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The Need for the Bible

Deceit, Death, and Details

by Jeremy Cagle

Compared to my other articles, this article may seem small in length but it is not small in importance. Any study of the Bible would be lacking without an understanding of why such a book would be necessary. God chose to reveal Himself in several ways throughout history: through a nation,¹ through His Son,² and through written revelation.³

The question this article seeks to answer is: why would God reveal Himself through a book? Why was such an act necessary?

I. The Deceit of Man

Of all the creatures on this earth, God made man unique. He created Adam, the first man, in His own image (Gen 1:26-27). Yet Adam, through his own initiative, disobeyed God (Gen 3) and plunged the whole of humanity into sin. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Accordingly, the current state of man is extraordinary: he is made in the image of God and yet he is born in rebellion against God. He emerges into the world with some resemblance of life but his inherited disobedience results in his death.⁴ This rebellion does not start with his actions, however, but it begins in his very mind. Ralph Venning sums this up well:

Seeing that sin is so sinful, it is even evil to be a thinking sinner, or a sinner though only in thought. It is too commonly said that thoughts are free. They are indeed free in respect of men, who cannot judge us for them, but God can and will. Many people who seem to be modest and sparing as to evil words and deeds will still make bold with thoughts and, as the saying is, pay it with thinking. Such are speculative, contemplative sinners.⁵

In other words, mankind, without supernatural assistance, cannot think righteous, undefiled thoughts.⁶ As a dead man cannot contemplate the things of life, sinful man cannot grasp the things of righteousness. Our minds cannot replicate holiness because we are, at best, 'thinking sinners.' That is why God gave us

a book: because our inherent sin makes us deceitful.

Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" Romans 3:10-18 goes even further with this sentiment,

There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

A deceitful mind could not, on its own initiative, comprehend the nature and person of Deity. Without some objective standard,⁷ mankind could never find God. Without external truth, we would consistently change any teaching or rule to suit our own wants and desires. We are desperately wicked and in order for us to be able to understand God, He has to reveal Himself to us in a special way.⁸ God chooses to do so through the Bible.

II. The Death of Man

Not only did Adam's sin create an inherent deceitfulness in mankind, it also brought death unto us all. Genesis 1:16-17 gives the first mention of death in the Bible and explains the warning Adam received before he performed this deed: "The Lord God commanded the man, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in

the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” Genesis 3:17-19 describes the curse that God pronounced on man because Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁹ Verse 19 says, “By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

If you think like I do, you may wonder why Adam did not die after he ate from this tree. Well, Adam did die. It just took him a few more chapters. According to Genesis 5:5, “So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.” Would Adam have lived forever if he had not disobeyed God’s command? We do not know. We do know that he disobeyed God’s command and, as a consequence, he died and all of his offspring continue to die until the present day.¹⁰

The death cycle affects the need for the Bible in two ways:

First, if there was no long-lasting, completed source for God to draw from in revealing Himself, He would have to specifically re-reveal Himself every time someone was born. In other words, if there was not some resource that had been passed down from generation to generation for us to learn about God, He would have to disclose Himself afresh to each individual human being at his birth. With six billion people currently on the planet, the idea of such a process would be staggering. God would be involved in a process of continuous revelation about Himself, His plan of salvation, His rules for man to live by, and every other item necessary to pursue holiness.

Could God do this? Of course He could. He could do anything He wanted to. But He chooses not to incessantly disclose detailed information about Himself in this fashion.

Second, the shortness of man’s life substantially limits his potential to obtain new information. Individual man does not have the period of time he needs to tap into the mind of an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent being. The Bible itself is an example of this. The Old Testament was written in a time-frame of 1,000 years¹¹ and the New Testament in a time-frame of 100.¹² Not only did it take over a millennium to write the Bible, it required over thirty different authors to do so.¹³ Clearly, God saw

that it was necessary to distribute His Word over several generations.

Again, could God choose to specifically re-reveal Himself to each person and speak of Himself in ways that each particular man and woman could grasp in their own individual life-span? He absolutely could. But He chooses not to. He chooses to reveal Himself through a book that has remained intact for over 2,000 years.

III. The Need for Details

Man is deceitful and man dies, but the last reason for the need for the Bible does not have as much to do with man as it does with nature. The Bible is needed because it gives us specific details about God that are not provided through any other medium. Were it not for the Bible, we would know next to nothing about His qualities, His Son, His church,¹⁴ His commandments, or countless other things.

It is certainly true that there are some qualities of God that are displayed in the world around us without the aid of the Bible. Romans 1:20 says, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they (men) are without excuse.” According to this verse, God’s “eternal power and divine nature” are clearly seen through His creation.

Moreover, Psalm 8:3-4 says, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?” According to these verses, before all of God’s works, man appears small. So far, from creation alone we have determined that God has eternal power, divine nature, and man is in a humble state before Him.

This tells us something about God but more information is needed if we are to know of Heaven and Hell and the paths that lead to both. What about man’s place before God? His standing cannot be determined from nature alone. Is God pleased with man or is He angry with him? These details cannot be answered from just looking at the world around us. Information is needed from another source.

That other source is the Bible. The Bible gives us all the information we need about Heaven, Hell, man's place with respect to God, and the attainment of the Lord's pleasure. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Scripture is inspired by the Lord and it gives us details about Him that are not found anywhere else.

Why is the Bible needed? Because man is not to be trusted with Divine information of his own,¹⁵ he does not live long enough to grasp an adequate amount of Divine information, and there is not enough specific Divine information without it. If we are to know God, we must know the Bible. He left us with no other alternative.

Endnotes

¹ The nation through which He chose to reveal Himself was the nation of Israel. The Old Testament provides a thorough history of the Jewish people. It also contains their law, their poetry, and their prophecies. For a technical summary of the Old Testament's historical material, see Eugene H. Merrill's *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

² "His Son," meaning Jesus Christ. The New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John provide a history of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and teachings. The rest of the books in the New Testament (with the exception of Acts and Revelation) explain what He taught. For a technical summary of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, see Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry's *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978).

³ "Written revelation," meaning the Bible.

⁴ Rom 6:23 says the wages of sin is death.

⁵ *The Sinfulness of Sin* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965 reprint of 1669 original) 224.

⁶ Salvation, only attainable through believing in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and repenting of one's sins (Rom 10:8-10), gives mankind the ability to think righteous thoughts. Without God giving man the Bible, however, man would not know anything specific about how to receive such salvation and his thoughts could only be unrighteous.

⁷ Here, "objective standard" refers to a standard that is external or outside of man.

⁸ For a further explanation of the need for a special kind of revelation, see Stephen Cavness' article in this newsletter, "God, Revelation, and Dr. Phil."

⁹ Gen 3:6

¹⁰ Heb 9:27.

¹¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publishing, 1997) 13, 1359. Genesis was written around 1445 B.C. and Malachi was written around 435 B.C.

¹² MacArthur, 1841, 1989. Paul's letters were the first New Testament books to be written. 1 Thessalonians was penned around 51 A.D. Revelation was the last book of the Bible to be written. It was completed between 94 and 96 A.D.

¹³ The Bible contains 66 different books. Many of these books, however, were written by the same author.

¹⁴ We may know some things about His Son and His church from historical sources but these sources provide few significant details.

¹⁵ "Divine information," meaning information pertaining to God.