

Can I Believe The Bible?

This morning I want to review a few points found in our Doctrine of The Authenticity of The Bible.

Last week I taught in our Doctrine of Jesus that the Scripture is based on far more historicity than secular history at its best. My purpose this morning is to provide just a few points to demonstrate how our Scriptures do in fact stand the tests of history. Before we begin, let's use 1Jo 1:9 as may or may not be necessary.

1. What is history and how did we get it?

1.1 History is primarily determined from ancient written records.

1.2 To determine what is fact, or history, scholars use the following tests:

1.2.1 How many documents exist and how old are these manuscripts. Older documents take precedence where there are conflicts.

1.2.2 The number of mistakes in the various manuscripts and the substance of the errors are also important.

1.2.3 The time interval between the event described and the writing of the original documents helps in ascertaining history.

1.2.4 Various external evidence such as established contemporaneous events, rulers, names of cities, civilizations known to exist at the time, archaeology, etc. are also used in determining history.

2. Since we now know how history is determined, let's see how the Bible stacks up.

2.1 Robert Wilson in his book, A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament was impressed to write, "The evidence shows ... the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted with the most minute accuracy.

2.1.1 This is all the more remarkable given the fact that more than 40 men, in four languages, spanning 60 generations and 1600 years have written the Bible from three different continents."

2.1.2 Mr. Wilson went on to write, "The proof that the copies of the original documents had been handed down with substantial correctness for 2000 years cannot be denied.

2.1.3 The fact that 40 Kings living from 2000 B.C. to 400 B.C. appear in chronological order ... with reference to the Kings of other countries ... *could provide* ... no stronger evidence for the substantial accuracy of the Old Testament record ... mathematically, it is 1 chance in seven hundred fifty to the 21st power that this accuracy is mere circumstance."

2.2 Concerning the accuracy of the transmission of the Hebrew Text, the Under-Librarian of the library at Cambridge University has said, "It is little short of miraculous."

2.3 In the spring of 1947 a shepherd boy discovered "by accident" several scrolls. One of the scrolls was a complete Hebrew manuscript of the Book of Isaiah. This scroll was dated by paleographers at somewhere around 125 B.C. This provided opportunity to compare the prior oldest manuscript of Isaiah dated A.D. 900. As it turned out, the accuracy of the A.D. 900 copy proved "remarkably accurate."

2.3.1 There were only 17 letters in question. Ten of these letters were simply a matter of spelling, four more letters were minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprised the word "light," that was added in verse 11 and did not greatly affect the meaning. Thus in one chapter of 166 words, there was only one word in question after 1000 years of transmission, and this word did not significantly change the meaning of the passage.

2.3.2 A second (incomplete) scroll of Isaiah found in Qumran Cave #1 agreed even more closely. Miller Burrows in his book, The Dead Sea Scrolls, has written, "It is a matter of wonder that through something like 1000 years the text underwent so little alteration." As I said in my first article concerning the scroll "... herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition."

3. The Septuagint also substantiates the genuineness of the Hebrew text.

3.1 During the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphos of Egypt, the Old Testament was translated into the Koine Greek. Ptolemy was renowned as a patron of literature, and it was under him that the great library at Alexandria was established.

3.2 Ptolemy's librarian aroused the king's interest in the Jewish Law and advised him to send a delegation to the High Priest Eleazar at Jerusalem.

3.3 The High Priest selected 72 translators, who took up residence on the Island of Pharos, where in 72 days they completed their work and presented a Greek copy of the Pentateuch. The Septuagint helped bridge the textual criticism gap related to the Hebrew Old Testament.

4. Now let's see what a New Testament comparison reveals.

4.1 We now have close to 5,000 Greek manuscripts, along with some 13,000 copies of portions of the New Testament. Besides all this, much of the NT can be produced from quotations of early Christian writers.

4.1.1 To be skeptical of the text of the NT is to allow all classical antiquity to slip into obscurity. No other document of the ancient period is as well established bibliographically as the NT. Let me give you a comparison chart:

Author/Book	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Gap	# of Copies
Homer, <i>The Iliad</i>	800 BC	ca. 400 BC	ca. 400 yrs	643
Thucydides, <i>History</i>	460-400 BC	ca. AD 900	ca. 1,300 yrs	8
Caesar, <i>Gaelic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	ca. AD 900	ca. 1,000 yrs	10
Livy, <i>History of Rome</i>	59 BC-AD 17	ca. AD 400 (partial)	ca. 400 yrs	1 (partial)
Livy, <i>History of Rome</i>	59 BC-AD 17	ca. AD 1000(most)	ca. 1,000 yrs	19(most)
Pliny the Elder, <i>Natural History</i>	AD 61-113	ca. AD 850	ca. 750 yrs	7
The New Testament	AD 50-100	ca. AD 114-325	ca. 50-225 yrs	24,000+

4.1.2 Using the standard rules for defining history, the chart clearly indicates the New Testament is superior.

4.2 Sir Frederic Kenyon, Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum and second to none in authority for issuing statements about ancient manuscripts writes, "... beside number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors, and this time the difference is clear again. In no case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the NT. The books of the NT were written in the latter part of the 1st century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the 4th century - say from 250 to 300 years later. This may sound like a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which separates most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles; yet the earliest substantial manuscript upon which it was based was written more than 1400 years after the poet's death."

4.3 "For Caesar's Gaelic War there are several extant manuscripts but only 9 or 10 are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day. Of the 14 books of the Histories of Tacitus (A.D. 100) only four and one-half survive; of the 16 books of his Annals, 10 survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of Tacitus' two great historical works depend entirely on two manuscripts, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh."

5. Let me summarize what the time gap between the NT autographs and the extant copies reveal.

5.1 The time gap between the original manuscript (the autograph) and the extant copies call for this conclusion: the NT is far more authentic than Greek classical history.

5.2 Most copies of the Greek classical author's manuscripts are dated 1,000 years or more after the autograph. In the case of the NT, two of the most important manuscripts were written within 300 years after the NT was completed, and some virtually complete books, as well as extensive fragmentary manuscripts, date back to one century from the original writings.

5.3 Except for the NT, there are more extant manuscripts of the Iliad (643) than any other book. The NT has about 20,000 lines. The Iliad has about 15,500 lines. Only 40 lines or 400 words of the NT are in doubt, whereas 764 lines of the Iliad are questioned. This five percent textual corruption of the Iliad compares with one-half of one percent for the NT.

6. Now let's see what archeology teaches regarding the historicity of our Scriptures.

6.1 Nelson Glueck, a renowned Jewish archaeologist, noted that, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference."

6.2 William F. Albright one our countries greatest archaeologist writes, "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details."

6.3 Merrill Unger summarizes, "Old Testament archaeology has rediscovered whole nations, resurrected important peoples and in a most astounding manner filled in historical gaps, adding immeasurably to the knowledge of Biblical backgrounds."

6.4 Millar Burrows a Yale archaeologist says, "The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural. On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine."

6.5 Archaeology has also given us evidence as to the substantial accuracy of the Masoretic text.

6.5.1 A wine jar, dating from the first or second century A.D., was discovered in the Middle East. The seal on the jar was stamped with a quote from Jer 48:11. Jeremiah having been written in c. 600 B.C. The quotation found on the seal in general conformed to the earliest Masoretic Text. This seal attested to the accuracy with which the text had been copied over hundreds of years by generations of copyist.

6.6 Prior to 1925 it was fashionable to treat the patriarchal sagas of Genesis as though they were artificial creations of Israelite scribes. Archaeological finds since 1925 have changed all that. There is scarcely a single Biblical historian who has not been impressed by the rapid accumulation of data supporting the substantial historicity of patriarchal traditions.

6.7 Israel according to the Book of Genesis, originated from the area of Mesopotamia. Archaeological evidence certainly supports this origin.

6.8 Genesis tells us the whole earth was at one time of one language and philologists concur that this was most likely true given their study of ancient language progression.

6.9 Esau in Gen 36:20 encountered a people called the Horites, and for many years the verse was thought to be in error; perhaps, thought some (since the word Horite being similar to the Hebrew word for cave), it described a few cave dwellers.

6.9.1 Archeology now has found the Horites were a people living in Palestine at the time of the patriarchs.

6.10 During the excavation of Jericho, the chief archaeologist (Garstang) found something so startling that he had a document prepared and signed by two of his fellow workers to the effect that, "The walls fell outward and not inward." This very unusual phenomena was described in Jos 6:20.

6.11 There are many other evidences from archaeology that authenticate the Scriptures and there will no doubt be more.

6.11.1 William Albright summed it up: "As critical study of the Bible is more and more influenced by the rich new material from the rich ancient Near East, we shall see a steady rise in respect for the historical significance of now neglected or despised passages ..."

7. Scientific data also provide evidence of Scriptural authenticity. A few examples:

7.1 Planets move around each other. Job 38:31

7.2 Static electricity exists and can be formed, as we now know, by the condensation of vapor. Water rises and then again falls as rain. As we know water is never lost, it just rises and falls. Jer 10:13

7.3 The earth is a sphere. Isa 40:22

7.4 The earth rotates on its axis. Luk 17:31-34

7.5 Air has weight. Job 28:25

7.6 Winds have circuits and there are laws of evaporation. Ecc 1:6-7

7.7 Messages can be sent by electricity. Job 38:35

7.8 Doctors of medicine have often marveled at the detail the Bible provides concerning sanitation, health practices, etc. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy there are great details provided with reference to quarantining communicable diseases. Lev 13:45-46

8. There are many prophecies that Jesus fulfilled and many more which will later be fulfilled:

8.1 Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Mic 5:2

8.2 Jesus would be born of a virgin. Isa 7:14

8.3 Jesus would be believed on by Gentiles. Isa 65:1

8.4 Jesus would teach by parables. Psa 78:2

8.5 Jesus would perform miracles. Isa 35:5

8.6 Jesus' disciples would forsake Him. Zec 13:7

8.7 Jesus would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Zec 11:13

8.8 Jesus would be rejected, despised and bear our sorrows and transgressions. Isa 53:2-6

8.9 The sun would go down and there would be darkness from 12:00 noon to 3:00 pm. Amo 8:9

8.10 Jesus would be resurrected. Hos 6:2

8.11 Jesus' bones would not be broken. Psa 34:20

8.12 Jesus' side would be pierced. Zec 12:10

8.13 Jesus would be thirsty and be given gall and vinegar to drink. Psa 69:21

8.14 Jesus' garments would be divided and lots cast for them. Psa 22:18

8.15 Jesus' body would not decay. Psa 16:10

9. OT prophecies about Jesus -- a summary chart:

THE PROPHECY	THE FULFILLMENT	THE TIME SPAN
Born of a virgin Isaiah 7:14	Luke 1:26-38	700 years
Born in Bethlehem Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-7	700 years
The time of His appearance Daniel 9:24-27	Luke 19:44; Galatians 4:4	538 years
Abandoned by His disciples Zechariah 13:7	Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:50	520 years
Pierced in His side Zechariah 12:10	John 19:34, 37	520 years
His resurrection and exaltation Psalm 16:10 Isaiah 52:13, 10-12	Acts 2:25-32	1,000 years (Psalms) 700 years (Isaiah)
His ascension into heaven Psalm 68:18	Acts 1:9; Ephesians 4:8	1,000 years
A forerunner prepared His way Isaiah 40:3-5	Matthew 3:1-3; Luke 3:3-6	700 years (Isaiah)

10. In closing I want to give you in part, a sermon by James Kennedy entitled The Anvil.

If the Bible had not been written, many critics would have been out of work. It is the most attacked book written. Years ago I saw a painting of a very large anvil and around the anvil on the floor lay scattered many shattered, smashed hammers and underneath was written the words "the Word of God endureth forever."

The anvil is an appropriate metaphor for the Word of God which like the anvil has endured the attacks of numerous skeptics and unbelievers and yet still stands unscathed in spite of the onslaught of the ages. "Hammer away ye hostile hands your hammers break, God's Anvil stands." The Word of the Lord endureth forever.

God in a supernatural way has sustained His Word down through the centuries against the attacks of all ranks and classes of men. Numerous kings with the scepter of state in one hand have taken up the hammer of unbelief ... and ... with all the power of government *have attempted* to smash the Anvil of God.

The cases are numerous:

One of the early ones involved Herod sometimes called "the Great." He discovered that the wise men declared that the One who had been chosen to be ruler in Israel had been

born. He gathered together the scholars from the east to find out where this prince should be born. They said to him, "It is written in the prophet, thou Bethlehem Ephratah though thou be least among the tribes of Judah yet out of thee shall He come forth to me who shall rule my people Israel. Whose goings forth have been from old, even from everlasting. Thus said the Prophet, thus declared the Word of God."

Then King Herod took up the hammer of his might and sent for his soldiers to destroy that promised One ... and nullify the prophesy. They killed all of the children two years old and younger in all of the environs of Bethlehem. And the King believed he had brought to naught the prophecy of the Word of God. But God had warned Joseph in a dream. He took the child and his mother and fled into Egypt and so the prophecy came to pass. The Word of God was fulfilled. He that was to rule His people came forth out of Bethlehem after all.

Another king 400 years later, Constantine the Great, made Rome a Christian Empire; at his death his nephew Julian, later to be known as Julian the Apostate, rose to the throne. He was determined to reestablish the pagan religions of Rome and set out to study the Scripture ... to disprove Christianity by using his armies to disprove its prophecies, by bringing them to naught.

When he saw the prophecy concerning the destruction of the Temple he determined that he would build the Temple again, disproving the Scripture. He sent forth the money and the men to do just that; but there was a great earthquake that destroyed the work before it was hardly started. Undaunted, he started again, but this time from fissures in the earth, there came forth great clouds of gas which were ignited in great explosions, terrifying the men. His men fled from the scene refusing to return in spite of all the inducements offered. "Hammer away ye hostile hands your hammers break, God's Anvil stands."

Hitler, who called himself a complete pagan, and Mussolini, who declared the church would soon cease to exist, set themselves obstinately against Christ's Church and the Word of God. Hitler determined to uproot Christianity -- root and branch. Hitler's charred body was discovered in a bunker. Mussolini hung by his feet in the town square. The Word of God goes on today. The Word of the Lord endureth forever.

Many of those breaking their hammers against the Anvil were changed into avid defenders of the very Word they hated. One such man was the brilliant and erudite Sir William Michael Ramsey, Oxford trained, born into a house of skepticism and atheism, his parents were wealthy unbelievers. He was determined that he would see the Word of God demolished. Unlike the philosophers who discoursed and made claims, he would use his training as an archaeologist to prove the Bible was the product of ambitious monks of the second and third century.

After much study he determined the achilles heel of the New Testament was the book of Acts because it included detailed accounts of Paul's missionary journeys, with the names of places throughout the Roman world. The critical world waited expectantly. Even some Christians were fearful of his findings. Beginning in 1881, he labored

indefatigably for 15 years following the routes laid out by Luke. In 1896, he produced his work, Saint Paul, Roman Citizen, World Traveler.

Much to the dismay of those scholars who waited for his findings. He said he had found Luke to be an astonishingly accurate guide for his journeys and when he had followed his instructions he had turned up the evidence which proved him right. For forty years he continued his excavations and writings all to the increasing chagrin of the unbelieving world. He found Luke to be accurate in the minutest detail. Ramsey committed his life to the Christ of the Scriptures which he had found to be unfailingly sure.

Colonel Robert Ingersoll was a famous skeptic and unbeliever. He met a general on a train as he was traveling to one of his many speaking engagements against the Bible. They discussed theology, he told the general, "You have great literary skills. Why don't you use these skills to demolish the myth and uncover the truth about this Jesus and show Him as only a man among men."

The general decided to take up the challenge and began his research. As he searched he found himself astonished that this peasant from Nazareth from which no good thing could come, having never attended school, never earned any degrees, walked upon a mountain and delivered the most astounding sermon on human ethics the world has ever seen. This general considered, how can He know these things? His amazement increased until there at the cross he received the Lord as His Saviour. The general's name was Lou Wallace the author of Ben Hur.

The Assured Results of Higher Criticism was a school established in the last century. They were determined to demolish all traditional views of the Bible. They said it was quite obvious Moses could not possibly have written the Pentateuch because writing had not been invented in Moses' day. About the time that Higher Criticism really got going, so also developed the science of archaeology. The spade of the archaeologist became the bane of the School of Higher Criticism. The postulation concerning the incipience of writing post-dating Moses was soon disproved. According to several digs writing was found to predate Moses by 1,500 years, thus shattering the notion that Moses could not write.

The Empire of Assyria with its capital of Nineveh was believed to never have existed except in the mythological Bible. None of the secular historians had written about Assyria. An archaeologist named Layard went to Masul where in an ancient dig he found a brick with the name Sargon. He sent it to the museum in Paris where it was declared to be fraudulent because the empire never existed. Layard later dug up the whole city of Nineveh and discovered thousands of inscriptions detailing the history of Assyria.

The Hittites mentioned over 40 times in the Bible were believed to be mythical. In 1906, Hugo Winkler uncovered in central Turkey, the city of Burgoscoi which turned out to be the capital of the Empire of the Hittites.

The birth of Jesus was a familiar target. Luke was a frequent object of several critics. Scholars said there was no such thing as a census required by Rome. People were not required to return to their ancestral homes said the critics. Later a papyrus was discovered ordering citizens to return to their birth place to be counted for taxation purposes.

11. And so it goes. Even today there are skeptics everywhere, ever doubting the birth, life, resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus, our Lord. It is His total work that we celebrate each and every Lord's day.