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If I Didn't Believe The Bible

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*If I Didn't Believe
The Bible...*

by Rubel Shelly

Dear Reader,

Only the question of the existence of God is more fundamental than the issue of the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

How much serious thought have you given to the claims of the Bible? How much of the evidence relevant to its claims have you examined?

God has revealed his existence and power in nature. "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). It would not be unreasonable to expect him to reveal himself in some verbal manner.

In this little booklet, I want to share with you a small amount of the evidence on which a believer's faith in the Bible as the Word of God rests. Please read it carefully and critically.

I think an honest and even-handed look at the relevant data will lead you to the conclusion that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Shelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "R".

If I Didn't Believe The Bible...

I accept the Bible as the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God to mankind. I am fully aware that this is a minority view.

Most people of our time do not believe Scripture to be, in any real sense, the actual Word of God. They regard it as a collection of writings about religious themes by pious men of a distant age. They may consider those men *good* and their writings *important*, but they do not regard them as *Spirit-guided* and their writings as *inspired*.

Concerned for those people who have been led to doubt or deny the inspiration and authority of the Bible, I have tried to put myself in the shoes of an intellectually honest doubter. In this little booklet, I have listed some of the *evidences* which prove the Bible to be everything it claims to be. All I ask of you, the reader, is a *fair hearing of the facts* about Holy Scripture.

I Would Be Curious About Its Survival

If I didn't believe the Bible, I would be curious as to why it is still in existence.

The oldest parts of Scripture were committed to writing about 3,500 years ago; the most recent books are over 1,850 years old. Written on such perishable substances as clay tablets, cured animal skins, and papyrus, and having to be copied by hand for hundreds of years before the invention of printing, the Bible has not only survived but has survived against staggering odds.

For example, the Roman emperor Diocletian issued an edict in 303 A.D. which required the destruction of all church buildings, the burning of all copies of the sacred writings of Christians, and the denial of civil

rights to all citizens of the empire who persisted in embracing the religion of Jesus Christ. He was determined to stamp out Christianity by destroying the Bible.

Through the intervening centuries, men bent on "exposing" and destroying confidence in the Bible have done everything in their power to erase it from the minds of men and women. They have failed!

Whereas many other writings of antiquity have totally perished through benign neglect, the Bible has survived determined efforts to destroy it.

Its Reliable Text

Furthermore, it has survived with such a wealth of evidence that the authenticity of its text is not open to serious question. Yet the charge is still heard occasionally that we have only a spurious Bible today. It takes something of the following form: "The Bible has been tampered with and changed so often through the centuries that nobody knows what was in its original text." Such a statement would be laughable—if so many did not think it true. Look at the evidence.

The Hebrew text of the Old Testament was preserved with meticulous care over the centuries. Copyists counted the words in the

books they were reproducing and calculated the middle word of the book. This prevented the careless dropping or adding of words. Their proofreading was done with extreme attention to detail.

Until 1947, the oldest copy of any Old Testament book available to us came from around 900 A.D. Then the now-famous Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Suddenly we had partial or complete copies of every book of the Old Testament except Esther which were a thousand years older. A group of Jews lived in the hot, dry region at Qumran from the mid-second century B.C. to around A.D. 70. When they realized their country was about to be overrun by the Roman armies, they buried their scrolls in a series of caves. There they remained until this century!

What was learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls? Among other things, it was learned how faithfully the biblical text was preserved. Comparing two copies of the book of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls with the oldest dated manuscript of the book previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be identical in 95 percent of the text. The remaining five percent variation consisted of nothing more significant than updated spellings (roughly equivalent to replacing "hon-

our" with "honor") and a few obvious slips of the pen.

As for the New Testament, the evidence is even more impressive. We have well over 5,000 Greek copies of different parts of it. The sheer mass of evidence is staggering. And the time gap between the writing of the original documents and our copies of them is negligible. With the materials originally written during the period 45-95 A.D., we have fragments of copies from as early as 130 A.D. and entire books from 200 A.D. We have no other document from antiquity preserved with a similar wealth of evidence.

At the very least, there is something arresting about the fact that the Bible is still with us and its text is so well-attested. If I didn't believe the hand of God was in any way involved, I would still be curious about this phenomenon.

I Would Be Surprised At Its Popularity

If I didn't believe the Bible, I would certainly be surprised at the extensive popularity of this ancient document.

No other book begins to compare with the Bible in terms of circulation and popular-

ity. At the present time, the entire Bible is available in 277 languages and the New Testament in 518 others. Parts of it have been translated into 1,789 languages and dialects around the world.

New translations and study editions of the Bible in English are appearing constantly. The Bible is the best-selling book in the English language every year!

The Bible is known everywhere, and its influence has touched every area of life. Some of the greatest works of art and music center around biblical incidents and personalities. The world's great literature is permeated by quotations from and allusions to Scripture.

If the Bible is merely a human document, how can this sort of popularity and influence be explained?

I freely admit that the Bible's existence, well-preserved text, and extensive popularity do not establish its divine origin and inspiration. They do establish its uniqueness in all literature and make one "sit up and take notice" of Scripture.

I Would Be At A Loss To Account For Its Freedom From Mistakes

If I didn't believe the Bible, I would be at a loss to explain the absence of errors and self-contradictions in it.

Written by about 40 different individuals over 1,600 years on three continents and in three languages, the Bible tells one unfolding story of the redemption of sinful man by the grace of God with a total harmony of parts. It is no mere anthology of religious writings, for there is a unity binding it together which no anthology possesses.

Just imagine the difficulty you would have in going on the campus of a university and finding ten professors to write articles on the same controversial subject without contradicting each other on any point, and you will begin to appreciate the unanimity of view expressed by the 40 different writers of the Bible. For that many men to agree perfectly on every subject they address can be hardly coincidental!

It is also interesting to note that, although the Bible was written at a time of widespread ignorance on certain matters of science, it

nowhere reflects the common errors of its day.

For example, Egyptian medical books from the time of Moses prescribe animal feces, crocodile teeth, and other similar remedies for disease. Many ancient "scientists" believed the earth was flat or rested on the shoulders of a giant. It is not that the Bible avoids these subjects; it is rather that it does not reflect the crude notions of its time in history.

If men had written the Bible from their own unaided wisdom, the same silly ideas we find in other ancient books which treat scientific matters would be found in it. How shall we explain their absence in Scripture?

The Charge of "Errors in Scripture"

You may be ready to reply, "But I've always heard that the Bible does contain errors. In fact, I've heard it is *filled* with mistakes."

The "errors" of Scripture are a slippery lot. The list keeps changing! In 1800 the French Institute in Paris published a list of 82 errors in the Bible which they believed would destroy Christianity. Today not one of those "errors" remains to be resolved! Relevant research by historians, archaeologists, and scientists has always set-

tled every disputed case in the favor of Scripture.

For instance, critics of the Bible once pointed to the several Old Testament references to the Hittites and expressed the opinion that they were the mythical creation of late Hebrew writers. In 1906 a German archaeologist named Winckler unearthed the capital city of the Hittite empire and found huge archives of cuneiform tablets. The entire body of their history learned from those tablets confirms the biblical record of their place in Hebrew history.

Time and time again, this sort of thing has happened. Critics said the cultural conditions of Palestine were unlike those described in the Bible in the time Abraham was supposed to have lived. They denied the historicity of Sargon II of Assyria. They questioned the alleged wealth of Solomon. The historical situation of the days of Abraham stands confirmed as related in the Scripture, the palace of Sargon II has been found at Khorsabad, and the wealth of Solomon has been verified independently of Scripture by excavations at Megiddo and Ezion-geber.

It gives a believer considerable satisfaction to say that not a single case of dispute over the Bible's credibility has ever been settled to the discredit of the Word of God!

There are difficult texts in the Bible. There are many incidents in the Bible for which there is no additional data beyond what is related in Scripture. There are many which are still being studied in relation to information coming to light constantly from various sources. Where the information is in already, however, it is Scripture rather than its critics which stands vindicated.

I Would Be Impressed With Archaeological Findings

If I didn't believe the Bible, I would be amazed with the things which are coming to light constantly from archaeology and related historical sciences.

Having introduced the matter of archaeology and its contributions to modern study of the Bible, perhaps a separate point needs to be made about its general impact on strengthening the case for faith in Scripture as the Word of God.

Several years ago, *Time* magazine (Dec. 30, 1974, pp. 34-41) carried a cover story entitled "How True is the Bible?" The gist of its answer was that "the Bible is often surprisingly accurate in historical particulars,

more so than earlier generations of scholars ever suspected.” On the last page of an eight-page article, the piece concluded: “After more than two centuries of facing the heaviest scientific guns that could be brought to bear, the Bible has survived—and is perhaps the better for the siege. Even on the critics’ own terms—historical fact—the Scriptures seem more acceptable now than they did when the rationalists began the attack.”

A similar article was published more recently by *U.S. News & World Report* (Aug. 24, 1981, pp. 38-40) and made the same point. “A wave of archaeological discoveries is altering old ideas about the roots of Christianity and Judaism—and affirming that the Bible is more historically accurate than many scholars thought.”

I have quoted from national newsmagazines rather than technical journals to show the impact of archaeology on confirmation of the Bible’s reliability on matters of challenged historicity. Such magazines have no theological axe to grind, and simply report on a popular level what is a known fact among students of both the Bible and history.

Nelson Glueck, a respected Jewish archaeologist, has written: “It may be stated

categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”

The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible a hundred years ago has been in constant retreat before the discoveries of archaeology.

I Would Be Convinced By Predictive Prophecies

If I didn't believe the Bible, I would be convinced that it is from God by its many predictive prophecies.

No man can make specific and detailed predictions of future events except by inspiration of God. Only one who knows all things—including the end of all things from the beginning (i.e., God)—can predict the future without fail.

Of all the so-called “sacred books” of the religions of the world, only the Bible has dared to predict the future. Literally hundreds of such predictions are found in it. They are related to people and events remote enough in time from the writers that guesswork or logical deduction could not account for them; they are specific in nature

and not mere vague generalizations; their fulfillment in history is clear and unequivocal.

Every one of the hundreds of Old and New Testament predictions has been fulfilled to the letter, except for those relating to the second coming of Christ, judgment, and eternity. The fact of the fulfillment of those prior prophecies is conclusive evidence that these remaining ones will also come to pass!

The Story of Tyre

As an example of such predictive prophecies in Scripture, look closely at Ezekiel 26:3-21. Given around 588 B.C., this prediction speaks of God's future wrath against the city of Tyre. Ezekiel spoke for God and said Tyre would see "many nations" rise against her (v. 3), be devastated and left as a "bare rock" (vs. 4, 14), and serve as a spot "for the spreading of nets" (v. 14).

From 587-574 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar led a siege against the proud capital city of the Phoenician empire. The mainland city was overrun as a result, and the people of Tyre fled to an island about one-half mile off shore in the Mediterranean Sea. There the city existed until 332 B.C. In that year Alexander the Great came against it and, in a most ingenious manner, overcame the

problem which had stalled Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

Alexander tore down the ruins of the old mainland city and used its stones, timbers, and topsoil to construct a land bridge over to the island! Even this, however, was in fulfillment of divine prediction. Ezekiel had said of Tyre's enemies: "Your stones and timber and soil they will cast into the midst of the waters" (Ezekiel 26:12c).

When Alexander died and his empire began to be carved up by his generals, Antigonus came against Tyre yet again in 314 B.C. and plundered it once more.

Today the site of the old mainland city is nothing more than a barren rock where fishermen can be seen to spread their nets!

Many nations! Devastated! Left a "bare rock" and never rebuilt! Used for the spreading of nets! How could Ezekiel have known all those things so far in advance of their fulfillment? He could not have known them. *But God did!* Through the prophet Ezekiel, he predicted all these things. Now the record of the prediction and its exact fulfillment stand as an invitation for all people to recognize the book containing it for what it is—the *very Word of God to the human family*.

Conclusion

Surely there are many people who do not acknowledge the Bible as God's Word for the simple reason that they have never had access to the sort of information about Scripture which this booklet has presented. Have you been in that number?

What will you do now? I simply ask that you be honest with the facts and draw the conclusion warranted by them. God has never asked anyone to believe anything that is untrue!

If I didn't believe the Bible, I hope I would be fair-minded enough to look at the evidence closely. I hope you will do that much and be led to faith in the Bible and its central character, Jesus Christ! He alone is the Savior (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), and he is eager to save you (Romans 3:21-26; 6:1-4).

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