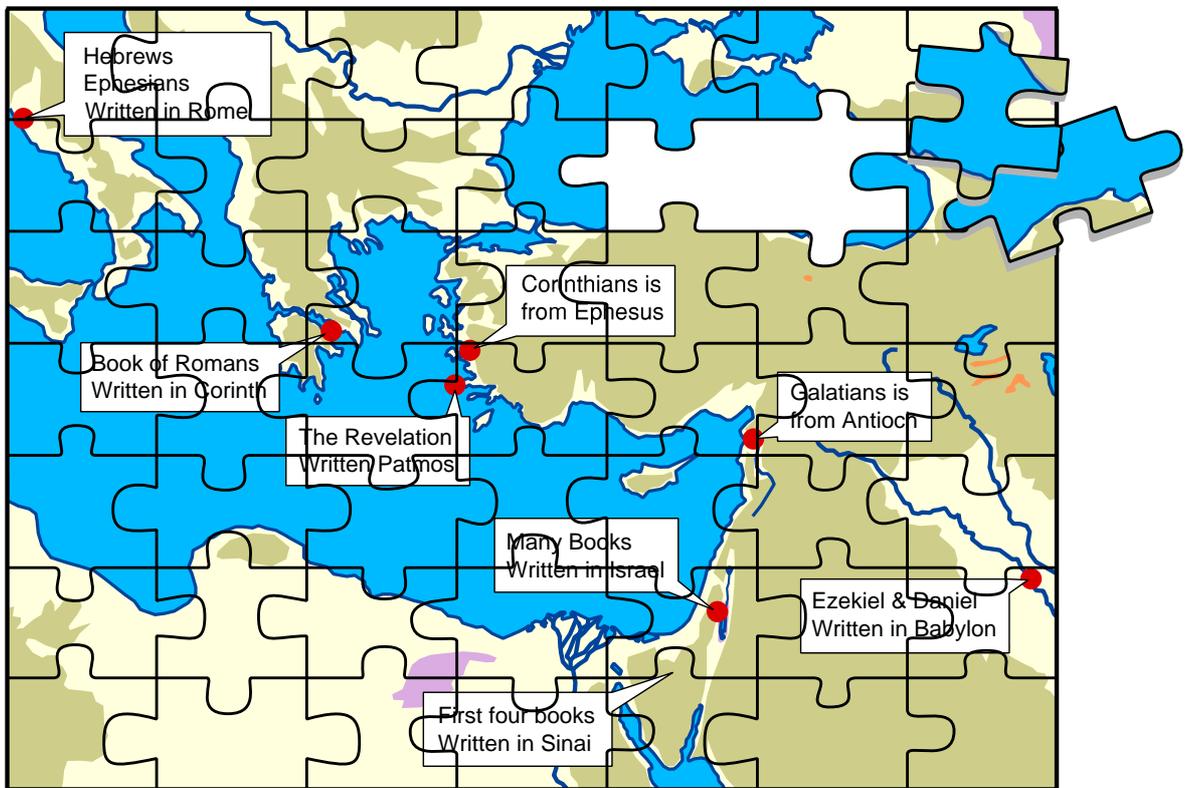


The Unity of The Bible

Evidence of Inspiration



J. C. Thorpe
2013
Version 0.1

Summary

The Bible is a book written over more than a thousand years by a minimum of 30 different writers from all levels of society. Parts of it were written in the land of Canaan, but others were written over a wide range of places from Babylon to Rome and from Sinai to Antioch. Richard Dawkins describes it as: “a chaotically cobbled-together anthology of disjointed documents, composed, revised, translated, distorted and ‘improved’ by hundreds of anonymous authors, editors and copyists, unknown to us and mostly unknown to each other, spanning nine centuries” (The God Delusion, p237). The good professor somewhat exaggerates the number of writers involved and the chaos of the production process, but the point remains.

One would not expect any book written in this way to be consistent in any way, let alone have a powerful and coherent message. However, the Bible does have exactly such a message. The teaching of the Bible about God, about Jesus, about salvation, about life after death and about the plan and purpose of God is absolutely consistent from one end of the Bible to the other. This includes tiny details of teaching and even the symbolism used within the Bible. The Bible has every sign of having been put together by a single intelligence.

There is only one possible explanation for the startling unity of the Bible in the face of such a large number of writers. The Bible is the work of a single supernatural being who has arranged its writing.

For more information visit:

<http://biblethink.org.uk/>

Version 0.1, July 2013

Introduction

The Bible was written by a large number of different writers over a many centuries. The writers came from different parts of the world and different sections of society. They wrote in three different languages. In spite of this, the Bible has a single, united message. It is extremely difficult to see how this could happen unless there is something behind the Bible which is much greater than anything that could be provided by any human being or collection of human beings.

This article is about the fact that it would be very difficult for such a group of people to write a consistent account. It shows how the Bible is united, explains the scale of the problem of writing such a document and discusses additional problems in generating a single united whole without divine intervention.

The Writers of the Bible.

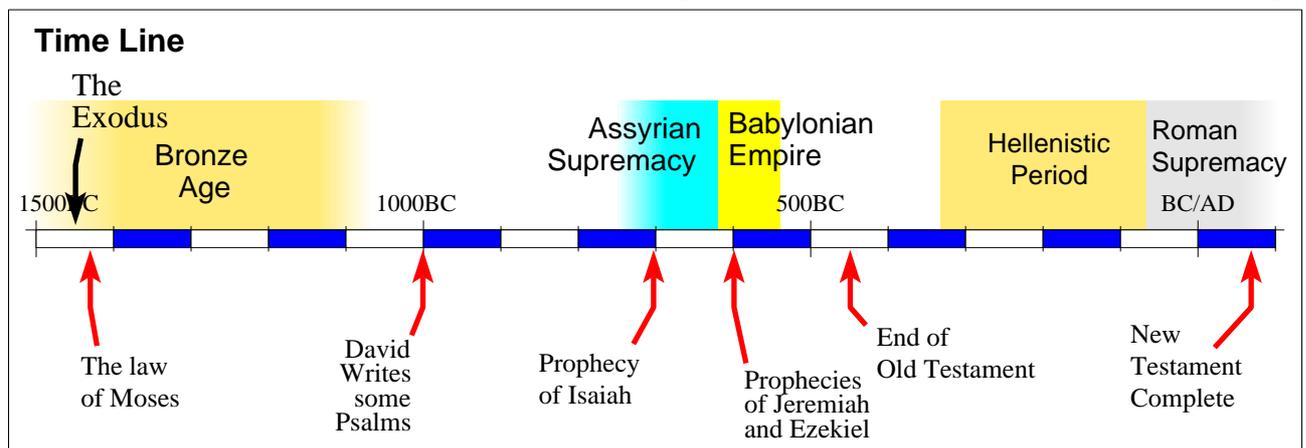
If the Bible had been the result of a single writer writing over a matter of a few years one might expect it to tell a single story and provide a single coherent view of the world. The Bible is a very united book, but it was written over a long period of time by a large number of different writers.

Dates of Writing

The earliest parts of the Old Testament are the Law of Moses and probably the Book of Job. The Law of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament) were probably written shortly after the Children of Israel left Egypt in the Exodus and crossed the Sinai Desert to enter the Land of Canaan (now called Israel and Palestine). According to the Bible and the entry to the Promised Land happened in about 1400BC and the Exodus happened forty years before this. The books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers were probably written before the Israelites entered Canaan and the book of Deuteronomy shortly afterwards. The book of Job is more difficult to date, but may very well come from well before this time (there is another view which dates the book late on in the writing of the Old Testament, but based on an earlier story).

The last part of the Bible, the New Testament was written in the middle of the first century AD, with the bulk of it completed before 70AD. This means that there is a period of more than some fourteen centuries between the earliest writings of the Old Testament and the last words of the New Testament.

The first writers of the Old Testament were writing in the Middle Bronze Age. This was a period in which the surrounding ideas were of a world which had always existed, but where natural phenomena such as rain, thunder, the growth of crops and the movements of heavenly bodies were considered to be the result of the actions of various gods. The last writers of the Bible were writing



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Some Old Testament Writers

Book	Writer	Occupation	Date
Leviticus	Moses	Former Prince	c1400BC
Ecclesiastes	Solomon	King	c1000BC
Isaiah	Isaiah	Aristocrat	c700BC
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Priest	c600BC
Amos	Amos	Herdsman	c750BC
Daniel	Daniel	Courtier	c550BC
Ezra	Ezra	Scribe	c450BC

This table shows just seven of the 19 named writers of the Old Testament. These were spread over a period of almost 1000 years, came from places as far apart as Egypt and Babylon as well as from Judea. They include a King from about 1000BC, a herdsman from about 750BC and a Scribe from about 450BC. They wrote in two different languages, Hebrew and Aramaic. It is difficult to imagine how such a diverse set of people could write a book like the Bible where the same world-view appears throughout.

in a period when there was a wide range of competing world-views, from the mystical speculations of Pythagorean philosophers to humanists like Cicero, the mysteries of Syrian and Eastern religion and the legalistic monotheism of the Jews.

Between are prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah (writing about 700BC and 600BC respectively), scribes like Ezra and Nehemiah (about 400BC) and writers like David and Solomon (around 1000BC). One would expect the world-view of such people to change drastically with the centuries. However, the Bible contains a single unified picture which does not change with date.

Who Wrote the Bible

The Bible contains 66 books. These were written by a variety of different people. The Old Testament was written by a minimum of 29 different writers; ten of its books are anonymous and mainly consist of histories which tended to be added to as time progressed. For 19 of the books the writers are named. The New Testament was written by eight named people (Hebrews is anonymous and some suggest that Revelation and the Gospel of John were written by different people - this could take the number of writers to ten).

For some of these books we know the occupation of the writer and hence the stratum of society from which the book came. Books like Isaiah and Jeremiah were written by aristocrats from the top of society who lived in Jerusalem, the capital city, for at least part of the time. On the other hand, Amos was written by a herdsman from a rural area. It is difficult to imagine that these would share common views, and even more difficult when one includes people like Moses, who was brought up as a prince in the court of Pharaoh king of Egypt, was exiled and became the leader of the Israelites as they travelled through the desert.

The New Testament was also written by a very wide variety of writers. Peter and John were fishermen on Galilee, although

The New Testament Writers

Writer	Occupation	Where
Matthew	Tax-Collector	Galilee
Mark	Aristocrat	Jerusalem
Luke	Doctor	Macedonia
John	Fisherman & Merchant	Galilee
Paul	Scholar	Tarsus
James	Carpenter	Nazareth
Peter	Fisherman	Galilee
Jude	Unknown	Unknown

The New Testament writers all worked in the same century (the first century AD) but in spite of this they came from widely different backgrounds. Some, like Mark, were from the highest levels of society while others, like Peter and James were artisans. Matthew, as a tax-collector, would be a social outcast. Luke (Colossians 4:11-14) is the only Gentile writer of any part of the Bible.

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John seems to have also sold fish in Jerusalem, Matthew was a collector of taxes and Paul was a scholar. They had different religious backgrounds. Peter would have been an observant Jew who attended the synagogue, while John appears to have made pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Paul was a Pharisee, and had contacts among the ruling élite in Jerusalem. Luke was a Gentile.

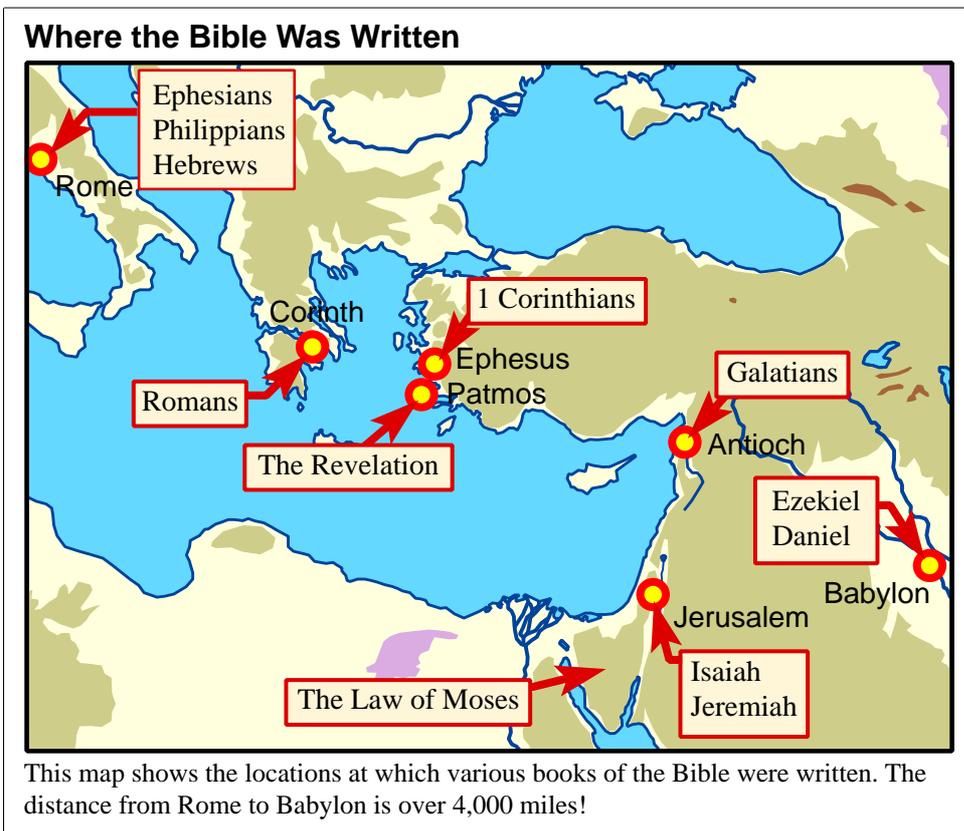
The contrast is very great. If one imagines that the Bible was completed in 2000 AD, then the oldest part would have been written in about 500AD. The difference in outlook of the writers would have been intense. It is very hard to imagine how a ploughman from, say 1200AD would be able to contribute to a book shared with a nuclear physicist from 2000AD; the outlook of the two would be irreconcilable.

Languages

The Old Testament was mainly written in Hebrew, although large parts of Daniel and some smaller parts of Ezra were written in Aramaic. The New Testament was entirely written in Greek, although there are occasional words of Aramaic embedded in its text. It is likely that the writers of the Bible often spoke more than one language, but even so it is likely that there was no single language in which all of them were fluent. It would have been impossible to gather all the writers together because of the dates at which they wrote, but even if it could have been managed they would have been unable to communicate in one single language.

Where the Bible was Written

Not only were the books of the Bible written over a wide range of dates, they were also written over a wide range of different places. Many of the Old Testament books were written in Canaan (Modern Israel and Palestine) but some were written in Babylon and the first books were probably written in the Sinai desert. The books of the New Testament were more widespread in their writing. It is not clear where the Gospels were written; there are traditions which indicate possible locations but



these tend to be unreliable. The writings of the Apostle Paul had a very wide geographical distribution: The letters to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians were written in Rome, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written in Ephesus while his letter to the Galatians was written from Antioch.

The books were written from areas which would themselves have widely differing world-views.

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In spite of all these writers, from all these places and over all these centuries, the Bible has a single united and harmonious message. It is noticeable that the teaching of the Bible doesn't change over 1500 years, and that even minor details are taken through from the beginning to the end.

Major Doctrine

The teachings of the Bible are remarkably consistent from the time of Moses (1500BC) to the time of the Apostles (70AD). The world views of most civilisations around Israel changed considerably over this period but were inclined to be polytheistic in the earlier stages with more abstract philosophy becoming the main influence in the Greek and Roman periods. There was a tendency for the people of Israel to incorporate beliefs from the surrounding nations into their way of life, which means that the common beliefs at the time of Isaiah had deviated from the beliefs in the Scriptures available to them at that time. The consistency of the major teachings of the Bible is therefore quite remarkable.

Example: The Oneness of God

This is a teaching which begins in the earliest parts of the Old Testament and continues through to the end of the New Testament. The Bible presumes that there is one God from the beginning; in the first chapter of Genesis a singular verb is used to describe God (except for one verse which describes God and the angels). This is a general picture throughout the rest of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments.

The first definitive statement of the oneness of God is found in Deuteronomy (written about 1400BC):-

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

The Letter of Paul to Ephesus is one of the last of the books of the Bible to be written (around 62 AS). This contains a similar statement:-

There is... one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
(Ephesians 4:4-6)

Between the two are many explicit statements from different parts of the Bible which proclaim exactly the same teaching of the unity of God. For example, consider the following passage from the Prophecy of Isaiah (c700AD).

I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.
(Isaiah 45:5-7)

The Oneness of God

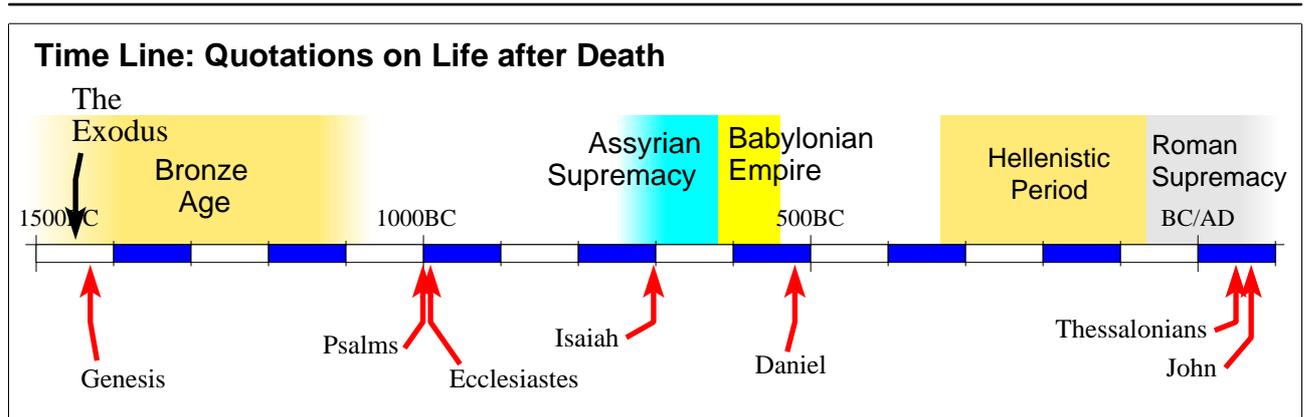
The idea that there is one God is fundamental to the teaching of the Bible, and is implied throughout it as well as being stated explicitly numerous times.

However, the nations surrounding Israel, along with almost the whole of the known world, had a religion which involved many gods of different kinds. This view was frequently adopted within Israel and archaeology shows that there were often shrines to many gods in Israel and Judah, often within the same precincts as shrines to the one God. It is therefore surprising that the Bible never incorporates elements of polytheism within its teaching at any point.

By New Testament times there were very abstract ideas of God as "The Good" and "The One" which were considered as the among the most important elements of Greek philosophy. Triune gods had appeared in Egypt from well before the time of Moses and were being discussed in Alexandria.

The fact that the Bible is never tempted to include any of the pagan ideas in its teaching is a testimony to its unique and unchanging quality.

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The constant repetition of the teaching of the unity of God continues against a background of a constant slide into polytheism. In the time of Isaiah one of the Kings of Judah worshipped other gods than the One God of Israel and even went to the lengths of child sacrifice and building a polytheist altar (1 Kings 16:1,3,10-13). The same problem appears in the early chapters of the prophecy of Ezekiel (For example Chapter 6). It would have been extremely easy for the Bible writers to have adopted a picture of multiple gods, or of gods supported by demons and saints. They never did so.

Example: Life After Death

Here again the Bible has a consistent picture which goes from one end to the other. The Bible consistently teaches that life after death is by resurrection. There is no picture of any kind of immortal element of a human, such as a soul, which survives after death.

The Bible account is in three parts. The first of these is the picture that sin leads to death and that as a consequence of sin mankind suffers a complete death. This is the story from Genesis:

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Genesis 3:19)

The whole point of this passage is that mankind sinned, and that as a result of this a sentence of death was passed upon us all. This is picked up in various places in the Bible, but one particularly clear passage is this:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.. (Romans 5:12)

Because death is a punishment for sin, one cannot expect it to be merely a transition from one state to another. In the whole of the Bible death is a state which removes one from existence. The Old Testament presents this very clearly:

Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish. (Psalm 49:20)

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in the grave, to which you are going. (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6,10)

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However, the same picture appears in the New Testament as well. The word most commonly used for death in the New Testament is “sleep”; the idea is that those who die are like those who are asleep. They are not living in some alternative realm.

On the contrary, the picture which appears in both the New Testament and the Old Testament is one of resurrection. Those who die sleep in the grave until they are raised at the day of judgement. This picture is consistent from some of the earlier parts of the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament:-

But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. (Psalm 49:15)

*Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.* (Isaiah 26:19)

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2)

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:15,16)

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. (John 5:28,29)

The earliest of these passages (Psalm 49) was written in about 1000BC. Isaiah was written around 700BC while Daniel was written about 550BC. 1 Thessalonians was written in 50AD and John’s Gospel somewhere between 65 and 70AD. Thus the message of resurrection is one which spans the Bible over many centuries.

The theme is not one which is immediately obvious; it takes a certain amount of reading of the Bible and thinking about the passages in it before one realises the full weight of the teaching. It is clear that the teaching of the Bible is one of resurrection but it can take some study to realise this. It appears, therefore, that the teaching of resurrection was not likely to have been so important in the thoughts of the writers of the Bible that they would be guaranteed to include it, unless they were prompted to do so by an external agency.

Example: The Kingdom of God

Another major teaching of the Bible is that of the Kingdom of God. In the Bible the Kingdom of God is seen in its fullness when God steps in to reform the world from its current state of decay and sin by sending Jesus back to it. The picture of the Kingdom of God is implied in Numbers 14:21, which refers to a time when the earth will be filled with God’s glory:-

*Then the LORD said, “I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD...
(Numbers 14:20,21)*

The Context of Numbers 14:21

The Children of Israel had been promised a kingdom in the land of Canaan, where they could live in peace ruled by God. They crossed the Sinai desert in two years and arrived at the southern edge of Canaan. Here they became afraid of the defences of the Canaanites and refused to enter the land.

In Numbers 14 we have God’s reaction to the refusal of the Children of Israel. The generation that refused to enter was to wander in the wilderness for another 38 years until they died and their children were to enter the land.

At this point God makes a statement which insists that ultimately his glory will fill, not only the land of Canaan, but the whole world.

The picture is taken up in the promises that God made to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16) and the Psalms (for example Psalms 2 and 72). Daniel gives a very succinct description of the Kingdom of God:-

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, (Daniel 2:44)

Ezekiel describes a future king and contrasts him with the Kings of the end of the regal period in Judah. Isaiah gives numerous detailed and poetic pictures of life in the Kingdom of God (for example, Isaiah 11:1-9; Isaiah 35:1-10; Isaiah 65:17-25. Similar descriptions appear in the prophecies of Joel, Amos and Micah.

The same picture is taken up in the Gospels:-

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:31-33)

Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28)

The teaching of the Kingdom of God essentially one of the main themes of the message of the Apostles. Indeed it appears in the summary of the teaching of the Apostle Paul at the end of Acts:-

He [Paul] lived there [in Rome] two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. (Acts 28:30,31)

The picture of the Kingdom of God is thus a teaching which appears throughout the entire Bible.

Example: The Offspring of Abraham

Another theme which appears throughout the whole of the Bible is the idea of a descendent of Abraham who would be anointed by God to become the king of the Kingdom of God. The promises to Abraham are recorded in the book of Genesis, from chapters 12 to 18 and in chapter 22. The promise to Abraham was that he would have many descendants, that he and his offspring would inherit the land of Canaan, and that his offspring would bring a blessing on all the earth. In Genesis 22 it is indicated that there was to be one single offspring above all others who would overcome his enemies.

The Kingdom of God

The Bible constantly refers to a period in the future when the rule of humanity will be replaced by the rule of God. The Kingdom of God begins with the return of Jesus and the Day of Judgement, and continues for ever.

The Kingdom of God is a constant part of the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles:-

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God. (Mark 1:14)

This is the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and the summary that is given of his message is "The Kingdom of God".

He [Jesus] presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

This is the summary of the teaching of Jesus to his disciples between his resurrection and ascension.

When they had appointed a day for him [Paul], they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. (Acts 28:23)

This passage summarises the teaching of the Apostle Paul.

Clearly the Kingdom of God is a major part of the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

*I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of **his** enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*

(Genesis 22:17,18)

Notice that the passage refers to “his” enemies, not “their” enemies; it refers to one specific descendent of Abraham rather than the whole set of Abraham’s descendants. This fact is picked up by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians:-

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.

(Galatians 3:16)

The promises to Abraham were about his offspring through the generations and were thus inherited by the next generation, and so on. The promises were passed on to Jacob (Genesis 28:14) and to David (2 Samuel 7:12-14). This is the picture that is taken up in the description of Jesus as the king of the Kingdom of God (Luke 1:33-35 - see previous page).

The promises are not a major theme of any single book after the middle section of Genesis. Nevertheless they form a constant thread which provides a backbone to Bible teaching and which gives a direction to much of the rest of its teaching. Like the other themes, it is difficult to believe that it would have been included in the way it is had the books not all had a common intelligence behind them.

Types

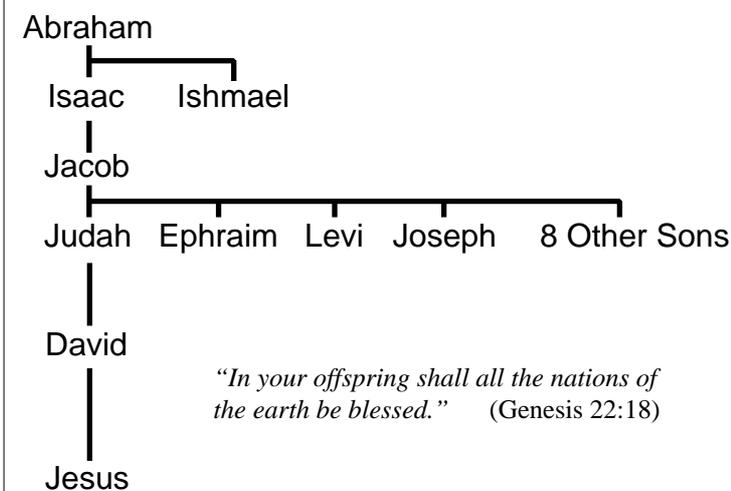
Another way in which the Bible provides consistent teaching throughout is in the inclusion of detail in various different accounts which provide shadows of things to come. Such consistency of detail arises because God acts in similar ways in different centuries.

Example: Joseph

Joseph was one of the twelve sons of Jacob (who was also known as Israel - these were the original Children of Israel from whom the nation came to be called). The account of Joseph is found in Genesis 37 - 50.

Joseph was the older son of Rachael, Jacob’s favoured wife, and hence in a favoured position in the family. He was given a multi-coloured coat, which might have been a priestly garment and was an object of jealousy for his other 10 brothers (Benjamin, the last, was not yet born). The brothers decided to dispose of Joseph. He was taken prisoner and put in a pit; he was then sold into slavery and finally became a slave in Egypt, where he found himself in prison. However, by the intervention of God, who allowed him to interpret one of Pharaoh’s dreams and hence warn of a

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Joseph	Jesus
Favoured son (Gen 37:3)	Only Begotten Son
Rejected by his brothers (Gen 37:1)	Rejected by his own people
Falsely accused (Gen 39:1-14)	Falsely accused (Mt 26:59,60)
Buried and appeared dead (Gen 37:24)	Crucified and buried
Restored alive to his father	Raised to life
Saved the world from death in famine	Saves the world from death and sin.
Betrayed for silver (Gen 37:28)	Betrayed for silver (Mt 26:14,15)
Became Pharaoh's right-hand man	Raised to the right hand of God (Acts 7:56)
Was the means of salvation (from famine) for both the Children of Israel and for Gentiles.	Was the means of salvation from death for the whole world, both Israelites and Gentiles.

great famine to come on the whole area, Joseph rose to be Pharaoh's prime minister.

When the famine came the Egyptians, warned by Joseph, had managed to save up large amounts of grain which they then used to feed the nation (and even to sell relief supplies to other nations).

Jacob heard of this and sent Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph recognised them and the whole family came to live in Egypt.

This account has a considerable number of parallels with the purpose of Jesus.

Both Jesus and Joseph were special sons, they were both apparently dead (Jesus was really dead but Joseph was only reported so to his father) but were later restored to life, they both rose to the highest position of authority and both provided salvation for the world (Joseph from death due to famine and Jesus from death due to sin). There are other similarities (see table above).

The Near-Sacrifice of Isaac

In Genesis 22 there is an account of Abraham being commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac. Isaac is tied to an altar but as Abraham prepares to sacrifice him God intervenes to prevent the sacrifice.

Like Jesus, Isaac was the promised son and hence had a special relationship to his father, was a willing victim, and was restored to life. The account is accompanied by the words of Abraham: "*God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering...*" (Genesis 22:8)

Other Examples

The Old Testament contains large numbers of types, most of whom concern some detail of the life and ministry of Jesus. Some of them are a little obscure, but most of them can be seen without too much effort. The pattern of the New Testament is seen in the Old Testament.

Types in the Early Old Testament

Book	Type	Fulfilment
Genesis	Adam the first man	Jesus the second Adam
	The Ark of Noah	The Salvation of Mankind
	Melchizedek	Christ - Priest and King
	The near-sacrifice of Isaac	The sacrifice of Jesus
	Joseph	The mission of Jesus
Exodus	The Passover	The Sacrifice of Jesus
	The Exodus from the crossing of the Red Sea to the entry into Canaan	The progress of mankind from baptism to the Kingdom of God
	Manna and Water	Spiritual provision by Christ
	The High Priest	Jesus the Priest for mankind
Leviticus	Sacrifices	The sacrifice of Jesus
Numbers	The brazen serpent	Jesus crucified
Joshua	Joshua leads the Children of Israel into Canaan	Jesus leads his followers to the Kingdom of God
	The Cities of Refuge	Refuge from sin and death
Ruth	Boaz	Jesus - Kinsman and Redeemer
Samuel	David	King of the Kingdom of God.
Kings	Solomon; peaceful ruler and Son of David	Jesus - bringer of peace and Son of David

This is a list of some of the more obvious types in the Old Testament. A short search will show that this is a long way from being a complete list!

Alternative Theory 1: Unity and the Establishment

It is possible to imagine a scenario in which many books were written and were selected shortly after writing to become part of the Bible on the basis of their tendency to agree with earlier scripture. In this scenario the unity of the Bible stems from the decisions of an established school to write and select works which tell a consistent story.

However, the evidence does not support this idea.

1. For this method of producing the Bible to exist there would have needed to have been an establishment of some time with the authority to select books to add to the canon of scripture. There is no evidence that any such establishment existed. On the contrary, the books of the Bible are generally very critical of the existing religious establishment.

The Prophets Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel

Isaiah
Courtier from Jerusalem
On close terms with the King
Prophesied on deliverance

Ezekiel
Priest from Jerusalem
Captive in Babylonia
Opposed corruption.

Amos
Herdsman from Tekoa
No contact with Jerusalem
Prophesied in Samaria.

Daniel
Captive in Babylon
Advisor to the King
Wrote of distant future.

The prophets Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel wrote within a century and a half of one another, but they had very different backgrounds and could never have met one another. While Amos and Isaiah were born only about 20 miles apart Amos came from the background of a subsistence farmer and went to Samaria to oppose the idolatry and conspicuous consumption of the new rich there. Isaiah lived in the court in Jerusalem and spoke of the deliverance of Judah from invaders. Ezekiel and Daniel were captives from Judea in Babylon, but were sent to different parts of the country. Ezekiel lived with the dispersed Jewish community in rural Mesopotamia while Daniel advised Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon and lived in his palaces.

2. While there were clearly men who held the beliefs found in the books of the Bible, they equally clearly did not exist as a single community. The times are too long, the social differences are too great and the geographical separation is too far. Even when the distances are short and the writers come from the same period, they have little in common. Consider the examples of Isaiah and Amos (see box). These two men came from Judah in the reign of Uzziah, but while Isaiah was a courtier in Jerusalem and had the ear of the king, Amos was a subsistence farmer in Tekoa who looked after cattle and collected figs. The difference between the two of them and Ezekiel the prophet, who was a priest taken captive by the Babylonians and settled in rural Mesopotamia, or Daniel who was an advisor at the court of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, is huge. The people who wrote the Bible did not form a single consistent organic community. Most of them would not have known one another and would never have met (the exceptions being the Apostles in the first century AD and David and Solomon who were father and son).

3. The background against which the Bible was written was frequently unsympathetic to the writing of a consistent document. At times the prophets were called on to denounce the attitudes

of the rulers, the priests and even other prophets. They declared the failings of the ruling classes and the idolatry of the people. The institutions that could have provided continuity for the writers of the Bible was completely opposed to their message.

Alternative Theory2: Late Editing

The other, and more common, theory about the source of unity in the Bible is the theory that the Bible was edited later by scholars. According to this theory, these scholars took diverse books and altered them so that they agreed with one another.

However, this theory is even more problematic than the idea of a consistent school of Bible writers:-

1. The Old Testament was clearly completed in its modern form by the early hellenistic period (c300AD).

There are various independent witnesses to its text from around this time in the Targums, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint. The Dead Sea Scrolls show that the text in use in the second century BC was effectively the same as the text in use in the first century AD or the third century BC. There was therefore no opportunity for a later authority to change it. The New Testament was not started until the first century AD. The correspondence between them must therefore have arisen without any communication between the writers of the Old Testament and the New Testament. In spite of this the two are highly consistent.

2. The details of writing in both the Old and the New Testament are thoroughly consistent with the archaeological record of the times written about and the presence of undesigned coincidences within the accounts shows that they have not been tampered with since they were written and therefore ideas cannot have been harmonised within them.

Alternative Theory 3: Selection

The third possible alternative theory to the idea that the writing of the Bible was controlled by an outside intelligence is that many more books were written than are now contained in the Bible, but that only the ones which were consistent with the views of a religious establishment at the end of the first century were selected for inclusion in the Bible. This is also a theory with insuperable objections.

1. This theory requires the existence of a religious establishment, in existence towards the end of the first century AD, with the authority to select books and ensure their consistency. Some scholars propose that this was done by the "Council of Jamnia", but the evidence for the existence of such a council is extremely flimsy. However, the problem is deeper than the existence of a particular council. The Old Testament is not only consistent within itself, but it is also consistent with the New Testament. The selection of books for consistency between both testaments would require a single council which could make decisions for both Jews and Christians. It is absolutely certain that no such body could have existed in the late first century.
2. The theory would also require that there would be a large number of rejected books for which the correspondence was less than perfect. As the correspondence runs to many tiny details

The Prophets and the Priests

In spite of the fact that the Bible was written by prophets it is often highly critical of the religious establishment. Here are some typical passages:-

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so... (Jeremiah 5:31)

...from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. (Jeremiah 8:10)

Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; (Micah 3:11)

Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men; her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law. (Zephaniah 3:4)

There is no doubt that the prophets who wrote the Bible were not writing on behalf of the religious establishment that existed in their day.

The Unity of the Bible

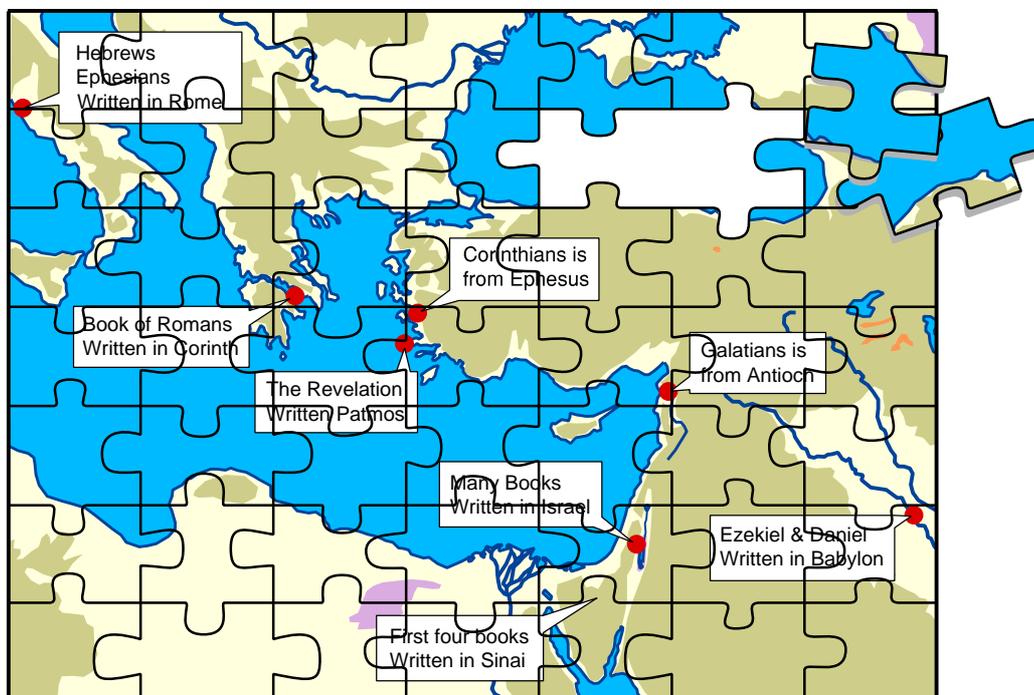
there would have to be a very large number indeed. However, there is no sign of all these rejected books. The books would have been available to the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls and to ancient libraries such as the one in Alexandria. There is no sign of them, and no reference to them in writings which indicate the views of heretical sects in Judaism or Christianity who had adopted a different collection of documents. The best that can be done is to look at the Gnostic groups of the second century, but the writings of these groups did not come into existence until well after the end of the first century AD.

The Only Real Alternative

As no other theory can come close to explaining the facts as they are known to be, all that is left is the picture of a Bible which was written with great and detailed consistency over a period of centuries by a very diverse group of people in different places. Some of the elements of the book could not have been known by writers who included detail referring to them in their books. It would have been effectively impossible for someone writing before the exile (prior to 600AD, when the Jews were carried away captive into Babylon) to have written so clearly about the mission of Jesus Christ, as Isaiah does, or to include types which show the working of Jesus sacrifice such as are found in the Book of Genesis.

The only conclusion that one can draw is that the Bible is the product of a single mind, working through a collection of men, and that that mind spans centuries. One is forced to the conclusion that the Bible comes from God.

The Jigsaw Analogy



In this analogy the Bible is likened to a jigsaw which has many different pieces, each one intricate in its own way. The pieces fit together to show a single united picture. It would be very difficult for such a jigsaw to be made by many different workmen over many centuries; if this happened one would not expect the pieces to fit, and if they did fit the picture would not be consistent. There would have to be a single designer who drew the picture and designed the pieces. The Bible is much more complicated than a jigsaw and it would be much more difficult for it to have been produced by the 27 or more writers associated with it. The only possible designer is God.