread in the West. Famines threatening millions of lives, though partly caused by drought or mismanagement of land, are also the result of civil wars. Small nationalities are asserting their rights, and are ready to take up arms to defend them. In short, the nations are shaken to their moral, political and economic foundations to an extent undreamed of in past ages.

All this is occurring in our supposedly advanced 20th Century, and it is world-wide. The dream of progress has evaporated, and nothing has been found to take its place.

The Bible's View of Mankind

Now the remarkable fact is that the Bible never shared this optimistic view of human progress. It has been well said that the Bible's view of the development of human civilisation is not

evolutionary, but catastrophic; that is, mankind's career will end in a great crisis and a dramatic change (H. J. Cadbury, in *The Peril of Modernising Jesus*, 1934).

The evidence for this is quite clear throughout the Old and New Testaments. Daniel, speaking of "the time of the end", foresaw "a time of trouble such as never was" when "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake", some to everlasting life (12:1,2). The apostle Paul foresaw that "in the last days perilous times shall come". He proceeds to describe the rise of a violent and self-indulgent generation, "lovers of money, boastful . . . disobedient to parents . . . without natural affection . . . without self-control . . . lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God, holding a form of religion (RSV), but having denied the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:1-5, RV). The resemblance to the materialistic, atheistical and undisciplined spirit of our age is striking. Jesus himself was equally explicit. At a time when Jerusalem would be no longer under the domination of the nations, there would be "upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity . . . men fainting for fear and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world" (Luke 21:25,26).

But the writings in which these forecasts are found are 2,000 years old and more. How did the writers know that the climax of mankind's career would not be a state of peace and prosperity, as the wise men of only 100 years ago were predicting? Again, of themselves as men, they could not have known. But it is clear that somebody must have known. There must have been a Mind far greater than the human to inspire what they wrote. It was surely that of God Himself. No other explanation meets the facts.

The Climax

It is only in the last half-century that the need for one world government for all nations has become apparent. Shortly after the Second World War, Bertrand Russell in a series of radio talks asserted that the nations of the world would need to develop within 50 years one world authority having the power to enforce its decisions. If this was not achieved, he said, civilisation would perish. Earnest efforts have been made to bring this about through the setting up of the United Nations Organisation. It has succeeded in resolving a few minor disputes, but the conflicting interests of the major nations have rendered it impotent. It is worth stressing again that this perception of the need for one government for the whole earth is a very modern development, brought about by the existence of competing powers, armed with deadly weapons, yet unable to control violent minorities determined to gain their own ends.

The remarkable fact is, however, that the writers of the Bible have prophesied from the beginning the establishment of one government for the whole earth as the climax of human history and the essential basis for world peace. We have seen clear evidence of that already. In his prophecy of the course of world empires, Daniel saw their final destruction and the setting up of a new world order under a new authority:

"In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed ... it shall last for ever." (Daniel 2:44)

One World Ruler

That was 600 years before Christ. Only a century or so before that, Isaiah had prophesied the setting up of a world authority in Jerusalem, where all nations would go to receive the Divine law. The result would be peace among the nations of the world; "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4). One of the great themes of the New Testament

is that Jesus Christ will return to the earth at a time of trouble and distress and will establish the authority of God over the whole earth.

This establishment of one government for the whole earth under the rule of Christ is exactly what the disunited nations of the modern world desperately need. For it will not be a government of pious promises, but one with the power to control the conflicting interests of the nations; and it will not only have the power, but the right policy for the good of all. The ruler himself has been specially trained and selected. If we were able to choose someone to govern the whole earth, who better than the most outstanding personality in human history, Jesus Christ the Son of God? His moral courage, his devotion to truth, his compassionate consideration of others, his denunciation of hypocrisy, and above all his complete consecration to the worship of God - all these outstanding qualities, unique in the world of men, make him the ideal ruler of the new world order so much desired by the more enlightened of men and so constantly beyond their reach.

A King for Ever

But there is one further significant point. Human rulers may at times be good and achieve some benefits for their peoples. But eventually they die, and what is to guarantee that their successors will be desirable? This serious difficulty will not arise in the case of Christ, for he has eternal life and his government will last for all time.

How can it be that a plan for the government of the world, ensuring peace and blessings for all nations of the earth, outlined so many centuries ago in the Bible, proves to be exactly what the nations of the 20th Century need? Why, too, is the Bible unique in this, for there is nothing like it in the pronouncements of any other religion or human literature? Again, someone must have known the world needs which would arise. An all-seeing Mind is needed to explain it. It must be God. No other explanation makes sense.

The Moral Factor

In the pagan centuries before Christ men worshipped natural phenomena like the sun, moon, and stars, and sometimes even animals. In cruder rites it was thought the god required the sacrifice of children in the fire. The Old Testament allusions to the worship of Molech, and Micah's question, "**Shall I sacrifice the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?**" (6:7) are examples. The legendary gods of Greece and Rome appear like glorified men and frequently exhibited the vices of men. In the Roman world oriental cults of a mystical nature, often associated with licentious rites involving sacred prostitution, grew in influence as belief in the legendary gods waned. The gods of modern Eastern religion appear remote, inhabiting a sphere of philosophical perfection which is far removed from the daily experience of ordinary people.

But the portrait of God in the Bible offers a totally different view and is unique in the world. God has supreme power and authority, for He is Creator of heaven and earth and also of the human race; but He is above all a God possessing definite moral qualities and maintaining them in His dealings with mankind. We cannot do better than reproduce God's own description of Himself, given to Israel through Moses.

"The LORD . . . a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin: and that will by no means clear the guilty . . ."
(Exodus 34:6-7, RV)

This portrait of a God of holiness and truth, who yet remembers the weakness of those who seek to serve Him and extends forgiveness to those who humble themselves before Him, is unswervingly maintained throughout the writings of the Old Testament for 1,000 years and then reappears in the New Testament in the 1st Century AD and nowhere else in the world's literature.

It is profoundly reinforced in the New Testament by the appearance of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who manifests all the moral attributes of His Father, while consistently recognising the Father's supremacy. His devotion to truth, his fearless unmasking of evil, his compassion for human weakness, and his devotion to the service of God, putting aside his own will—all these and more are unique in human experience. Such a portrait is not found anywhere else in the world, but only in the Bible.

The question is, where did it come from? Judging by the evidence of the past, no man nor any human authority would have thought out this view, nor would they have been able to maintain it over a period of many centuries. The strong impression remains that we need God to explain the portrait of God found in the Bible.

God in the World

But there is still one thing more. The God of the Bible is not remote from mankind, inhabiting a sphere of spiritual perfection far removed from the experience of men and women, for He is vitally involved in human history. Having created the human race, He was confronted by almost universal rejection of His will, and proceeded to create His own people, by making promises to Abraham and his descendants, by bringing them into a land of their own and there subjecting them to a special discipline in religious and social life designed to form a "people for His name". For over 1,000 years He cared for them, sending prophets constantly to warn them of the consequences of their evil ways and to make promises to the faithful few. When eventually they were driven out of their land because of their stubborn rebellion, He manifested Himself in a Son, born of woman. Through him God established the means of redemption from sin and death of individual men and women, and caused the good news of it to be spread over the world. Then, as a climax, having governed the rise and fall of nations, He has promised to establish His own government for the whole earth to ensure the welfare of mankind. In short, this is a portrait of a God thoroughly involved in human life, influencing actual historical events, and bringing mankind's career to a designed end, when the whole earth will honour His name.

Now there is no such God as this in any religion in the world, nor is any conception like it found in any human writings of any age or of any country. It is unique to the Bible. The divine activities described are unparalleled anywhere else. But who conceived this view in the first place? And how was it consistently maintained for 1,500 years - the same God, the same moral qualities, the same practical purpose - from Moses, 1400 BC, to the apostle John, 1st century AD? No human mind or group of minds could have achieved this. A superior Mind must have supervised it all. The existence of the God of heaven as the Bible portrays Him is positively demanded by the facts. The Bible is the expression of His will and purpose.

"To this man . . ."

We have seen how the Bible reveals God's plan for all nations of the world and for the future welfare of all mankind. We now contemplate the remarkable fact that the Bible has a message for every individual man or woman who is willing to take notice.

All through the turbulent centuries of Israel's history, the Word of God was constantly assuring them of His special care for the men and women who "feared him", that is revered Him. A most striking illustration is found in Isaiah, where God reminds Israel that He is the great Creator of the heavens and the earth. He then goes on:

"But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor (humble), and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:1-2)

Now this message was delivered at a time when the nation of Israel were in deep trouble. Their Northern kingdom had been destroyed by the Assyrians, who had also invaded the land of Judah. Their society was corrupt, with oppression of the weak by the wealthy and the powerful, increasing idolatry and growing immorality due to the nation's abandonment of the laws of God. Yet at this time of national crisis God delivered a message for every individual man who could find it in his heart to humble himself, to confess his sins, and to give reverent heed to the Word of God.

Now Jesus does just the same. Concerned as he is with God's purpose for man, involving resurrection and judgement and the government of all nations as a climax, he is yet conscious of the needs of the individual:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden (i.e. with a sense of sin), and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matthew 11:28-30)

This message of hope and encouragement for every individual man and woman is reinforced on every page of the New Testament.

What a marvelous concept is this: the God of heaven, the Ruler of nations and kingdoms, can also look with favour on the individual who honours His name and seeks to do His will. As a conception of God it is unique in the world. The Bible alone reveals it.

Conclusion

Our conclusions can be brief. The Bible is a book unique in the world. It could not have been written solely by man. It must be a Word from God.

As such it is of vital significance. It should be read with reverent attention and eager interest. It answers all our problems, warning us of the dangers that beset us, giving us hope of help now and of a new life in the Kingdom of God. No other book in the world can do this. To neglect it, to treat it with indifference, would be an act of folly. Let us rather be wise and give heed to this Word of truth and life in a world of darkness and doubt.

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