

The Uniqueness of the Bible

Webster must have had the Bible “Book of books” in mind when he wrote the definition for “unique”:

1. one and only; single; sole
2. different from all others; having no like or equal

Professor M. Montiero-Williams, former Boden professor of Sanskrit, spent 42 years studying Eastern books and said in comparing them with the Bible: “Pile them (Eastern Books), if you will, on the left side of your study table; but place your own Holy Bible on the right side – all by itself, all alone – and with a wide gap between them. For ...there is a gulf between the Bible and the so-called sacred books of the East which severs the one from the other utterly, hopelessly, and forever...a veritable gulf which cannot be bridged over by any science of religious thought.”

The Bible is Unique

1. Unique in its Continuity

- (1) Written over a 1,500 years span
- (2) Written over 40 generations
- (3) Written by over 40 authors from every walk of life including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, etc.: Moses, a political leader, trained in the universities of Egypt

Peter, a fisherman

Amos, a herdsman

Joshua, a military general

Nehemiah, a cupbearer of a king

Daniel, a prime minister

Luke, a physician

Solomon, a king

Matthew, a tax collector

Paul, a rabbi

David, a shepherd, song writer, a general and a king

(4) Written in different places:

Moses in the wilderness
Jeremiah in a dungeon
Daniel on a hillside and in a palace
Paul inside prison walls
Luke while traveling
John on the exiled Isle of Patmos
Others in the rigors of a military campaign

(5) Written at different times:

David in times of war
Solomon in times of peace

(6) Written during different moods: some written from the heights of joy and others writing from the depths of sorrow and despair

(7) Written on three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe

(8) Written in three languages:

Hebrew: was the language of the Old Testament

In 2 Kings 18:26-28 called “the language of Judah”

In Isaiah 19:18 called “the language of Canaan”

Aramaic: was the common language of the Near East until the time of Alexander the Great (6th century BC – 4th century BC)

Greek: New Testament language. Was the international language at the time of Christ

(9) Its subject matter includes hundreds of controversial subjects. A controversial subject is one which would create opposing opinions when mentioned or discussed.

Biblical authors spoke on hundreds of controversial subjects with harmony and continuity from Genesis to Revelation. There is one unfolding story: “God’s redemption of man.”

F.F. Bruce concludes: “The Bible, at first sight, appears to be a collection of literature – mainly Jewish. If we enquire into the circumstances under which the various Biblical documents were written, we find that they were written

at intervals over a space of nearly 1400 years. The writers wrote in various lands, from Italy in the West to Mesopotamia and possibly Persia in the East. The writers themselves were a heterogeneous number of people, not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles, but belonging to the most diverse walks of life. In their ranks we have kings, herdsmen, soldiers, legislators, fishermen, statesmen, courtiers, priests and prophets, a tentmaking Rabbi and a Gentile physician, not to speak of others of whom we know nothing apart from the writings they have left us. The writings themselves belong to great variety of literary types. They include history, Law (civil, criminal, ethical, ritual, sanitary), religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively Biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic.

“For all that the Bible is not simply an anthology; there is a unity which binds the whole together. An anthology is compiled by an anthologist, but no anthologist compiled the Bible.”

In contrast Muhammed first received revelation in 609 AD in a cave on Mount Hira, near Mecca at age 40 years old. Muslims regard the Quran as the most important miracle of Muhammed, the proof of his prophethood, and the culmination of a series of divine messages revealed by the angel Gabriel from 609-622 AD, a period of 23 years to Muhammed alone. Muhammed feared that his story or revelation would be dismissed as evidence of him being possessed.

2. Unique in its Circulation

Figures are from the Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Americana, Protestant Christian Evidence and A General Introduction to the Bible (Geisler and Nix).

Bible Publication:

- (1) As of 1804 the British Bible Society has published 409,000,000 copies of Bible
- (2) In 1928 Gideons of America published 965,000 copies of Bible

- (3) National Bible Society of Scotland has published 88,070,068 copies of Bible
- (4) Dublin Bible Society has published 6,987,961 copies of Bible
- (5) In 1927 German Bible Society published 900,000 copies of Bible
- (6) In 1930 12,000,000 copies
- (7) In 1932 1,330,213,815 copies
- (8) In 1947 14,108,436 copies
- (9) In 1951 952,666 copies and 1,913,314, copies of NT
- (10) In 1955 25,393,161 copies
- (11) 1950-1960 3,037,898 copies of Bible and 3,223,986 copies of NT annually
- (12) In 1963 54,123,820 copies
- (13) In 1964 American Bible Society 1,665,559 copies
- (14) In 1965 76,953,369 copies of Bible
- (15) In 1966 87,398,961 copies

The Bible has been read by more people and published in more languages than any other book. There have been more copies produced of its entirety and more portions and selections than any other book in human history. Over all there is absolutely no book that reaches or even begins to compare to the circulation of the Holy Bible. The first major book printed was the Latin Vulgate. It was printed on Gutenberg's press.

Hy Pickering says that about 50 years ago, for the British and Foreign Bible Society to meet its demands, it had to publish "one copy of Bible every three seconds day and night; 22 copies every minute day and night; 1,369 copies every hour day and night; 32,876 copies every day in the year. And it is deeply interesting to know that this amazing number of Bibles were dispatched to various parts of the world in 4,583 cases weighing 490 tons."

The Cambridge History of the Bible: "No other book has known anything approaching this constant circulation."

The uniqueness in its Translation: The Bible was one of the first major books translated. Septuagint: Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament in 250 BC. The Bible has been translated and retranslated and paraphrased more than any other book in existence.

Encyclopedia Britannica says that: “By 1966 the whole Bible had appeared in 240 languages and dialects. One or more whole books of the Bible in 739 additional ones, a total of publication of 1,280 languages.”

The Bible factually stands unique, one of a kind in its translation.

3. Unique in its Survival

(1) Survival through time

Being written on material that perishes (papyrus, parchment, vellum, clay tablets, stones, rolls or scrolls), having to be copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press, did not diminish its style, correctness nor existence. The Bible, compared with other ancient writings, has more manuscript evidence than any 10 pieces of classical literature combined.

John Warwick Montgomery says that “to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.”

Bernard Ramm speaks of the accuracy and number of biblical manuscripts. “Jews preserved it as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. With their massora – parva, magna, and finalis – they kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word and paragraph. They had special classes of men within their culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity – scribes, lawyers, massoretes. Who ever counted the letters and syllabus and words of Plato or Aristotle Cicero or Seneca?”

John Lea in “The Greatest Book in the World” compared the Bible with Shakespeare’s writing: “It seems strange that the text of Shakespeare, which has been in existence less than two hundred and eighty years,

should be far more uncertain and corrupt than that of the New Testament, now over 1900 (eighteen centuries old), during nearly fifteen of which it existed only in manuscript...with perhaps a dozen or twenty exceptions, the text of every verse in the New Testament may be said to be so far settled by general consent of scholars, that any dispute as to its reading must relate rather to the interpretation of the words than to any doubts respecting the words themselves. But in every one of Shakespear's 37 plays there are probably a hundred readings still in dispute, a large portion of which materially affects the meaning of the passages in which they occur."

(2) Survival through Persecution

The Bible has withstood vicious attacks of its enemies as no other book. Many has tried to burn it, ban it and "Outlaw it from the days of Roman emperors to present-day communist-dominated countries."

Sidney Collett in "All about the Bible" says: Voltaire, the noted French infidel who died in 1778, said that in one hundred years from his time Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history. But what has happened? Voltaire has passed into history, while the circulation of the Bible continues to increase in almost all parts of the world, carrying blessing wherever it goes. For example, the English Cathedral in Zanzibar is built on the site of the Old Slave Market, and the Communion Table stands on the very spot where the whipping-post once stood! The world abounds with such instances...As one has truly said, "We might as well put our shoulders to the burning wheel of the sun, and try to stop it on its flaming course, as attempt to stop the circulation of the Bible."

Concerning the boast of Voltaire on the extinction of Christianity and the Bible in 100 years, Geisler and Nix point out that "Only fifty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to produce stacks of Bibles." What An Irony of History!

In AD 303, Diocletian, Roman emperor from AD 284 to AD 305, issued an edict (Cambridge History of the Bible, Cambridge University Press, 1963), to stop Christians from worshipping and to destroy their Scriptures (the

Bible): “an imperial letter was everywhere promulgated, ordering the razing of the churches to the ground and the destruction by fire of the Scriptures (the Bible), and proclaiming that those who held high positions would lose all civil rights, while those in households, if they persisted in their profession of Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty.”

The historic irony of the above edict to destroy the Bible is that Eusebius records the edict given 25 years later by Constantine, the emperor following Diocletian, that 50 copies of the Scriptures should be prepared at the expense of the government.

The Bible is unique in its survival. This does not prove the Bible is the word of God. But it does prove it stands alone among books.

(3) Survival through Criticism

H.L. Hastings, cited by John W. Lea, has forcibly illustrated the unique way the Bible has withstood the attacks of infidelity and skepticism: “Infidels (unbelievers) for eighteen hundred years have been refuting and overthrowing this book (the Bible), and yet it stands today as solid as rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved and cherished and read today than ever before. Infidels, with all their assaults, make about as much impression on this book as a man with a tack hammer would on the Pyramids of Egypt. When the French monarch proposed the persecution of the Christians in his dominion, an old statesman and warrior said to him, “Sire, the Church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.” So the hammers of Infidels have been pecking away at this book for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures. If this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers have all tried their hand at it; they die and the book still lives.”

Bernard Ramm adds: A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put. No other book has been so chopped, knived, sifted, scrutinized and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or belles

lettres of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? With such venom and skepticism? With such thoroughness and erudition? Upon every chapter, line and tenet?

“The Bible is still loved by millions, read by millions, and studied by millions.”

Robert Dick Wilson, a man who was fluent in more than 45 languages and dialects, concluded after a lifetime of study in the Old Testament: “I may add that the result of my 45 years of study of the Bible has led me all the time to a firmer faith that in the Old Testament we have a true historical account of the history of the Israelite people.”

4. Unique in its Teachings

Prophecy Wilbur Smith, who compiled a personal library of 25,000 volumes, concludes that “Whatever one may think of the authority of and the message presented in the book we call the Bible, there is world-wide agreement that in more ways than one it is the most remarkable volume that has ever been produced in these some five thousand years of writing on the part of the human race. It is the only volume ever produced by man, or a group of men, in which is to be found a large body of prophecies relating to individual nations, to Israel, to all the peoples of the earth, to certain cities, and to the coming of One who was to be the Messiah. The ancient world had many different devices for determining the future, known as divination, but not in the entire gamut of Greek and Latin literature, even though they use the words prophet and prophecy, can we find any real specific prophecy of a great historic event to come in the distant future, nor any prophecy of a Savior to arise in the human race...”

“Mohammedanism or (Islam) cannot point to any prophecy or prophecies of the coming of Mohammed uttered hundreds of years before his birth. Neither can the founders of any cult (false religion) in this country (in the world) rightly identify any ancient text specifically foretelling their appearance.” (The prophecy about Tyre later)

History From 1 Samuel through II Chronicles one finds the story of Israel’s history, covering about five centuries. The Cambridge Ancient History, vol 1

p.222 says: “The Israelites certainly manifest a genius for historical construction, and the Old Testament embodies the oldest history writing extant.”

The distinguished archeologist, Professor Albright, begins his classic essay, “The Biblical Period: Hebrew national tradition excels all others in its clear picture of tribal and family origins. In Egypt and Babylonia, in Assyria and Phoenicia, in Greece and Rome, we look in vain for anything comparable. There is nothing like it in the tradition of the Germanic peoples. Neither India nor China can produce anything similar, since their earliest historical memories are literary deposits of distorted dynastic tradition, with no trace of the herdsman or peasant behind the demigod or king with whom their records begin. Neither in the oldest Indic historical writings (the Puranas) nor in the earliest Greek historians is there a hint of the fact that both Indo-Aryans and Hellenes were once nomads who immigrated into their later abodes from the north. The Assyrians, to be sure, remembered vaguely that their earliest rulers, whose names they recalled without any details about their deeds, were tent dwellers, but whence they came had long been forgotten.”

“The Table of Nations” – “The Descendants of Noah” in Genesis chapter 10 is an astonishingly accurate historical account. According to Albright: “It stands absolutely alone in ancient literature without a remote parallel even among the Greeks. “The Table of Nations” remains an astonishingly accurate document...It shows such remarkably modern understanding of the ethnic and linguistic situation in the modern world, in spite of all its complexity, that scholars never fail to be impressed with the author’s knowledge of the subject.”

Personalities The Bible deals very frankly with the sins of its characters. Read the biographies today, and see how they try to cover up, overlook or ignore the shady side of people. Take the literary great geniuses; most are painted as saints. The Bible does not do it that way. It simply tells it like it is:

- The sins of the people denounced – Deuteronomy 9:24
- Sins of the Patriarchs – Genesis 12:11-13; 49:5-7

- Evangelists paint their own faults and the faults of the apostles – Matthew 8:10-26; 26:31-56; Mark 6:52; 8:18; Luke 8:24,25; 9:40-45; John 10:6; 16:32
- Disorder of the churches – 1 Corinthians 1:11; 15:12; 2 Corinthians 2:4
- Many will say, “Why did they have to put in that chapter about David and Bethsheba?” Well, the Bible has the habit of telling the truth, telling it like it is.

Uniqueness in its Influence on Surrounding Literature

Cleland B. McAfee writes in “The Greatest English Classic”: “If every Bible in any considerable city were destroyed, the Book could be restored in all its essential parts from the quotations on the shelves of the city’s public library. There are works, covering almost all the great literary writers, devoted especially to showing how much the Bible has influenced them.”

The historian Philip Schaff (The person of Christ), vividly describes the Bible’s uniqueness along with its Savior: “This Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produce effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He sets more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern time.”

Kenneth Scott Latourette, former Yale historian, says: “It is evidence of his importance, of the effect that he has had upon history and presumably, of the baffling mystery of his being that no other life ever lived on this planet has evoked so huge a volume of literature among so many peoples and languages, and that, far from ebbing, the flood continues to mount.”

The Bible is the first religious book to be taken into space (outer). The astronauts read Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God...”

Just think, Voltaire said it would be extinct by 1850!

Gutenberg's Latin Vulgate Bible sells for over \$100,000

The Russians sold the Codex Sinaiticus to England for \$510,000