

A Gift From Heaven

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The Bible Cannot Be Proven

Daily life in past centuries was largely dominated by the Bible. In the past the Bible's influence was reflected by biblical reproductions on tiles in porches, on stamps, on daily utensils and many other places. For generations people used to live close to the Bible, which they considered their main lifeline. In those days one could not imagine what life would be like without the Bible. Many believers in the past simply accepted the Bible not as the word of man, but as the only true Word of God.

How can we today, with all our knowledge and understanding, prove that the Bible is God's Word?

No Proof Just Knowledge

Every believer is convinced that the Bible is the Word of God. Yet every believer will agree that you cannot prove that the Bible is God's Word. Nobody on earth can do that. The Roman Catholic Church has tried to prove it simply by having the Pope proclaim that the Bible is the Word of God. In such a case the Bible would ultimately derive its authority from a human declaration. This cannot be right for the Bible derives its authority from God.

Others try to find proof in the archaeological discoveries made in and around Palestine during the last centuries. When such excavations correspond with the Bible, people joyfully exclaim, "The Bible is true!" However, this proof is also derived from a human source. Fortunately, we do not need to depend on people to know that the Bible is God's Word.

Then how can you know beyond a shadow of doubt, that the Bible is indeed THE WORD OF GOD? There is only one answer. Those who believe will recognize their Father's voice in it. In everyday life you recognize your father's voice. Although you might not be able to prove that it is indeed your father's voice, you simply know it is.

During His stay on earth, Jesus used the metaphor of a shepherd and his sheep to explain this to His disciples. The sheep know the voice of their *shepherd* (*John*

10:1-18). The sheep are "tuned in" to the sound of their master's voice. They will never follow a stranger since they do not know his voice. Similarly, God's children recognize the voice of their good Shepherd (*Ps. 23*). They cannot prove that it is the Lord, yet they are absolutely certain it is His voice.

No Need For Evidence

All the same, many people are not satisfied with the example of the shepherd and his sheep, or with the comparison of a father's voice. They prefer logical arguments and look for reasonings that hold more water.

The apostle Paul also had to deal with this reaction in his time. Paul was preaching God's Word or the "the Word of the Cross" as he called it. Many regarded it as folly. So some Jews demanded that Paul prove his statement by showing them a sign or a miracle. In addition there were Greeks who asked for logical proofs. They could not just accept this "Word of the Cross". Both the renowned Jew and the intellectual Greek needed an acceptable declaration before they would believe (*I Cor. 1:18-25*).

Yet there were also people in Paul's audience who humbly listened to the Word and received it as wisdom from God (*I Cor. 1:22*). These people understood that evidence was unnecessary.

The Eternal Book

Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, expresses his great thankfulness to God: “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (*2 Thess. 2:13*).

It is remarkable that Paul uses the verbs “to receive” and “to accept”. The Thessalonians even welcomed the message “with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit” (*1 Thess. 1:6*). This is exactly how the Word works. By hearing, receiving and accepting the message, you become Joyfully certain that it is true. Paul did not need to produce evidence. He simply preached the

Word, and it was accepted by the people with joy. The Thessalonians were surrounded by many philosophies, but they only listened to the voice of the one Good Shepherd. Today we also have to deal with many false theories, but we have the complete Word of God to help us determine what is right and wrong.

No Need For Proof

If you read the Bible in a respectful manner, then God will lead you to say, “These are not human words, but this is God’s Word which is speaking to me. I cannot prove it but I know it as certainly as the believers of past centuries have known it.” Little wonder then that the Bible is the best-seller of the month, of the year, or, better yet, of the ages. It is God’s book.

Babel

Genesis 11

After the flood cleansed the earth God promised Noah and his descendants a “fresh start”. He added that there would never be a flood again (*Gen. 9:12-17*). At the same time, however, God also commanded the people to fill the earth (*Gen. 8:17; 9:1,7*). As time passed, they started to turn a deaf ear to God’s commands. Apparently, they had not learn from the flood. Within a relatively short period of time man grew confident in his own abilities and decided to build his own tower, the tower of Babel.

“Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” (*Gen. 11:4*)

Independence

In spite of God’s command for men to spread themselves over the whole earth, they remained close together, working under the motto “strength in unity”. Once they had completed their huge tower and fortified their city, Noah’s descendants would be ready to rebel against God, to become independent from Him and to make a name for themselves. The tower that they are building became a symbol of their independence.

Excavations have shown what type of structure was probably erected. Many ancient cities had a tower that was built in the form of a pyramid. If low clouds enshrouded the top of the tower it looked like it reached to heaven. Often it was said that a deity dwelt in the top of the tower. This explains why temples were frequently constructed on the top of these towers.

Much of this applies to Babel. Again it becomes apparent that man has remained the same. He still busy opposes the laws of his Creator and rebels against Him. However, God in His wisdom intervened for the benefit of man. He stopped this rebellion in its tracks by bringing about a confusion of tongues. God created different languages and man’s unity vanished into the babble of many different dialects.

Must we conclude from this story that God condemns world unity? Does God want nations with different languages to treat each other as enemies and destroy each another? Such a conclusion is incorrect. In His Word God teaches that the peoples should be at peace with each other. At the same time we must never forget that peace on a human level should not result in rebellion against God. This is where the people of Babel went wrong. They wanted an independent unity in which God would have no place and man would be his own master.

A Shattered Unity

God intervened in the construction of the tower of Babel by confusing the builders’ speech. This brought about some drastic consequences. Not only did the work on the tower stop, but people started to move away from each other. Everyone was compelled to join whomever he could still understand and to leave behind those who spoke a strange language. Whereas, at first, they did not obey their Creator’s command, they were now being forced to spread themselves over the face of the earth.

From this point onwards a new phase begins in the history of the world. God’s judgment means that mankind must now live scattered over the earth. It also

shows that God, in spite of men's disobedience, keeps His promise. Humanity is not destroyed. Instead, God keeps the way open for the arrival of His Son, Jesus Christ. There have been many other moments in history when the end seemed near. Another example is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah where the sins of the people offended God greatly (*Gen. 19:1-29*). Still, God did not terminate the history of the human race. By being merciful He demonstrated His grace and His love. He kept His Word because it was of utmost importance that His Son come to earth and redeem mankind from sin.

Truly, Jesus Has Come

Many centuries after the construction of the tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues, Jesus was indeed born. He shed His blood on earth to redeem us. After His work on earth was done, He returned to heaven. We now wait with eager expectation for Jesus' second coming on earth which could come at any time.

In our days, the days before Christ's second coming, many of the Old Testament mistakes are being made again. As time goes on, the situation in the world becomes more corrupt. One example is the pursuit of power and unity. One can also notice in our time that peoples and nations wish "to make a name for themselves". Remember, until the last day of human history the "seed of the serpent" will be at war with the "seed of the woman". And Satan will always do his utmost to lead people away from God using both obvious and subtle means. He attempts to organize a powerful united state or confederacy of nations in which mankind will no longer be dependent upon God.

Eventually, God's last intervention will take place, not by way of a flood or a confusion of tongues, but by His Last Judgment (*2 Pet. 3:8-13*). Then the whole world will "bum", in order to be purified of all its filth and sin. It is the believers, the seed of the woman, who will live on this purified earth in all of its glory (*Rev. 21:9-22:4*).

Living By God's Grace

All nations live and will continue to live in constant flux until God decides to bring this world to an end (*Matt. 24:3-7*). Nations not only strive to enlarge their physical boundaries, but they also seek to spread their power and influence. On the one hand there are nations which are highly "civilized", while other nations live in a very primitive stage of development.

After the building of the tower of Babel was disrupted nations started searching for their own identities with the result that there was also a noticeable growth in variety of religions. At first, before the confusion of tongues, the generations were all told the story of creation, the fall and the flood. Afterwards, when they scattered, every nation started to live its own life. Although the people retained their knowledge of God as Creator and Ruler, it gradually degenerated. Now God decided to leave the people "for what they were", and made a new beginning with Abraham and the nation of Israel (*Acts 7:2,3; 14:15-17; 17:26-28; Ps. 147:19,20*).

By revealing Himself to Israel over the centuries God preserved His Word. It was Abraham and his descendants who received the privilege of handing down the correct information about creation, the fall and the flood from generation to generation.

Nevertheless, the other nations did retain some of their knowledge about God's existence and His deeds in history. It is, therefore, not surprising to encounter Biblical elements in their stories and myths. The Bible does not depend on these stories. On the contrary, many ancient tales are watered-down versions of what is found in the Bible.

Although there are similarities, there will always be one radical difference between Christianity and other religions. The Bible teaches that man is totally unable to save himself and can only live by God's grace. The other religions focus their attention on man's self-redemption, in whatever form this may take.

Prayer Is Also Other-Directed

”To whom, for what and how should you pray?” This may very well be a question you have asked yourself. The disciples also requested Jesus to teach them to pray. As a result, Jesus taught them the well-known Lord’s prayer, a prayer which can be used to answer the above questions.

Who should we address when we pray? We should pray to God. What should we pray for? Jesus gives an answer to this question in the six “petitions” which follow the first part of the Lord’s prayer. How should we pray? We should approach God with confidence since we are His children and He is our Father. We must also assume an attitude of reverence, for God is great and high “in the heavens”.

Hallowed Be Thy Name

“To hallow” means “to set apart”, “to recognize as holy”, or “to revere”. We must revere God’s fame and hold His Name high. God has made a name or reputation for Himself through His Word. He excels in all He does, for His greatness and power can be seen everywhere. Thus “hallowed by Thy Name” is the same as saying “Oh God, grant that we may always speak of Thee with admiration.” One of the church’s confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism, puts it this way: “Grant us, first of all, that we may rightly know Thee, and sanctify, glorify and praise Thee in all Your works, in which shine forth Thy almighty power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy and truth.” Our whole life - our thoughts, words and actions must be an example and encourage others to hallow God’s name. When you yourself pray that God’s name may be hallowed you also do this for others.

In your prayer you must include the whole world (*John 17:3-6,26*). The hallowing of God’s name on this earth is a blessing for everybody, not just for ourselves. As soon as every knee bows before God, Paradise will be regained on earth (*Is. 45:22-25; Phil. 2:9,10*). This new earth will be the home of righteousness (*II Pet. 3:13*). We pray not only to praise God ourselves, but we should also ask that everyone will praise Him. The petition “Hallowed be Thy Name” dominates the

Lord’s prayer for God made everything to the honour of His Name (*Ps. 8, Ps. 148, Rev. 4:11*).

Thy Kingdom Come

Ever since the fall into sin God’s name has not received due credit. Sinful men do not naturally praise God. Therefore, God’s kingdom must come so that His Name will be fully and truly hallowed. Although God is King, God’s Kingdom is not here yet. We, as people, are not quite ready to listen to Him and to let Him be Lord over our whole life. Sinful man recognizes Satan as “the ruler of this world” and is inclined to put himself in the centre of things (*John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11*). Yet God is busy restoring His Kingdom. Every time someone subjects himself to His Will, God’s Kingdom comes closer (*Luke 17:20,21*). Whoever believes in Him becomes a citizen of that Kingdom, which is growing steadily. It is like a small seed, which, withstanding all types of weather, grows into a big tree. It can also be compared to salt which spices up food or like yeast that works itself through the dough (*Matt. 13*).

This petition also concerns the whole human race. We pray that many may subject themselves to God so that at last His Kingdom will come to earth in full glory (*Rev. 19:6-10*).

Thy Will Be Done As In Heaven So On Earth

This third petition is closely connected to the previous one. As a subject in God's Kingdom you must do what He commands. You must deny your own will and obey God only, without any objections, just like the angels in heaven.

"Thy will be done" means that God's will must be done by us. We ask for strength and love to be fully obedient. By ourselves we are unable, but God will give us the power and the love to obey if we pray for it.

In these first three petitions of the Lord's prayer we pray for all humanity. When everyone hallow's God's name and obeys His will then there will be peace on earth. Only then will we see a new heaven and a new earth.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Jesus teaches us to pray for our daily subsistence (*Luke 11:3*). We may pray for everything we need in our life such as food, clothing, shelter, work and health. If we realize that our entire material wellbeing is dependent on God then we will not ask for extreme wealth, but we will trust that God will provide us with everything we need.

Everyone who works in God's Kingdom needs His gifts just like soldiers need their daily rations. In other words, you must also pray for others and so be ready to help those in need (*James 2:15,16; Gal. 6:2,10*). You must pray for all the hungry men, women and children on this planet. However, the first three petitions, namely, the hallowing of God's name, the coming of His Kingdom, and the working out of His will must never be forgotten (*Matt. 6:33*). Although our material needs are important, there is one need which is even more critical. We will be confronted with it in the next petition.

Forgive Us Our Sins As We Have Forgiven Those Who Trespassed Against Us

God detests our sins and our guilt. There is a barrier between God and us because of them. Through Jesus, God wants to forgive whatever thought or action is sinful in our lives.

At the same time Jesus explicitly teaches us that we must also forgive others (*Matt. 6:14,15; 11:25,26;*

18:21-35). No matter how deeply someone has hurt us, we must forgive him.

We are continually falling into sin. Satan will always do his best to tempt us. Satanic powers will keep trying to lead us away from God (*I Pet. 5:8; Eph. 6:10-20*). The temptation to sin springs forth both from within, the human heart, and from the outside, our environment. It is even possible that God, if His anger with us is great enough, will give us over to Satan, so that he may tempt us. This means we are being rejecting by God. Yet even if God does not abandon us, Satan will keep scheming about the most effective ways of leading God's children into temptation. Regardless of this, however, we may be comforted in the fact that God will come to our aid.

Lead Us Not Into Temptation But Deliver Us From The Evil One

We ourselves are unable to stand up against the attacks of the devil. Often we are not even aware of his assaults. Therefore God needs to help us in this lifelong battle against sin. But God will always stay beside us and eventually make us victorious.

The sixth petition reads, "lead us not into temptation". The little word "us" indicates that God is not only a Father towards you but to all those who believe. Jesus teaches us to pray for the whole world, for all people, even for our enemies, so that "every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (*Matt. 5:44*)

For Thine Is The Kingdom, The Power And the Glory

God is powerful! He will give us what we ask of Him in this prayer. It is obvious we are asking a lot but God is very gracious and He will give it. Surely it will happen so.

Whoever prays in accordance with what Jesus taught us in the Lord's prayer, does not only pray for himself but also for others, far and near. Such a prayer is far from egoistic. Note that the words "I" and "me" do not appear in the Lord's prayer. Rather the pronouns "us" and "we" are used. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbours and praying for them is part of this love.

"Amen" is a very appropriate and comforting ending because it means: it is true and certain. Pray with the certainty and comfort that God will answer.

Questions 5

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1. Read *John 10:1-18*. What is portrayed by the image of the shepherd and his sheep?
2. Joel, as well as other prophets, starts off with this inscription: “The Word of the Lord, which came to Joel...” What is meant with this?
3. Read *Luke 16:19-31*. How does the conclusion of this parable show that only God’s Word is able to convince?

Babel

1. *Gen. 9:8-17* deals with God’s covenant with Noah. Briefly explain what this covenant with mankind comprised.
2. Can you describe exactly what was wrong with the idea of building the tower of Babel?
3. Although mankind sinned again with the building of the tower of Babel, God did not immediately destroy the world once more. Why not? (see also *2 Pet. 3:9*)

Prayer is Also Other-Directed

1. Explain how the first three petitions of the Lord’s prayer concern others.
2. For whom does Paul in *Col. 1:3-14* thank and pray?
3. Read *Matt. 18:21-35*. On which condition does Jesus promise to forgive sins?