

The Bible: Intentionally Misunderstood (Radio Transcript)

Steve Cable examines the faulty reasoning and interpretation of the Bible in Kurt Eichenwald's Newsweek article "The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin."

Dissecting the Bible by Focusing on Nits

Recently, New Testament scholar, Dr. Daniel Wallace, addressing our strong confidence in our modern translations, mentioned others presenting a false view of this situation. One example, *The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin* by Kurt Eichenwald^{1}, appeared in *Newsweek*. This article presents arguments intended to undermine the New Testament. Let's evaluate some of these arguments to be better equipped in sharing the truth.^{2}

Eichenwald begins by parroting negative stereotypes about American evangelicals. Adding rigor to his rant, he states, "A Pew Research poll in 2010^{2} found that evangelicals ranked only a smidgen higher than atheists in familiarity with **the New Testament and Jesus's teachings.**"^{4}



He referred to a table showing the average number of questions out of twelve answered correctly. However, only **two of the twelve related to the New Testament** and **none to Jesus's teachings.**^{5} Two questions are not enough to evaluate someone's knowledge of the New Testament, But, for the record, the two questions were "Name the four gospels" and "Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born?" 53% of those professing to be born again answered these correctly versus 20% of atheists. Apparently to Eichenwald, a "smidgen

higher” must mean almost three times as many.

Eichenwald spends two pages bemoaning the translation problems in the New Testament. But as pointed out by Dr. Wallace and others, his critique really serves to highlight the excellence of today’s translations. The areas he points out as having questionable additions in the text are clearly marked in all of today’s popular translations{6} and if removed make no difference in the overall message of the New Testament (i.e. the woman caught in adultery in John and snake handling in Mark).

He also lists three short passages, claiming they did not appear in earlier Greek copies. Upon examination, we find that one of those passages does not appear in modern translations. The other two do appear in the translations. Why? Because they appear in numerous early Greek manuscripts.{7} Once again his scholarship is found wanting.

All scholars agree there are variations between ancient manuscripts from different areas but they do not change the message. As Wallace points out, “We are getting closer and closer to the text of the original. . . . The New Testament has more manuscripts that are within a century or two of the original than anything else from the Greco-Roman world. If we have to be skeptical . . . , that skepticism . . . should be multiplied one thousand times for other Greco-Roman literature.”{8}

Supposed Biblical Contradictions

Eichenwald continues attacking the Bible with nine different topics he claims reveal contradictions in the biblical record. Let’s examine three of them to see if his arguments have substance.

First, he claims there are three different creation models, stating that “careful readers have long known that the two

stories of Genesis 1 and 2 contradict each other.”{9}

However, a clear-headed examination sees chapter 1 describing the overall creation while chapter 2 talks about the creation of Adam and Eve. As commentators explain, “what follows Genesis 2:4 is not another account of creation but a tracing of events from creation through the fall and judgment.”{10}

In his third creation model “the world is created in the aftermath of a great battle between God and . . . a dragon . . . called Rahab.”{11}

Reading the relevant verses shows no creation story but rather the creature Rahab representing Egypt. Job 9:13 says “under (God) the helpers of Rahab lie crushed.” Some speculate this could relate to the Babylonian Creation Epic. Even if this speculation were true, rather than a third creation story one would say this reference tells us God destroys all idols raised up by others.

Eichenwald’s claim of three different creation models is an illusion.

His second claim states the Gospel of John was written “when gentiles in Rome were gaining dramatically more influence over Christianity; that explains why the Romans are largely absolved from responsibility for Jesus’s death and blame instead is pointed toward the Jews,”{12} implying the other gospels put much of the blame on the Romans.

Examining his claim, in Luke we read, “The chief priests . . . were trying to find some way to execute Jesus.” While the Roman governor did not find Jesus guilty of anything worthy of death.{13} In Acts, Peter squarely places the responsibility onto the Jewish leaders and nation.{14} We find similar verses in Matthew{15} and Mark{16}. All the gospels place the blame on the Jewish nation. There is no shift in perspective in John.

In a third supposed contradiction Eichenwald writes, “As told in Matthew, the disciples go to Galilee after the Crucifixion and see Jesus ascend to heaven; in Acts, written by Luke, the disciples stay in Jerusalem and see Jesus ascend from there.”[{17}](#)

The gospel of Matthew ends saying **nothing** about Jesus ascending to heaven. In Acts, Luke says the Lord was with His disciples over a forty-day period and could have easily traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee and back.

Not surprisingly, his other six so-called “contradictions” all fail to hold up when one examines the Scriptures.

Faulty Interpretation Part 1

Eichenwald wants to show that what we think the Bible teaches about homosexuality is not what God intended. He begins by pointing out “the word homosexual didn’t even exist until . . . 1,800 years after the New Testament was written . . . these modern Bibles just made it up.”[{18}](#)

But this could be said of many English words used today. A respected dictionary of New Testament words[{19}](#) defines the Greek word he questions as “a male engaging in same-gender sexual activity, a sodomite. . .”

He then tells us not to trust 1 Timothy when it lists homosexuality as a sin because “Most biblical scholars agree that Paul did not write 1 Timothy.”[{20}](#)

The early church fathers from the second century on and many contemporary scholars[{21}](#) do not agree it is a forgery.[{22}](#) Regardless, the same prohibition appears in other epistles and not just in Timothy.

Eichenwald points out Romans, Corinthians and Timothy discuss other sins in more detail than homosexual behavior. He

writes, "So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality . . . and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government."

Most people understand that explaining our relationship to the government is more complex than forbidding homosexuality which is clearly understood.

He claims people are not banished for other sins such as adultery, greed, and lying.

But if you proclaimed you practice those actions regularly and teach them as truth, your church is going to remove you from any leadership position. They should still encourage you to attend worship services out of a desire to see God change your heart.[{23}](#) Mr. Eichenwald would be surprised to learn that most evangelical churches handle issues with homosexuality in the same way.

Then he declares, "plenty of fundamentalist Christians who have no idea where references to homosexuality are in the New Testament . . . always fall back on Leviticus."[{24}](#)

Personally, I have never run into another church member who was unfamiliar with the New Testament, but knew the details of Leviticus.

In summary, Eichenwald believes we should declare homosexuality is not a sin and those who practice it should be honored as leaders within the church. He does not suggest that we treat any other sins that way. He does not present a cogent argument that the New Testament agrees with his position. He is saying that we should ignore biblical teaching. But, we really do love those struggling with homosexual behavior and we want to help them gain freedom from those lusts just as much as someone struggling with opposite sex issues.

Faulty Interpretation Part 2

To strengthen his position on homosexuality, Eichenwald calls out “a fundamental conflict in the New Testament – arguably the most important one in the Bible.”[{25}](#) As Christians, are we to obey the Mosaic Law or ignore it?

He claims, “The author of Matthew made it clear that Christians must keep Mosaic Law like the most religious Jews, . . . to achieve salvation.”[{26}](#) He says this is contrary to Paul’s message of salvation through grace not works.

What a mistaken understanding. In Matthew, Jesus explains that to enter God’s kingdom “our righteousness must surpass that of (the most religious Jews)[{27}](#).” We must not get angry, call people names, or lust even once. In fact, “You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”[{28}](#) Jesus clearly taught we cannot be good enough. Only through His sacrifice can we be made righteous.

In Acts 15, some believers with Pharisaical backgrounds brought the Mosaic Law up to the apostles. Peter told them, “Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? . . . we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as (the Gentiles) also are.”[{29}](#) The apostles and the whole church agreed to send the Gentiles word that they were not required to follow the Law.

Eichenwald is right: we are not required to follow the Law. The New Testament is very careful to identify actions and attitudes which are sin so may try to avoid them. This truth is why sexual sins are specifically mentioned in the New Testament.[{30}](#) Even in Acts 15, the apostles tell Gentile Christians to abstain from fornication[{31}](#), a term covering all sexual activity outside of marriage.

Eichenwald also castigates us for disobeying the biblical teaching about government. He says Romans has “eight verses condemning those who criticize the government.”[{32}](#) Pat Robertson sinned by stating, “We need . . . to pray to be delivered from this president.”

Actually, Romans says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. . . . the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God.”[{33}](#) We are not required to say good things about the government, but rather to obey the law. Our Bill of Rights states that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.”[{34}](#) So, if we do not voice our opinions about our government, we are not availing ourselves of the law established by our governing authorities.

Faulty Interpretation Part 3

As we examine popular arguments against the Bible, we will conclude by looking at prayer. In his *Newsweek* article, Kurt Eichenwald castigates a Houston prayer rally[{35}](#) saying, “(Rick) Perry . . . boomed out a long prayer asking God to make America a better place . . . babbling on . . . about faith and country and the blessings of America.” He claimed Perry “heaped up empty phrases as the Gentiles do.”

In reality, Perry prayed succinctly for about two minutes with no empty phrases.

Eichenwald explains, Perry is just an example of our error. Most Christians are disobeying by praying in front of people. Jesus told us, “Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray . . . so that they may be seen by others.”

But someone can speak a prayer before others without being a hypocrite. Jesus does tell us to make our prayers a personal conversation with our God. But Jesus prayed often before

synagogue attenders, in front of His disciples, {36} and before over 5,000 people. {37} Those times, although numerous, were less than the time He spent praying alone as should be true for us.

Eichenwald states we should repeat the Lord's prayer verbatim.

But in Matthew, Jesus gave an example of how to pray, not a set of words to repeat meaninglessly. The New Testament contains many prayers offered by the apostles and none repeat the words from the Lord's prayer. If Eichenwald were there to instruct them, the apostles would not have sinned so grievously.

Eichenwald claims the only reason anyone could pray in front of a large crowd, or on television, is "to be seen." This claim does not make sense; the people he is judging can build themselves up without having to resort to prayer.

In this article we have seen that critics use an incomplete, shallow examination of Scripture to claim it is not accurate and our application is faulty. In every case, we have seen that these claims leak like a sieve.

Dan Wallace concludes, "But his numerous factual errors and misleading statements, his lack of concern for any semblance of objectivity, his apparent disdain for . . . genuine evangelical scholarship, and his uber-confidence about more than a few suspect viewpoints, make me wonder. . . . Eichenwald's . . . grasp of genuine biblical scholarship (is), at best, subpar." {38}

If Eichenwald's article represents the best arguments discrediting the Bible, one rejoices in our firm foundation. However, realizing many readers of such pieces don't know their flimsy nature, one is saddened by the potential impact on a society inclined to ignore the Bible.

Notes

1. Eichenwald, Kurt, "The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin," *Newsweek Magazine*, December 2014.
2. There are numerous web postings placed after release of Eichenwald's article. Two you may find interesting that deal with areas of the article not addressed herein are as follows: Daniel B. Wallace, ["Predictable Christmas fare: Newsweek's Tirade against the Bible,"](#) blogpost December 2014; and Darrell Bock, ["Darrell Bock Responds to Kurt Eichenwald's Newsweek Article on the Bible,"](#) blogpost December 2014.
3. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey, September 2010, pages 17-23.
4. Eichenwald, paragraph 4.
5. The 12 questions are as follows:
 1. What is the first book of the Bible? (Open-ended)
 2. What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels?
 3. Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born? Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?
 4. Which of these is NOT in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others . . . , no adultery, no stealing, keep Sabbath?
 5. Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Job, Elijah, Moses or Abraham?
 6. Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Moses, Job, Elijah or Abraham?
 7. Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Abraham, Job, Moses or Elijah?
 8. What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become body and blood, or are symbols?
 9. Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
 10. Was Mother Teresa Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Mormon?
 11. What is the name of the person whose writings and actions inspired the Reformation? Luther, Aquinas or Wesley?

12. Who was a preacher during the First Great Awakening?
Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Billy Graham?
6. Check your footnotes and the italics applied to the story of the woman caught in adultery and the last few verses of the Gospel of Mark.
7. Insert summary on 1 John 5:7, Luke 22:20, and Luke 24:51.
8. Wallace.
9. Ibid, paragraph .
10. New English Translation, Genesis 59 Chapter 2, Notes 9 and 11.
11. Ibid, paragraph 66.
12. Eichenwald, paragraph 51.
13. See Luke 23:4,14,22.
14. See Acts 2:23,23,3:14-15,4:10,5:30.
15. Matthew 26:4,27:23-24.
16. Mark 14:1, 15:14-15.
17. Eichenwald, paragraph 52.
18. Ibid, paragraph 68.
19. William Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Zondervan, 2006.
20. Eichenwald, paragraph 70.
21. Among those disagreeing with Eichenwald's assertion are Daniel Wallace, John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, John Stott, and Craig Keener.
22. In Daniel Wallace, *Intro to 1st Timothy*, Dr. Wallace writes, "In sum, although the evidence against the authenticity of the pastorals is as strong as any evidence against the authenticity of any NT book, it still cannot overthrow the traditional view. The traditional view, however, must be modified by the substantial linguistic evidence against authenticity: an amanuensis (possibly Luke) had great freedom in writing these letters for the apostle Paul."
23. See the Watermark Community Church story: www.watermark.org/statement.
24. Eichenwald, paragraph 80.
25. Eichenwald, paragraph 81.

26. Eichenwald, paragraph 82.
27. Matthew 5:20.
28. Matthew 5:48.
29. Acts 15:10-11.
30. For example in Mt 5:xx, Luke x;xx, John x:xx, Romans x:xx, Ephesians x:xx, Phil x:xx, 1 Peter x:xx, 1 John x:xx.
31. Acts 15:20,29.
32. Eichenwald, paragraph 77.
33. Romans 13:1,2.
34. Amendment 1 to the Constitution of the United States of America.
35. Houston 2011.
36. John chapter 17.
37. Luke chapter 9.
38. Wallace, paragraph ??.

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Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?

We can trust that the Bible we hold in our hands today is the same as when the various documents were written. Probe founder Jimmy Williams provides evidence for the trustworthiness of the biblical documents.

How do we know that the Bible we have today is even close to the original? Haven't copiers down through the centuries inserted and deleted and embellished the documents so that the original message of the Bible has been obscured? These questions are frequently asked to discredit the sources of information from which the Christian faith has come to us.

Three Errors To Avoid

1. Do not assume inspiration or infallibility of the documents, with the intent of attempting to prove the inspiration or infallibility of the documents. Do not say the bible is inspired or infallible simply because it claims to be. This is circular reasoning.
2. When considering the original documents, forget about the present form of your Bible and regard them as the collection of ancient source documents that they are.
3. Do not start with modern “authorities” and then move to the documents to see if the authorities were right. Begin with the documents themselves.

Procedure for Testing a Document's Validity

In his book, *Introduction in Research in English Literary History*, C. Sanders sets forth three tests of reliability employed in general historiography and literary criticism.^[1] These tests are:

- Bibliographical (i.e., the textual tradition from the original document to the copies and manuscripts of that document we possess today)
- Internal evidence (what the document claims for itself)
- External evidence (how the document squares or aligns itself with facts, dates, persons from its own contemporary world).

It might be noteworthy to mention that Sanders is a professor of military history, not a theologian. He uses these three tests of reliability in his own study of historical military events.

We will look now at the bibliographical, or textual evidence for the Bible's reliability.

The Old Testament

For both Old and New Testaments, the crucial question is: "Not having any original copies or scraps of the Bible, can we reconstruct them well enough from the oldest manuscript evidence we *do* have so they give us a true, undistorted view of actual people, places and events?"

The Scribe

The scribe was considered a professional person in antiquity. No printing presses existed, so people were trained to copy documents. The task was usually undertaken by a devout Jew. The Scribes believed they were dealing with the very Word of God and were therefore extremely careful in copying. They did not just hastily write things down. The earliest complete copy of the Hebrew Old Testament dates from c. 900 A.D.

The Masoretic Text

During the early part of the tenth century (916 A.D.), there was a group of Jews called the Masoretes. These Jews were meticulous in their copying. The texts they had were all in capital letters, and there was no punctuation or paragraphs. The Masoretes would copy Isaiah, for example, and when they were through, they would total up the number of letters. Then they would find the middle letter of the book. If it was not the same, they made a new copy. All of the present copies of the Hebrew text which come from this period are in remarkable agreement. Comparisons of the Masoretic text with earlier Latin and Greek versions have also revealed careful copying and little deviation during the thousand years from 100 B.C. to 900 A.D. But until this century, there was scant material written in Hebrew from antiquity which could be compared to the Masoretic texts of the tenth century A.D.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947, a young Bedouin goat herdsman found some strange clay

jars in caves near the valley of the Dead Sea. Inside the jars were some leather scrolls. The discovery of these "Dead Sea Scrolls" at Qumran has been hailed as the outstanding archeological discovery of the twentieth century. The scrolls have revealed that a commune of monastic farmers flourished in the valley from 150 B.C. to 70 A.D. It is believed that when they saw the Romans invade the land they put their cherished leather scrolls in the jars and hid them in the caves on the cliffs northwest of the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea Scrolls include a complete copy of the Book of Isaiah, a fragmented copy of Isaiah, containing much of Isaiah 38-6, and fragments of almost every book in the Old Testament. The majority of the fragments are from Isaiah and the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The books of Samuel, in a tattered copy, were also found and also two complete chapters of the book of Habakkuk. In addition, there were a number of nonbiblical scrolls related to the commune found.

These materials are dated around 100 B.C. The significance of the find, and particularly the copy of Isaiah, was recognized by Merrill F. Unger when he said, "This complete document of Isaiah quite understandably created a sensation since it was the first major Biblical manuscript of great antiquity ever to be recovered. Interest in it was especially keen since it antedates by more than a thousand years the oldest Hebrew texts preserved in the Masoretic tradition."[\[2\]](#)

The supreme value of these Qumran documents lies in the ability of biblical scholars to compare them with the Masoretic Hebrew texts of the tenth century A.D. If, upon examination, there were little or no textual changes in those Masoretic texts where comparisons were possible, an assumption could then be made that the Masoretic Scribes had probably been just as faithful in their copying of the other biblical texts which could not be compared with the Qumran material.

What was learned? A comparison of the Qumran manuscript of Isaiah with the Masoretic text revealed them to be extremely close in accuracy to each other: "A comparison of Isaiah 53 shows that only 17 letters differ from the Masoretic text. Ten of these are mere differences in spelling (like our "honor" and the British "honour") and produce no change in the meaning at all. Four more are very minor differences, such as the presence of a conjunction (and) which are stylistic rather than substantive. The other three letters are the Hebrew word for "light." This word was added to the text by someone after "they shall see" in verse 11. Out of 166 words in this chapter, only this one word is really in question, and it does not at all change the meaning of the passage. We are told by biblical scholars that this is typical of the whole manuscript of Isaiah." {3}

The Septuagint

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, also confirms the accuracy of the copyists who ultimately gave us the Masoretic text. The Septuagint is often referred to as the LXX because it was reputedly done by seventy (for which LXX is the Roman numeral) Jewish scholars in Alexandria around 200 B.C. The LXX appears to be a rather literal translation from the Hebrew, and the manuscripts we have are pretty good copies of the original translation.

Conclusion

In his book, *Can I Trust My Bible*, R. Laird Harris concluded, "We can now be sure that copyists worked with great care and accuracy on the Old Testament, even back to 225 B.C. . . . indeed, it would be rash skepticism that would now deny that we have our Old Testament in a form very close to that used by Ezra when he taught the word of the Lord to those who had returned from the Babylonian captivity." {4}

The New Testament

The Greek Manuscript Evidence

There are more than 4,000 different ancient Greek manuscripts containing all or portions of the New Testament that have survived to our time. These are written on different materials.

Papyrus and Parchment

During the early Christian era, the writing material most commonly used was *papyrus*. This highly durable reed from the Nile Valley was glued together much like plywood and then allowed to dry in the sun. In the twentieth century many remains of documents (both biblical and non-biblical) on papyrus have been discovered, especially in the dry, arid lands of North Africa and the Middle East.

Another material used was *parchment*. This was made from the skin of sheep or goats, and was in wide use until the late Middle Ages when paper began to replace it. It was scarce and more expensive; hence, it was used almost exclusively for important documents.

Examples

1. Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus

These are two excellent parchment copies of the entire New Testament which date from the 4th century (325-450 A.D.).[\[5\]](#)

2. Older Papyrii

Earlier still, fragments and papyrus copies of portions of the New Testament date from 100 to 200 years (180-225 A.D.) before Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. The outstanding ones are the Chester Beatty Papyrus (P45, P46, P47) and the Bodmer Papyrus II, XIV, XV (P46, P75).

From these five manuscripts alone, we can construct all of Luke, John, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, and portions of Matthew, Mark, Acts, and Revelation. Only the Pastoral Epistles (Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy) and the General Epistles (James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 1, 2, and 3 John) and Philemon are excluded.[\[6\]](#)

3. Oldest Fragment

Perhaps the earliest piece of Scripture surviving is a fragment of a papyrus codex containing John 18:31-33 and 37. It is called the Rylands Papyrus (P52) and dates from 130 A.D., having been found in Egypt. The Rylands Papyrus has forced the critics to place the fourth gospel back into the first century, abandoning their earlier assertion that it could not have been written then by the Apostle John.[\[7\]](#)

4. This manuscript evidence creates a bridge of extant papyrus and parchment fragments and copies of the New Testament stretching back to almost the end of the first century.

Versions (Translations)

In addition to the actual Greek manuscripts, there are more than 1,000 copies and fragments of the New Testament in Syria, Coptic, Armenian, Gothic, and Ethiopic, as well as 8,000 copies of the Latin Vulgate, some of which date back almost to Jerome's original translation in 384 400 A.D.

Church Fathers

A further witness to the New Testament text is sourced in the thousands of quotations found throughout the writings of the Church Fathers (the early Christian clergy [100-450 A.D.] who followed the Apostles and gave leadership to the fledgling church, beginning with Clement of Rome (96 A.D.)).

It has been observed that if all of the New Testament manuscripts and Versions mentioned above were to disappear

overnight, it would still be possible to reconstruct the entire New Testament with quotes from the Church Fathers, with the exception of fifteen to twenty verses!

A Comparison

The evidence for the early existence of the New Testament writings is clear. The wealth of materials for the New Testament becomes even more significant when we compare it with other ancient documents which have been accepted without question.

Author and Work	Author's Lifespan	Date of Events	Date of Writing*	Earliest Extant MS**	Lapse: Event to Writing	Lapse: Event to MS
Matthew, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 0-70?	4 BC – AD 30	50 – 65/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years
Mark, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 15-90?	27 – 30	65/70	ca. 225	<50 years	<200 years
Luke, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 10-80?	5 BC – AD 30	60/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years
John, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 10-100	27-30	90-110	ca. 130	<80 years	<100 years
Paul, <i>Letters</i>	ca. 0-65	30	50-65	ca. 200	20-30 years	<200 years
Josephus, <i>War</i>	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 70	ca. 80	ca. 950	10-300 years	900-1200 years
Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 65	ca. 95	ca. 1050	30-300 years	1000-1300 years
Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>	ca. 56-120	AD 14-68	100-120	ca. 850	30-100 years	800-850 years
Seutonius, <i>Lives</i>	ca. 69-130	50 BC – AD 95	ca. 120	ca. 850	25-170 years	750-900 years
Pliny, <i>Letters</i>	ca. 60-115	97-112	110-112	ca. 850	0-3 years	725-750 years

Plutarch, <i>Lives</i>	ca. 50-120	500 BC – AD 70	ca. 100	ca. 950	30-600 years	850-1500 years
Herodotus, <i>History</i>	ca. 485-425 BC	546-478 BC	430-425 BC	ca. 900	50-125 years	1400-1450 years
Thucydides, <i>History</i>	ca. 460-400 BC	431-411 BC	410-400 BC	ca. 900	0-30 years	1300-1350 years
Xenophon, <i>Anabasis</i>	ca. 430-355 BC	401-399 BC	385-375 BC	ca. 1350	15-25 years	1750 years
Polybius, <i>History</i>	ca. 200-120 BC	220-168 BC	ca. 150 BC	ca. 950	20-70 years	1100-1150 years

*Where a slash occurs, the first date is conservative, and the second is liberal.

**New Testament manuscripts are fragmentary. Earliest complete manuscript is from ca. 350; lapse of event to complete manuscript is about 325 years.

Conclusion

In his book, *The Bible and Archaeology*, Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum, stated about the New Testament, "The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established." [\[8\]](#)

To be skeptical of the twenty-seven documents in the New Testament, and to say they are unreliable is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as these in the New Testament.

B. F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, the creators of *The New Testament in Original Greek*, also commented: "If comparative trivialities such as changes of order, the insertion or omission of the article with proper names, and the like are set aside, the works in our opinion still subject to doubt can hardly mount to more than a thousandth part of the whole New Testament." [\[9\]](#) In other words, the small changes and variations in manuscripts change no major doctrine: they do not affect Christianity in the least. The message is the same with or without the variations. We have the Word of God.

The Anvil? God's Word.

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime:
Then looking in, I saw upon the floor
Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

"How many anvils have you had," said I,
"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"
"Just one," said he, and then, with twinkling eye,
"The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."

And so, thought I, the anvil of God's word,
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;
Yet though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed . . . the hammer's gone.

Author unknown

Notes

1. C.Sanders, *Introduction in Research in English Literacy* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), 143.
2. Merrill F. Unger, *Famous Archaeological Discoveries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 72.
3. R. Laird Harris, *Can I Trust My Bible?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 124.
4. Ibid., 129-30.
5. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 892.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Sir Fredric Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 288ff.
9. B.F. Westcott, and F.J.A. Hort, eds., *New Testament in Original Greek*, 1881, vol. II, 2.

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Archaeology and the Old Testament

Dr. Patrick Zukeran surveys the importance of archaeology with regard to its confirmation of biblical history.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Understanding Archaeology

Christianity is a historical faith based on actual events recorded in the Bible. Archaeology has therefore played a key role in biblical studies and Christian apologetics in several ways.

First, archaeology has confirmed the historical accuracy of the Bible. It has verified many ancient sites, civilizations, and biblical characters whose existence was questioned by the academic world and often dismissed as myths. Biblical archaeology has silenced many critics as new discoveries supported the facts of the Bible.

Second, archaeology helps us improve our understanding of the Bible. Although we do not have the original writings of the authors, thousands of ancient manuscripts affirm that we have an accurate transmission of the original texts.^{1} Archaeology can also help us to understand more accurately the nuances and uses of biblical words as they were used in their day.

Third, archaeology helps illustrate and explain Bible passages. The events of the Bible occurred at a certain time, in a particular culture, influenced by a particular social and political structure. Archaeology gives us insights into these areas. Archaeology also helps to supplement topics not covered in the Bible. Much of what we know of the pagan religions and the intertestamental period comes from archaeological research.

As we approach this study we must keep in mind the limits of archaeology. First, it does not prove the divine inspiration of the Bible. It can only confirm the accuracy of the events. Second, unlike other fields of science, archaeology cannot recreate the process under study. Archaeologists must study and interpret the evidence left behind. All conclusions must allow

for revision and reinterpretation based on new discoveries. Third, how archaeological evidence is understood depends on the interpreter's presuppositions and worldview. It is important to understand that many researchers are skeptics of the Bible and hostile to its world view.

Fourth, thousands of archives have been discovered, but an enormous amount of material has been lost. For example, the library in Alexandria held over one million volumes, but all were lost in a seventh century fire.

Fifth, only a fraction of available archaeological sites have been surveyed, and only a fraction of surveyed sites have been excavated. In fact, it is estimated that less than two percent of surveyed sites have been worked on. Once work begins, only a fraction of an excavation site is actually examined, and only a small part of what is examined is published. For example, the photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls were withheld from the public for forty years after they were uncovered.

It is important to understand that the Scriptures remain the primary source of authority. We must not elevate archaeology to the point that it becomes the judge for the validity of Scripture. Randall Price states, "There are indeed instances where the information needed to resolve a historical or chronological question is lacking from both archaeology and the Bible, but it is unwarranted to assume the material evidence taken from the more limited content of archaeological excavations can be used to dispute the literary evidence from the more complete content of the canonical scriptures."[\[2\]](#) The Bible has proven to be an accurate and trustworthy source of history.

Noted archaeologist Nelson Glueck writes, "As a matter of fact, however, it may be clearly stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a single biblical reference. Scores of archeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical

statements in the Bible.”[\[3\]](#)

The Discovery of the Hittites

The Hittites played a prominent role in Old Testament history. They interacted with biblical figures as early as Abraham and as late as Solomon. They are mentioned in Genesis 15:20 as people who inhabited the land of Canaan. 1 Kings 10:29 records that they purchased chariots and horses from King Solomon. The most prominent Hittite is Uriah the husband of Bathsheba. The Hittites were a powerful force in the Middle East from 1750 B.C. until 1200 B.C. Prior to the late 19th century, nothing was known of the Hittites outside the Bible, and many critics alleged that they were an invention of the biblical authors.

In 1876 a dramatic discovery changed this perception. A British scholar named A. H. Sayce found inscriptions carved on rocks in Turkey. He suspected that they might be evidence of the Hittite nation. Ten years later, more clay tablets were found in Turkey at a place called Boghaz-koy. German cuneiform expert Hugo Winckler investigated the tablets and began his own expedition at the site in 1906.

Winckler’s excavations uncovered five temples, a fortified citadel and several massive sculptures. In one storeroom he found over ten thousand clay tablets. One of the documents proved to be a record of a treaty between Ramesses II and the Hittite king. Other tablets showed that Boghaz-koy was the capital of the Hittite kingdom. Its original name was Hattusha and the city covered an area of 300 acres. The Hittite nation had been discovered!

Less than a decade after Winckler’s find, Czech scholar Bedrich Hronzny proved the Hittite language is an early relative of the Indo-European languages of Greek, Latin, French, German, and English. The Hittite language now has a central place in the study of the history of the Indo-European languages.

The discovery also confirmed other biblical facts. Five temples were found containing many tablets with details of the rites and ceremonies that priests performed. These ceremonies described rites for purification from sin and purification of a new temple. The instructions proved to be very elaborate and lengthy. Critics once criticized the laws and instructions found in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy as too complicated for the time it was written (1400 B.C.). The Boghaz-koy texts along with others from Egyptian sites and a site along the Euphrates called Emar have proven that the ceremonies described in the Jewish Pentateuch are consistent with the ceremonies of the cultures of this time period.

The Hittite Empire made treaties with civilizations they conquered. Two dozen of these have been translated and provide a better understanding of treaties in the Old Testament. The discovery of the Hittite Empire at Boghaz-koy has significantly advanced our understanding of the patriarchal period. Dr. Fred Wright summarizes the importance of this find in regard to biblical historicity:

Now the Bible picture of this people fits in perfectly with what we know of the Hittite nation from the monuments. As an empire they never conquered the land of Canaan itself, although the Hittite local tribes did settle there at an early date. Nothing discovered by the excavators has in any way discredited the Biblical account. Scripture accuracy has once more been proved by the archaeologist. [\[4\]](#)

The discovery of the Hittites has proven to be one of the great archaeological finds of all time. It has helped to confirm the biblical narrative and had a great impact on Middle East archaeological study. Because of it, we have come to a greater understanding of the history of our language, as well as the religious, social, and political practices of the ancient Middle East.

Sodom and Gomorrah

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah has long been viewed as a legend. Critics assume that it was created to communicate moral principles. However, throughout the Bible this story is treated as a historical event. The Old Testament prophets refer to the destruction of Sodom on several occasions (Deut. 29:23, Isa. 13:19, Jer. 49:18), and these cities play a key role in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles (Matt. 10:15, 2 Pet. 2:6 and Jude 1:7). What has archaeology found to establish the existence of these cities?

Archaeologists have searched the Dead Sea region for many years in search of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 14:3 gives their location as the Valley of Siddim known as the Salt Sea, another name for the Dead Sea. On the east side six wadies, or river valleys, flow into the Dead Sea. Along five of these wadies, ancient cities were discovered. The northern most is named Bab edh-Drha. In 1924, renowned archaeologist Dr. William Albright excavated at this site, searching for Sodom and Gomorrah. He discovered it to be a heavily fortified city. Although he connected this city with one of the biblical "Cities of the Plains," he could not find conclusive evidence to justify this assumption.

More digging was done in 1965, 1967, and 1973. The archaeologists discovered a 23-inch thick wall around the city, along with numerous houses and a large temple. Outside the city were huge grave sites where thousands of skeletons were unearthed. This revealed that the city had been well populated during the early Bronze Age, about the time Abraham would have lived.

Most intriguing was evidence that a massive fire had destroyed the city. It lay buried under a coating of ash several feet thick. A cemetery one kilometer outside the city contained charred remains of roofs, posts, and bricks turned red from heat.

Dr. Bryant Wood, in describing these charnel houses, stated that a fire began on the roofs of these buildings. Eventually the burning roof collapsed into the interior and spread inside the building. This was the case in every house they excavated. Such a massive fiery destruction would match the biblical account that the city was destroyed by fire that rained down from heaven. Wood states, "The evidence would suggest that this site of Bab edh-Drha is the biblical city of Sodom." [\[5\]](#)

Five cities of the plain are mentioned in Genesis 14: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zoar, and Zeboiim. Remnants of these other four cities are also found along the Dead Sea. Following a southward path from Bab edh-Drha there is the city called Numeria. Continuing south is the city called es-Safi. Further south are the ancient cities of Feifa and Khanazir. Studies at these cities revealed that they had been abandoned at the same time about 2450-2350 B.C. Many archaeologists believe if Bab ed-Drha is Sodom, Numeria is Gomorrah, and es-Safi is Zoar.

What fascinated the archaeologists is that these cities were covered in the same ash as Bab ed-Drha. Numeria, believed to be Gomorrah, had seven feet of ash in some places. In every one of the destroyed cities ash deposits made the soil a spongy charcoal, making it impossible to rebuild. According to the Bible, four of the five cities were destroyed, leaving Lot to flee to Zoar. Zoar was not destroyed by fire, but was abandoned during this period.

Although archaeologists are still disputing these findings, this is one discovery we will be hearing more about in years to come.

The Walls of Jericho

According to the Bible, the conquest of Jericho occurred in approximately 1440 B.C. The miraculous nature of the conquest has caused some scholars to dismiss the story as folklore. Does archaeology support the biblical account? Over the past

century four prominent archaeologists have excavated the site: Carl Watzinger from 1907-1909, John Garstang in the 1930's, Kathleen Kenyon from 1952-1958, and currently Bryant Wood. The result of their work has been remarkable.

First, they discovered that Jericho had an impressive system of fortifications. Surrounding the city was a retaining wall fifteen feet high. At its top was an eight-foot brick wall strengthened from behind by an earthen rampart. Domestic structures were found behind this first wall. Another brick wall enclosed the rest of the city. The domestic structures found between the two walls is consistent with Joshua's description of Rahab's quarters (Josh. 2:15). Archeologists also found that in one part of the city, large piles of bricks were found at the base of both the inner and outer walls, indicating a sudden collapse of the fortifications. Scholars feel that an earthquake, which may also explain the damming of the Jordan in the biblical account, caused this collapse. The collapsed bricks formed a ramp by which an invader might easily enter the city (Josh. 6:20).

Of this amazing discovery Garstang states, "As to the main fact, then, there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely, the attackers would be able to clamber up and over the ruins of the city."[{6}](#) This is remarkable because when attacked city walls fall inward, not outward.

A thick layer of soot indicates that the city was destroyed by fire as described in Joshua 6:24. Kenyon describes it this way. "The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire and every room was filled with fallen bricks."[{7}](#) Archaeologists also discovered large amounts of grain at the site. This is again consistent with the biblical account that the city was captured quickly. If it had fallen as a result of a siege, the grain would have been used up. According to Joshua 6:17, the Israelites were forbidden to plunder the city, but had to destroy it totally.

Although the archaeologists agreed Jericho was violently destroyed, they disagreed on the date of the conquest. Garstang held to the biblical date of 1400 B.C. while Watzinger and Kenyon believed the destruction occurred in 1550 B.C. In other words, if the later date is accurate, Joshua arrived at a previously destroyed Jericho. This earlier date would pose a serious challenge to the historicity of the Old Testament.

Dr. Bryant Wood, who is currently excavating the site, found that Kenyon's early date was based on faulty assumptions about pottery found at the site. His later date is also based on the discovery of Egyptian amulets in the tombs northwest of Jericho. Inscribed under these amulets were the names of Egyptian Pharaohs dating from 1500-1386 B.C., showing that the cemetery was in use up to the end of the late Bronze Age (1550-1400 B.C.). Finally, a piece of charcoal found in the debris was carbon-14 dated to be 1410 B.C. The evidence leads Wood to this conclusion. "The pottery, stratigraphic considerations, scarab data and a carbon-14 date all point to a destruction of the city around the end of the Late Bronze Age, about 1400 BCE." [\[8\]](#)

Thus, current archeological evidence supports the Bible's account of when and how Jericho fell.

House of David

One of the most beloved characters in the Bible is King David. Scripture says that he was a man after God's own heart. He is revered as the greatest of all Israelite kings and the messianic covenant is established through his lineage. Despite his key role in Israel's history, until recently no evidence outside the Bible attested to his existence. For this reason critics questioned the existence of a King David.

In the summer of 1993, an archaeologist made what has been labeled as a phenomenal and stunning discovery. Dr. Avraham

Biran and his team were excavating a site labeled Tell Dan, located in northern Galilee at the foot of Mt. Hermon. Evidence indicates that this is the site of the Old Testament land of Dan.

The team had discovered an impressive royal plaza. As they were clearing the debris, they discovered in the ruins the remains of a black basalt stele, or stone slab, containing Aramaic inscriptions. The stele contained thirteen lines of writing but none of the sentences were complete. Some of the lines contained only three letters while the widest contained fourteen. The letters that remained were clearly engraved and easy to read. Two of the lines included the phrases "The King of Israel" and "House of David."

This is the first reference to King David found outside of the Bible. This discovery has caused many critics to reconsider their view of the historicity of the Davidic kingdom. Pottery found in the vicinity, along with the construction and style of writing, lead Dr. Biran to argue that the stele was erected in the first quarter of the ninth century B.C., about a century after the death of King David.

The translation team discovered that the inscription told of warfare between the Israelites and the Arameans, which the Bible refers to during this period. In this find, a ruler of the Arameans probably Hazael is victorious over Israel and Judah. The stele was erected to celebrate the defeat of the two kings. In 1994 two more pieces were found with inscriptions which refer to Jehoram, the son of Ahab, ruler over Israel, and Ahaziah, who was the ruler over the "House of David" or Judah. These names and facts correspond to the account given in chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Kings. Dr. Hershel Shanks of *Biblical Archaeological Review* states, "The stele brings to life the biblical text in a very dramatic way. It also gives us more confidence in the historical reality of the biblical text."[9](#)

The find has confirmed a number of facts. First, the use of the term "House of David" implies that there was a Davidic dynasty that ruled Israel. We can conclude, then, that a historic King David existed. Second, the kingdoms of Judah and Israel were prominent political entities as the Bible describes. Critics long viewed the two nations as simply insignificant states.

Dr. Bryant Wood summarizes the importance of this find this way. "In our day, most scholars, archaeologist and biblical scholars would take a very critical view of the historical accuracy of many of the accounts in the Bible. . . . Many scholars have said there never was a David or a Solomon, and now we have a stele that actually mentions David." [\[10\]](#)

Although many archeologists remain skeptical of the biblical record, the evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible continues to build.

Notes

1. See [Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?](#) available on the Web at www.probe.org/are-the-biblical-documents-reliable/
2. Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 46. e, 173.
3. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*, (New York: Farrar, Strous and Cudahy, 1959), 136. e, 173.
4. Fred Wright, *Highlights of Archaeology in the Bible Lands*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1955), 94-95.
5. Price, 118.
6. John Garstang, *The Foundations of Bible History; Joshua, Judges* (London: Constable, 1931), 146.
7. Kathleen Kenyon and Thomas Holland, *Excavations at Jericho Vol. 3: The Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Tell*,

(London: BSA), 370.

8. Bryant Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?" *Biblical Archaeological Review*, March/April, 1990, 57.

9. John Wilford, "Areologists say Evidence of House of David Found." *Dallas Morning News*, 6 August 1993, 1A

10. Price, 173.

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Authority of the Bible – A Strong Argument for Christianity

Dr. Pat Zukeran examines some of the compelling evidence for the reliability and the authority of the Bible. The uniqueness and astounding accuracy of this ancient text is an important apologetic for Christianity.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

There are many books today that claim to be the Word of God. The Koran, the *Bhagavad Gita*, The Book of Mormon, and other religious works all claim to be divinely inspired. The Bible claims to be the only book that is divinely inspired and that

all other claims of inspiration from other works should be ruled out. Does the Bible confirm its exclusive claim to be the Word of God? The totality of evidences presents a strong case for the divine inspiration of the Bible.

The strongest argument for the divine inspiration of the Bible is the testimony of Jesus. Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God and confirmed His claims through His sinless, miraculous life and resurrection. The events of His life have been recorded in the four Gospels, which have proven to be historically accurate and written by first century eyewitnesses.[\[1\]](#) Since Jesus is God incarnate, whatever He taught is true, and anything opposed to His teaching is false.



Jesus directly affirmed the authority of the Old Testament and indirectly affirmed the New Testament. In Luke 11:51, Jesus identified the prophets and the canon of the Old Testament. He names Abel as the first prophet from Genesis, and Zechariah the last prophet mentioned in 2 Chronicles, the last book in the Jewish Old Testament (which contains the same books we have today although placed in a different order). In Mark 7:8-9, Jesus refers to the Old Testament as the commands of God. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus states that the Law and the Prophets referring to the Old Testament is authoritative and imperishable. Throughout His ministry, Jesus made clear His teachings, corrections, and actions were consistent with the Old Testament. He also judged others teachings and traditions by the Old Testament. He thus demonstrated His affirmation of the Old Testament to be the Word of God.

Jesus even specifically affirmed as historical several disputed stories of the Old Testament. He affirms as true the accounts of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4-5), Noah and the flood (Matthew 24:39), Jonah and the whale (Matthew 12:40), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 10:15), and more.

Jesus confirmed the Old Testament and promised that the Holy

Spirit would inspire the apostles in the continuation of His teaching and in the writing of what would become the New Testament (John 14:25-26 and John 16:12-13). The apostles demonstrated that they came with the authority of God through the miracles they performed as Jesus and the Prophets did before them. The book of Acts, which records the miracles of the apostles, has also proven to be a historically accurate record written by a first century eyewitness.

Prophecy

Many religious books claim to be divinely inspired, but only the Bible has evidence of supernatural confirmation. We have seen that Jesus, being God incarnate, affirms the inspiration of the Bible. Another evidence of supernatural confirmation is the testimony of prophecy. The biblical authors made hundreds of specific prophecies of future events that have come to pass in the manner they were predicted. No book in history can compare to the Bible when it comes to the fulfillment of prophecy.

Here are some examples. Ezekiel 26, which was written in 587 B.C., predicted the destruction of Tyre, a city made up of two parts: a mainland port city, and an island city half a mile off shore. Ezekiel prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the city, many nations would fight against her, the debris of the city would be thrown into the ocean, the city would never be found again, and fishermen would come there to lay their nets.

In 573 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the mainland city of Tyre. Many of the refugees of the city sailed to the island, and the island city of Tyre remained a powerful city. In 333 B.C., however, Alexander the Great laid siege to Tyre. Using the rubble of mainland Tyre, he built a causeway to the island city of Tyre. He then captured and completely destroyed the city.

Today, Tyre is a small fishing town where fishing boats come to rest and fisherman spread their nets. The great ancient city of Tyre to this day lies buried in ruins exactly as prophesied. If we were to calculate the odds of this event happening by chance, the figures would be astronomical. No, it was not by coincidence.[{2}](#)

Here's another example. There are nearly one hundred prophecies made about Jesus in the Old Testament, prophecies such as His place of birth, how he would die, His rejection by the nation of Israel, and so on. All these prophecies were made hundreds of years before Jesus ever came to earth. Because of the accuracy of the prophecies, many skeptics have believed that they must have been written after A.D. 70—after the birth and death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem. They have thereby tried to deny that they are even prophecies.

However, in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These scrolls contained the book of Isaiah and other prophetic books. When dated, they were found to be written from 120 to 100 B.C.,[{3}](#) well before Jesus was born. It would have been an incredible accomplishment for Jesus to have fulfilled the numerous prophecies. Some say these prophecies were fulfilled by chance, but the odds against this would be exceptionally large. It would take more a greater leap of faith to believe in that chance happening than in the fact that Jesus is God and these prophecies are divinely inspired.

The record of prophecy is thus evidence for the unique and supernatural origin of the Bible.

Unity

The Bible is the only book with supernatural confirmation to support its claim of divine inspiration. The testimony of Christ and the legacy of prophecy are two proofs for inspiration. A third line of evidence is the unity of the Bible.

The Bible covers hundreds of topics, yet it does not contradict itself. It remains united in its theme. Well, what's so amazing about that? you may ask. Consider these facts. First, the Bible was written over a span of fifteen hundred years. Second, it was written by more than forty men from every walk of life. For example, Moses was educated in Egypt, Peter was a fisherman, Solomon was a king, Luke was a doctor, Amos was a shepherd, and Matthew was a tax collector. All the writers were of vastly different occupations and backgrounds.

Third, it was written in many different places. The Bible was written on three different continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. Moses wrote in the desert of Sinai, Paul wrote in a prison in Rome, Daniel wrote in exile in Babylon, and Ezra wrote in the ruined city of Jerusalem.

Fourth, it was written under many different circumstances. David wrote during a time of war, Jeremiah wrote at the sorrowful time of Israel's downfall, Peter wrote while Israel was under Roman domination, and Joshua wrote while invading the land of Canaan.

Fifth, the writers had different purposes for writing. Isaiah wrote to warn Israel of God's coming judgment on their sin; Matthew wrote to prove to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah; Zechariah wrote to encourage a disheartened Israel who had returned from Babylonian exile; and Paul wrote addressing problems in different Asian and European churches.

If we put all these factors together—the Bible was written over fifteen hundred years by forty different authors at different places, under various circumstances, and addressing a multitude of issues—how amazing that with such diversity, the Bible proclaims a unified message! That unity is organized around one theme: God's redemption of man and all of creation. The writers address numerous controversial subjects yet contradictions never appear. The Bible is an incredible

document.

Let me offer you a good illustration. Suppose ten medical students graduating in the same year from medical school wrote position papers on four controversial subjects. Would they all agree on each point? No, we would have disagreements from one author to another. Now look at the authorship of the Bible. All these authors, from a span of fifteen hundred years, wrote on many controversial subjects, yet they do not contradict one another.

It seems one author guided these writers through the whole process: the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21 states, "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." The unity of the Bible is just one more amazing proof of the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible.

Archaeology

We've studied the testimony of Jesus, prophecy, and the unity of the Bible as providing supernatural confirmation of the divine inspiration of the Bible. Another line of evidence is archaeology. Archaeology does not directly prove the Bible's inspiration, but it does prove its historical reliability.

Middle Eastern archaeological investigations have proven the Bible to be true and unerringly accurate in its historical descriptions. Nelson Glueck, a renowned Jewish archaeologist, states, "No archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."^{4} Dr. William Albright, who was probably the foremost authority in Middle East archaeology in his time, said this about the Bible: "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament."^{5} At this time, the number of archaeological discoveries that relate to the Bible number in the hundreds of thousands.^{6}

Archaeology has verified numerous ancient sites, civilizations, and biblical characters whose existence was questioned by the academic world and often dismissed as myths. Biblical archaeology has silenced many critics as new discoveries supported the facts of the Bible.

Here are a few examples of the historical accuracy of the Bible. The Bible records that the Hittites were a powerful force in the Middle East from 1750 B.C. until 1200 B.C. (Genesis 15:20, 2 Samuel 11, and 1 Kings 10:29). Prior to the late nineteenth century, nothing was known of the Hittites outside the Bible, and many critics alleged that they were an invention of the biblical authors.

However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, archaeologists in Turkey discovered a city which proved to be the capital of the Hittite empire. In the city they discovered a massive library of thousands of tablets. These tablets showed that the Hittite language was an early relative of the Indo-European languages.

Another example is the story of Jericho recorded in the book of Joshua. For years, skeptics thought the story of the falling walls of Jericho was a myth. However, recent archaeological discoveries have led several prominent scholars to conclude that the biblical description of the fall of Jericho is consistent with the discoveries they have made. One of the leading archaeologists on Jericho presently is Dr. Bryant Wood. His research has shown that the archaeological evidence matches perfectly with the biblical record.[{7}](#)

Archaeology has also demonstrated the accuracy of the New Testament. One of the most well attested to New Testament authors is Luke. Scholars have found him to be a very accurate historian, even in many of his details. In the Gospel of Luke and Acts, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands without error.[{8}](#) A. N. Sherwin-White states, For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . .

. Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted. [\[9\]](#)

There is no other ancient book that has so much archaeological evidence to support its accounts. Since God is a God of truth, we should expect His revelation to present what is historically true. Archaeology presents tangible proof of the historical accuracy of the Bible.

The Bible Alone Is God's Word

We have given several proofs for the divine inspiration of the Bible. These include the testimony of Jesus the divine Son of God, prophecy, unity, and archaeology. Accepting the divine inspiration of the Bible leads to the conclusion that all other works cannot be divinely inspired. This does not mean other works do not contain truth. All people are created in the image of God and can articulate principles that are true. However, only the Bible proves to be divinely inspired by God and therefore, other claims of divine inspiration should be ruled out for several reasons.

The Bible is the only book that gives supernatural confirmation to support its claim of divine inspiration. Other scriptures which contradict it cannot, therefore, be true.

The law of non-contradiction states that two contradictory statements cannot be true at the same time. If one proposition is known to be true, its opposite must be false. If it is true that I am presently alive, it cannot also be true to say that I am presently not alive. This is a universal law which is practiced daily in every part of the world. Even if you claim, the law of non-contradiction is false, you are asserting this statement is true and its opposite is false. In other words you end up appealing to the law you are trying to deny thus making a self-defeating argument.

Since we have good reason to believe the Bible is the inspired

word of God, any teaching that contradicts the Bible must be false. The Bible makes exclusive claims regarding God, truth and salvation that would exclude other scriptures. The Bible teaches that any deity other than the God of the Bible is a false deity (Exodus 20). Jesus declared that he is the divine Son of God, the source of truth, and the only way to eternal life (John 1 & 14:6).

A look at a few works from other religions illustrates this point. The Hindu scriptures include the Vedas and the Upanishads. These books present views of God that are contrary to the Bible. The Vedas are polytheistic, and the Upanishads present a pantheistic worldview of an impersonal divine essence called Brahma, not a personal God.

The Koran, the holy book of Islam, denies the deity of Christ, the triune nature of God, and the atoning work of Christ on the cross (Sura 4:116, 168). These are foundational truths taught in the Bible. The Pali Canon, the holy scriptures of Southern Buddhism, teach a naturalistic worldview (or pantheistic, as some schools interpret it). It also teaches salvation by works and the doctrine of reincarnation. The worldview of the Pali Canon and its view of salvation contradict biblical teachings. Since these works contradict biblical teaching, we reject their claim to divine inspiration.

The Bible alone proves to be divinely inspired and its exclusive claims rule out the claims of other books.

Notes

1. For more information refer to the articles "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels" (probe.org/historical-reliability-of-the-gospels/) and "The Uniqueness of Jesus" (www.probe.org/uniqueness-of-jesus).

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1986), 869.

3. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1986), 364-367.

4. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1959), 31.

5. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1953), 176.

6. Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 25.

7. Ibid., 152-53.

8. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), s.v., Archaeology, New Testament.

9. Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1999), 66.

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The Historical Reliability of the Gospels – An Important Apologetic for Christianity

Dr. Zukeran provides a succinct argument for the reliability of our current copies of the four gospels. This data is an important part of any apologetic argument, i.e. defense of the veracity of the Christian faith.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Differences Between the Four Gospels

Skeptics have criticized the Gospels, the first four books of

the New Testament, as being legendary in nature rather than historical. They point to alleged contradictions between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They also maintain the Gospels were written centuries after the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses. The late date of the writings allowed legends and exaggerations to proliferate, they say.

Are the Gospels historical or mythological?

The first challenge to address is how to account for the differences among the four Gospels. They are each different in nature, content, and the facts they include or exclude. The reason for the variations is that each author wrote to a different audience and from his own unique perspective. Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience to prove to them that Jesus is indeed their Messiah. That's why Matthew includes many of the teachings of Christ and makes numerous references to Old Testament prophecies. Mark wrote to a Greek or Gentile audience to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, he makes his case by focusing on the events of Christ's life. His gospel moves very quickly from one event to another, demonstrating Christ's lordship over all creation. Luke wrote to give an accurate historical account of Jesus' life. John wrote after reflecting on his encounter with Christ for many years. With that insight, near the end of his life John sat down and wrote the most theological of all the Gospels.

We should expect some differences between four independent accounts. If they were identical, we would suspect the writers of collaboration with one another. Because of their differences, the four Gospels actually give us a fuller and richer picture of Jesus.

Let me give you an example. Imagine if four people wrote a biography on your life: your son, your father, a co-worker, and a good friend. They would each focus on different aspects of your life and write from a unique perspective. One would be writing about you as a parent, another as a child growing up,

one as a professional, and one as a peer. Each may include different stories or see the same event from a different angle, but their differences would not mean they are in error. When we put all four accounts together, we would get a richer picture of your life and character. That is what is taking place in the Gospels.

So we acknowledge that differences do not necessarily mean errors. Skeptics have made allegations of errors for centuries, yet the vast majority of charges have been answered. New Testament scholar, Dr. Craig Blomberg, writes, "Despite two centuries of skeptical onslaught, it is fair to say that all the alleged inconsistencies among the Gospels have received at least plausible resolutions."[\[1\]](#) Another scholar, Murray Harris, emphasizes, "Even then the presence of discrepancies in circumstantial detail is no proof that the central fact is unhistorical."[\[2\]](#) The four Gospels give us a complementary, not a contradictory, account.

The Date of the New Testament Writings: Internal Evidence

Critics claim that the Gospels were written centuries after the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses. This would allow for myths about Jesus' life to proliferate. Were the Gospels written by eyewitnesses as they claim, or were they written centuries later? The historical facts appear to make a strong case for a first century date.

Jesus' ministry was from A.D. 27-30. Noted New Testament scholar, F.F. Bruce, gives strong evidence that the New Testament was completed by A.D. 100.[\[3\]](#) Most writings of the New Testament works were completed twenty to forty years before this. The Gospels are dated traditionally as follows: Mark is believed to be the first gospel written around A.D. 60. Matthew and Luke follow and are written between A.D. 60-70; John is the final gospel, written between A.D. 90-100.

The internal evidence supports these early dates for several reasons. The first three Gospels prophesied the fall of the Jerusalem Temple which occurred in A.D. 70. However, the fulfillment is not mentioned. It is strange that these three Gospels predict this major event but do not record it happening. Why do they not mention such an important prophetic milestone? The most plausible explanation is that it had not yet occurred at the time Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written.

In the book of Acts, the Temple plays a central role in the nation of Israel. Luke writes as if the Temple is an important part of Jewish life. He also ends Acts on a strange note: Paul living under house arrest. It is strange that Luke does not record the death of his two chief characters, Peter and Paul. The most plausible reason for this is that Luke finished writing Acts before Peter and Paul's martyrdom in A.D. 64. A significant point to highlight is that the Gospel of Luke precedes Acts, further supporting the traditional dating of A.D. 60. Furthermore, most scholars agree Mark precedes Luke, making Mark's Gospel even earlier.

Finally, the majority of New Testament scholars believe that Paul's epistles are written from A.D. 48-60. Paul's outline of the life of Jesus matches that of the Gospels. 1 Corinthians is one of the least disputed books regarding its dating and Pauline authorship. In chapter 15, Paul summarizes the gospel and reinforces the premise that this is the same gospel preached by the apostles. Even more compelling is that Paul quotes from Luke's Gospel in 1 Timothy 5:18, showing us that Luke's Gospel was indeed completed in Paul's lifetime. This would move up the time of the completion of Luke's Gospel along with Mark and Matthew.

The internal evidence presents a strong case for the early dating of the Gospels.

The Date of the Gospels: External Evidence

Were the Gospels written by eyewitnesses of the events, or were they not recorded until centuries later? As with the internal evidence, the external evidence also supports a first century date.

Fortunately, New Testament scholars have an enormous amount of ancient manuscript evidence. The documentary evidence for the New Testament far surpasses any other work of its time. We have over 5000 manuscripts, and many are dated within a few years of their authors' lives.

Here are some key documents. An important manuscript is the Chester Beatty Papyri. It contains most of the N.T. writings, and is dated around A.D. 250.

The Bodmer Papyri contains most of John, and dates to A.D. 200. Another is the Rylands Papyri that was found in Egypt that contains a fragment of John, and dates to A.D. 130. From this fragment we can conclude that John was completed well before A.D. 130 because, not only did the gospel have to be written, it had to be hand copied and make its way down from Greece to Egypt. Since the vast majority of scholars agree that John is the last gospel written, we can affirm its first century date along with the other three with greater assurance.

A final piece of evidence comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls Cave 7. Jose Callahan discovered a fragment of the Gospel of Mark and dated it to have been written in A.D. 50. He also discovered fragments of Acts and other epistles and dated them to have been written slightly after A.D. 50.[\[4\]](#)

Another line of evidence is the writings of the church fathers. Clement of Rome sent a letter to the Corinthian church in A.D. 95. in which he quoted from the Gospels and

other portions of the N.T. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote a letter before his martyrdom in Rome in A.D. 115, quoting all the Gospels and other N.T. letters. Polycarp wrote to the Philippians in A.D. 120 and quoted from the Gospels and N.T. letters. Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) quotes John 3. Church fathers of the early second century were familiar with the apostle's writings and quoted them as inspired Scripture.

Early dating is important for two reasons. The closer a historical record is to the date of the event, the more likely the record is accurate. Early dating allows for eyewitnesses to still be alive when the Gospels were circulating to attest to their accuracy. The apostles often appeal to the witness of the hostile crowd, pointing to their knowledge of the facts as well (Acts 2:22, 26:26). Also, the time is too short for legends to develop. Historians agree it takes about two generations, or eighty years, for legendary accounts to establish themselves.

From the evidence, we can conclude the Gospels were indeed written by the authors they are attributed to.

How Reliable was the Oral Tradition?

Previously, I defended the early dating of the Gospels. Despite this early dating, there is a time gap of several years between the ascension of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. There is a period during which the gospel accounts were committed to memory by the disciples and transmitted orally. The question we must answer is, Was the oral tradition memorized and passed on accurately? Skeptics assert that memory and oral tradition cannot accurately preserve accounts from person to person for many years.

The evidence shows that in oral cultures where memory has been trained for generations, oral memory can accurately preserve and pass on large amounts of information. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reveals to us how important oral instruction and memory of

divine teaching was stressed in Jewish culture. It is a well-known fact that the rabbis had the O.T. and much of the oral law committed to memory. The Jews placed a high value on memorizing whatever writing reflected inspired Scripture and the wisdom of God. I studied under a Greek professor who had the Gospels memorized word perfect. In a culture where this was practiced, memorization skills were far advanced compared to ours today. New Testament scholar Darrell Bock states that the Jewish culture was “a culture of memory.”[\[5\]](#)

Rainer Reisner presents six key reasons why oral tradition accurately preserved Jesus’ teachings.[\[6\]](#) First, Jesus used the Old Testament prophets’ practice of proclaiming the word of God which demanded accurate preservation of inspired teaching. Second, Jesus’ presentations of Himself as Messiah would reinforce among His followers the need to preserve His words accurately. Third, ninety percent of Jesus’ teachings and sayings use mnemonic methods similar to those used in Hebrew poetry. Fourth, Jesus trained His disciples to teach His lessons even while He was on earth. Fifth, Jewish boys were educated until they were twelve, so the disciples likely knew how to read and write. Finally, just as Jewish and Greek teachers gathered disciples, Jesus gathered and trained His to carry on after His death.

When one studies the teachings of Jesus, one realizes that His teachings and illustrations are easy to memorize. People throughout the world recognize immediately the story of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and the Lord’s Prayer.

We also know that the church preserved the teachings of Christ in the form of hymns which were likewise easy to memorize. Paul’s summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 is a good example of this.

We can have confidence then that the oral tradition accurately preserved the teachings and the events of Jesus’ life till they were written down just a few years later.

The Transmission of the Gospel Texts

When I am speaking with Muslims or Mormons, we often come to a point in the discussion where it is clear the Bible contradicts their position. It is then they claim, as many skeptics, do that the Bible has not been accurately transmitted and has been corrupted by the church. In regards to the Gospels, do we have an accurate copy of the original texts or have they been corrupted?

Previously, we showed that the Gospels were written in the first century, within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses. These eyewitnesses, both friendly and hostile, scrutinized the accounts for accuracy.

So the original writings were accurate. However, we do not have the original manuscripts. What we have are copies of copies of copies. Are these accurate, or have they been tampered with? As shown earlier, we have 5000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. When you include the quotes from the church fathers, manuscripts from other early translations like the Latin Vulgate, the Ethiopic text, and others, the total comes out to over 24,000 ancient texts. With so many ancient texts, significant alterations should be easy to spot. However, those who accuse the New Testament of being corrupted have not produced such evidence. This is significant because it should be easy to do with so many manuscripts available. The truth is, the large number of manuscripts confirm the accurate preservation and transmission of the New Testament writings.

Although we can be confident in an accurate copy, we do have textual discrepancies. There are some passages with variant readings that we are not sure of. However, the differences are minor and do not affect any major theological doctrine. Most have to do with sentence structure, vocabulary, and grammar. These in no way affect any major doctrine.

Here is one example. In our Bibles, Mark 16:9-20 is debated as to whether it was part of the original writings. Although I personally do not believe this passage was part of the original text, its inclusion does not affect any major teaching of Christianity. It states that Christ was resurrected, appeared to the disciples, and commissioned them to preach the gospel. This is taught elsewhere.

The other discrepancies are similar in nature. Greek scholars agree we have a copy very accurate to the original. Westcott and Hort state that we have a copy 98.33% accurate to the original.[{7}](#) A.T. Robertson gave a figure of 99% accuracy to the original.[{8}](#) As historian Sir Fredric Kenyon assures us, "...the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."[{9}](#)

Do Miracles Discredit the Gospels?

Skeptics question the accuracy of the Gospels because of the miracles. However, this is an issue of worldviews. Those who hold to a naturalistic worldview do not believe an omnipotent creator exists. All that exists is energy and matter. Therefore, miracles are impossible. Their conclusion, then, is that the miracle accounts in the Gospels are exaggerations or myths.

Those who hold to a theistic worldview can accept miracles in light of our understanding of God and Christ. God can intervene in time and space and alter the natural regularities of nature much like finite humans can in smaller limited ways. If Jesus is the Son of God, we can expect Him to perform miracles to affirm His claims to be divine. But worldviews are not where this ends. We also need to take a good look at the historical facts.

As shown previously, the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses to the events of the life of Christ. Early dating shows eyewitnesses were alive when Gospels were circulating and could attest to their accuracy. Apostles often appeal to the witness of the hostile crowd, pointing out their knowledge of the facts as well (Acts 2:22, Acts 26:26). Therefore, if there were any exaggerations or stories being told about Christ that were not true, the eyewitnesses could have easily discredited the apostles accounts. Remember, they began preaching in Israel in the very cities and during the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses. The Jews were careful to record accurate historical accounts. Many enemies of the early church were looking for ways to discredit the apostles' teaching. If what the apostles were saying was not true, the enemies would have cried foul, and the Gospels would not have earned much credibility.

There are also non-Christian sources that attest to the miracles of Christ. Josephus writes, "Now there was about that time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew to him both many of the Jews and many of the gentiles." The Jewish Talmud, written in the fifth century A.D., attributes Jesus' miracles to sorcery. Opponents of the Gospels do not deny He did miracles, they just present alternative explanations for them.

Finally, Christ's power over creation is supremely revealed in the resurrection. The resurrection is one of the best attested to events in history. For a full treatment, look up the article [Resurrection: Fact or Fiction](#) here at Probe.org.

Notes

1. Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 10.
2. Ibid., 9.

3. F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 14.
4. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002), 530.
5. Michael Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 80.
6. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 27-28.
7. Geisler, 474.
8. Ibid.
9. Quoted by Norman Geisler, *General Introduction to the Bible*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 405.

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God and the Canaanites: A Biblical Perspective

Rick Wade provides a biblically informed perspective of these Old Testament events, looking back at them with a Christian view of history and its significance.

The Charge of Genocide

A common attack today on Christianity has to do with the character of the God of the Old Testament^{1}. Moses' instructions to the Israelites as they were about to move into Canaan included this:

In the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is

giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded (Deut. 20:16-17).

Because of such things, biologist and prominent atheist Richard Dawkins describes God as “a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser . . . genocidal . . . [a] capriciously malevolent bully.” [{2}](#)



Can the actions of the Israelites legitimately be called genocide?

The term “genocide” means a major action “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.” [{3}](#) Some twentieth-century examples are the extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis and the slaughter of 800,000 Tutsis by the Hutus in Rwanda in 1994. Going by this definition alone, the destruction of the Canaanites would seem to have been genocide.

But there is a major difference. These twentieth-century examples were basically people killing people simply because they hated them and/or wanted their land. The Canaanites, by contrast, were destroyed at the direction of God and primarily because of their sin. Because of this, I think the term should be avoided. The completely negative connotations of “genocide” make it hard to look at the biblical events without a jaundiced eye.

One’s background theological beliefs make a big difference in how one sees this. If God was not behind the conquest of Canaan, then the Israelites were no different than the Nazis and the Hutus. However, once the biblical doctrines of God and of sin are taken into consideration, the background scenery

changes and the picture looks very different. There is only one true God, and that God deserves all honor and worship. Furthermore, justice must respond to the moral failure of sin. The Canaanites were grossly sinful people who were given plenty of time by God to change their ways. They had passed the point of redeemability, and were ripe for judgment.

Yahweh War

To understand what God was doing in Canaan, one must see it within the larger context of redemptive history.

The category scholars use for such events as the battles in the conquest of Canaan is *Yahweh war*. Yahweh wars are battles recorded in Scripture that are prompted by God for His purposes and won by His power.[\[4\]](#)

Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman sees five phases of Yahweh war in the Bible. In phase one, God fought the flesh-and-blood enemies of Israel. In phase two, God fought against Israel when it broke its side of its covenant with God (cf. Dt. 28:7, 25). In phase three, when Israel and Judah were in exile, God promised to come in the future as a warrior to rescue them from their oppressors (cf. Dan. 7).

In phase four there was a major change. When Jesus came, He shifted the battle to the *spiritual* realm; He fought spiritual powers and authorities. Jesus' power was shown in His healings and exorcisms and preeminently in His victory in the heavenlies by His death and resurrection (see Col. 2:13-15). Christians today are engaged in warfare on this level. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (6:12).

Phase five of Yahweh war will be the final battle of history when Jesus returns and will once again be military in nature.

Thus, Longman says, "The war against the Canaanites was simply

an earlier phase of the battle that comes to its climax on the cross and its completion at the final judgment.”{5}

There are several aspects of Yahweh war. The part that concerns us here—the real culmination of Yahweh war—is called *herem*. *Herem* literally means “ban” or “banned.” It means to ban from human use and to give over completely to God. The ESV and NIV give a fuller understanding of the term by translating it “devote to destruction” (the NASB renders it “set apart”).

Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitsch write that “there can be no doubt that the idea which lay at the foundation of the ban was that of a compulsory dedication of something which resisted or impeded sanctification; . . . it was an act of the judicial holiness of God manifesting itself in righteousness and judgment.”{6}

Canaan, because of its sin, was to be *herem*—devoted to destruction.

The Conquest of Canaan

In the conquest of Canaan, three goals were being accomplished.

First, the movement of the Israelites into Canaan was the fruition of God’s promise to Abram that He would give that land to his children (Gen. 12:7). When Joshua led the people across the Jordan River into Canaan, he was fulfilling this promise. Since the land wasn’t empty, this could only be accomplished by driving the Canaanites out.

The second goal of the conquest was the judgment of the Canaanites. Driving them out wasn’t simply a way of making room for Israel. The Canaanites were an evil, depraved people who had to be judged to fulfill the demands of justice. What about these people prompted such a harsh judgment?

For one thing, the Canaanites worshipped other gods. In our

pluralistic age, it's easy to forget what an offense that is to the true God.

In the worship of their gods, the Canaanites committed other evils. They engaged in temple prostitution which was thought to be a re-enactment of the sexual unions of the gods and goddesses.

An even more detestable practice was that of child sacrifice. Under the sanctuary in the ancient city of Gezer, urns containing the burnt bones of children have been found. They are dated to somewhere between 2000 and 1500 BC, between the time of Abraham and the Exodus.[{7}](#)

The third goal of the conquest was the protection of Israel. God was concerned that, if the Canaanites remained in the land, they would draw the Israelites into their evil practices.

How could the Canaanites have that much influence over the Israelites? For one thing, the Israelites would intermarry with them, and their spouses would bring their gods into the marriage with all that entailed.[{8}](#) In addition, the Israelites would be tempted to imitate Canaanite religious rituals because of their close connection to agricultural rhythms. The fertility of the land was believed to be directly connected to the sexual relations of the gods and goddesses. The people believed that re-enacting these unions themselves played a part in the fertility of the land.[{9}](#)

At first, the Israelites tried to compromise and worship God the way the Canaanites worshiped their gods. God had warned them against that (Deut. 12:4, 30, 31). Then they would simply abandon worship of the true God. As a result, they eventually received the same judgment the Canaanites experienced (Deut. 4:26; 7:4).

The Dispossession and Destruction of the Canaanites

In Deuteronomy 20:16, Moses said the Israelites were to “save alive nothing that breathes” in the cities in their new land. The question has been raised whether God really intended the Israelites to kill *all* the people. It has been suggested that such “obliteration language” was “hyperbolic.”[{10}](#) Commands to destroy everyone are sometimes followed by commands not to intermarry, such as in Deut. 7:2-3. How could the Israelites intermarry with the Canaanites if they killed them all? Maybe this was just an example of Ancient Near Eastern military language.[{11}](#)

I think God meant it quite literally. Here’s why. Leviticus 27:29 says very plainly that every person devoted to destruction was to be killed. Further, in Deuteronomy 20, Moses said they were only to kill the adult males in far away cities (vv. 13-14), but in nearby cities they were to “save nothing alive that breathes” (v. 16). If God *didn’t* mean to kill everyone in nearby cities, then what distinction was being made? And how else would God have said it if He *did* mean that? That being said, I do not think God had the Israelites comb the land to find and destroy every person; they were to devote to destruction the people who remained in the cities when they attacked.

Another observation is that the instruction is frequently to *dispossess* the Canaanites or move them out rather than to *destroy* them. Scholar Glen Miller points out that “dispossession” words are used by a three-to-one margin over “destruction” words.[{12}](#)

Can these be put together? With Miller, I think they can. The people of the land had heard about all that had happened with the Israelites from the time they escaped Egypt. “As soon as we heard it,” Rahab of Jericho said, “our hearts melted, and

there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath" (Josh. 2:11). Because of that advance warning, it is possible that some people abandoned their cities. Thus, the Israelites could possibly have married people who weren't in the cities when they were attacked.

A more obvious reason for the possibility of intermarriage is the fact that the Israelites didn't fully obey God's commands. In Jdg. 1:27-2:5, we read that tribe after tribe of Israelites did not drive out all the inhabitants of the cities they conquered. The Israelites intermarried with them which eventually drew God's judgment on them as well.

Final Comments

The most disturbing part of the conquest of Canaan for most people is the killing of children. After the defeats of both Heshbon and Bashan, Moses noted that they had "devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children" (Deut. 2:34; 3:3, 6).

No matter what explanation of the death of children is given, no one except the most cold hearted will find joy in it. God didn't. He gets no pleasure in the death of anyone. In Ezekiel 18:23 we read, "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (see also Ezek. 33:11). When God told Abraham He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham pleaded for them, and God agreed in his mercy that if but only ten righteous people were found, He wouldn't do it. Long after the conquest of the land, when God decided He would have to destroy Moab, according to Isaiah God "wept bitterly" over her cities (Isa. 16:9; cf. 15:5).

But what about Deuteronomy 24:16 which says that children shall not be put to death because of their fathers' sins? Isn't there an inconsistency here?

The law given in Deuteronomy provided regulations for the people of Israel. On an individual basis, when a father sinned, his son wasn't to be punished for it. The situation with Canaan was different. Generation after generation of Canaanites continued in the same evil practices. What was to stop it? God knew it would take the destruction of the nations.

Here are a few factors to take into consideration:

First, the sins of parents, *just like their successes*, have an impact on their children.

Second, if the Canaanite children were allowed to live and remain in the land, they could very well act to avenge their parents when they grew up, or at least to pick up again the practices of their parents.

Third, if one holds that there is an age of accountability for children, and that those younger than that are received into heaven with God at their death, although the means of death were frightful and harsh, the Canaanite children's experience after death would be better than if they'd continued to live among such a sinful people.[\[13\]](#) How persuasive this thought is will depend on how seriously we take biblical teaching about our future after the grave. [Ed. note: please see Probe's article "[Do Babies Go to Hell?](#)" by Probe's founder Jimmy Williams.]

These ideas may provide little consolation. But we must keep in mind that God is not subject to our contemporary sensibilities.[\[14\]](#) The only test we can put to God is consistency with His own nature and word. Yahweh is a God of justice as well as mercy. He is also a God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Notes

1. This article is a slightly adapted version of the program that aired on the Probe radio program. A more detailed version

is also available on our Web site with the title "[Yahweh War and the Conquest of Canaan.](#)"

2. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008), 51.

3. "Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide," Article II, University of the West of England, at: www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/.

4. The phrase "the Lord's battles" or "battles of the Lord" are found in 1 Sam. 18:17 and 25:28.

5. Tremper Longman III, "The Case for Spiritual Continuity," in C. S. Cowles, Eugene H. Merrill, Daniel L. Gard, and Tremper Longman III, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 185.

6. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans., James Martin, *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1: The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 484-485. Emphasis added.

7. M.G. Kyle, "Canaan," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 550. 8. The atheism of today wasn't an option. If the Israelites started to get a little slack in their obligations to Yahweh, they would turn to other gods.

9. Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1957), 93-94; 96-103.

10. Paul Copan, "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?", *Philosophia Christi* 10, no. 1 (2008): 7-37; www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=45. In his article "Yahweh Wars" which was written after "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?," Copan presents two scenarios, one in which everyone was put to death, and the other in which the targets were military leaders and soldiers. He believes the latter is the correct interpretation. See Paul Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites," *Philosophia Christi* 11, no. 1 (2009): 73-92; www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=63.

In his discussion in "Moral Monster," Copan refers specifically to Deut. 23:12-13 where Joshua also warns the people against intermarrying. One should note that Joshua's commands in Deuteronomy 23 are given before the Israelites

have completed their sweep through the land, so of course there are Canaanites there to marry. The Deut. 7 passage provides better support for his position.

11. Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."

12. Glenn M. Miller, "How could a God of Love order the massacre/annihilation of the Canaanites?" on the web site A Christian Thinktank,

13. Cf. Paul Copan, "How Could a Loving God Command Genocide," in *That's Just Your Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 165.

14. And I say "contemporary" because children weren't regarded as highly in the Ancient Near East as they are today.

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Yahweh War and the Conquest of Canaan – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Rick Wade provides an expanded discussion of the issues around the Israelites battles against the Canannites. He points out how Yahweh Wars, i.e. wars instituted by and fought with the direct help of Yahweh, have a specific, God-designed purpose and are not a call to geneocide against non-Christians. He considers the events and differing views of those events before summarzing a biblical worldview perception of them.

The Charge of Genocide

A common attack today on Christianity has to do with the character of the God of the Old Testament.[\[1\]](#) Especially singled out for censure by critics is the conquest of Canaan,

the land promised to Abraham, by Joshua and the Israelites. Through Moses, God gave these instructions:

In the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded" (Deut. 20:16-17).

In obedience to this command, when the Israelites took Jericho, their first conquest after crossing the Jordan River, "they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword" (Josh. 6:21).

Because of such things, biologist and prominent atheist Richard Dawkins describes God as, among other things, "a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."[\[2\]](#)

Dawkins also complains about God's jealous rage over the worship of other gods. "One cannot help," he says, "marveling at the extraordinarily draconian view taken of the sin of flirting with rival gods. To our modern sense of values and justice it seems a trifling sin compared to, say, offering your daughter for a gang rape" (referring to Lot offering his daughters in exchange for the angels). "It is yet another example," he continues, "of the disconnect between scriptural and modern (one is tempted to say civilized) morals. . . . The tragi-farce of God's maniacal jealousy against alternative gods recurs continually through the Old Testament."[\[3\]](#)

For an atheist, of course, there is no supernatural, so the gods of all the many religions were, of course, made up; they are merely mythologies devised to give meaning to life. The

God invented by the Israelites (and still believed in by Christians) was given a very jealous and mean-spirited personality. What atheists truly dislike is not only that people actually *believe* in this God but that they think *other* people should, too!

Of course, it would be illogical to try to argue against the existence of God on the basis of the conquest of Canaan. In fact, the moral values that make what the Israelites did seem so objectionable to atheists are *grounded* in God. As William Lane Craig notes, "The Bible itself inculcates the values which these stories seem to violate."[\[5\]](#) According to Article II of the United Nation's Genocide Convention of 1948, the term genocide means a major action "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group."[\[6\]](#) Some twentieth-century examples are the massacre of Armenian Christians by Turks in 1915 and 1916, the extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis in the 1940s, and the slaughter of 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda in 1994. Going by this definition alone, the destruction of the Canaanites was genocide.

But there is a major difference between these events and the Israelite conquest of Canaan. The twentieth-century examples were basically people killing people simply because they hated them and/or wanted their land. The Canaanites, by contrast, were destroyed at the direction of God and primarily because of their sin.[\[7\]](#) Because the Canaanites' destruction was believed to be directed by *God*, obviously atheists will not find anything acceptable in what happened. If the atheists are correct in their naturalistic understanding of the world—that there is no God, no supernatural; that religion is just a human institution; that all there is is nature; and that people are the products of random evolution—then the Israelites were no different than Hitler or other Ancient Near Eastern people who slaughtered people simply to take their lands.

However, once the biblical doctrines of God and of sin are taken into consideration, the background scenery changes and the picture looks very different. There is only one true God, and that God deserves all honor and worship. Furthermore, justice must respond to the moral failure of sin. The Canaanites were grossly sinful people who were given plenty of time by God to change their ways. They had passed the point of redeemability, and were ripe for judgment. The doctrines of God and of sin put this in a different light.

Because of this, I think the term *genocide* should be avoided. The completely negative connotations of the word make it hard to look at the biblical events without a jaundiced eye.

Dawkins accuses the biblical God of jealousy as well. If the God of the Bible really *does* exist, why might He be so jealous? For one thing, being the creator and Lord of all, He ought to be the only one worshiped and served. He has the right to claim that. Second, people worshiping other gods are indeed worshiping gods of their own (or their forebears') invention. Even Dr. Dawkins should understand why worshiping a god that isn't real is a problem! Third, since God made the world and the people in it, He knows best how they function. To go against the true God is to lose sight of one's own nature and of what makes for the good life.

Furthermore, being the creator of the world, God has the authority to move people as He wills. As Paul said much later to the Athenians, God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place" (Acts 17:26). If God wanted the Israelites in that land, He had every right to put them there.

One more note about the complaints of atheists. Not only do they leave out the key factors of the reality of God and sin, but they think that their own ideas about ethics should have ruled in Joshua's day and even for all time since clearly

their own modern liberal ethical sensibilities are the height of moral evolution! Never mind that such critics, while castigating Israel for killing children, will support a woman's right to have her unborn child cut to pieces in her womb (an odd ethical system, to my mind). Never mind, too, that the best of modern liberal ethical beliefs were built upon Judeo-Christian ethics.

Yahweh War

To understand what God was doing in Canaan, in addition to having a correct understanding of God's existence and authority and of the consequences of sin, one must see it within the larger context of redemptive history.

One of the categories scholars use for such events as the battles in the conquest of Canaan is *Yahweh war*. Yahweh wars are battles recorded in Scripture that are prompted by God for His purposes and won by His power.^{8} Old Testament scholar Eugene Merrill describes Yahweh war this way: "God initiated the process by singling out those destined to destruction, empowering an agent (usually his chosen people Israel) to accomplish it, and guaranteeing its successful conclusion once the proper conditions were met."^{9} These wars were "a constituent part of the covenant relationship" between Yahweh and Israel. "Israel . . . would not just witness God's mighty deeds as heavenly warrior but would be engaged in bringing them to pass."^{10}

There are numerous examples of Yahweh war in Scripture. In some of them, God fights the battle alone. Think of the Israelites caught between the Egyptian army behind them and the sea in front. God told them, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. . . . The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Ex. 14:13-14). They walked through the parted waters and watched them close down around the Egyptians behind them.

Another example is found in 2 Kings 18 and 19. When the Assyrians were about to attack Judah, King Sennacherib's representative threw down a challenge to Judah's God:

Do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The LORD will deliver us. Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand (2 Kings 18:32-35)?

Unfortunately for the Assyrians, Yahweh decided to take them up on that challenge. Hezekiah prayed, and God answered through Isaiah:

"I will defend this city to save it," He said, "for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David." And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies (2 Kings 19:34, 35).

Most of the time God had the Israelites help in the battle. So at Jericho, for example, God made the wall fall, and then the Israelites moved in and took the city. Numerous examples are given in Joshua and Numbers of the Israelites fighting the battle with God making them victorious.

The involvement of God is a key point in the whole matter of the conquest of Canaan. It wasn't just the Israelites moving in to take over like any other tribal people. It was commanded by God and accomplished by God. Merrill says this:

It is clear that the land was considered Israel's by divine right and that the nations who occupied it were little better

than squatters. Yahweh, as owner of the land, would therefore undertake measures to destroy and/or expel the illegitimate inhabitants, and he would do so largely through his people Israel and by means of Yahweh war. [\[11\]](#)

The Israelites were not at heart a warrior tribe. There was no way they could have conquered the land of Canaan if they didn't have divine help. They escaped the Egyptians and moved into their new land by the power of Yahweh (Jdg. 6:9; Josh. 24:13).

Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman sees five phases of Yahweh war in the Bible. In phase one, God fought the flesh-and-blood enemies of Israel. In phase two, God fought against *Israel* when it broke its side of its covenant with God (cf. Dt. 28:7. 25). In phase three, when Israel and Judah were in exile, God promised to come in the future as a warrior to rescue them from their oppressors (cf. Dan. 7).

In phase four there was a major change. When Jesus came, he shifted the battle to the *spiritual* realm; he fought spiritual powers and authorities, not earthly ones.

This change might explain a rather odd question asked by John the Baptist. When he was in prison, John had his disciples go and ask Jesus if he was the expected one (Matt. 11:2). Why would John have asked that? Didn't he baptize Jesus and understand then who he was? He did, but it could be that John was still looking for a *conquering* Messiah. Matthew 3 records John's harsh words to the Pharisees: "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). Was he thinking this was imminent? Perhaps later when he was in prison John was still looking for an exercise of power against earthly rulers on Jesus' part. Notice how Jesus responded to John's disciples in Matthew 11. He told them about his miracles, his exercises of power in the spiritual

realm. Then he made this curious comment: "And blessed is the one who is not offended by me" or does not "stumble over" me (v.6). He may simply have been thinking of people stumbling over him saying the he was the one who fulfilled Old Testament prophecies (see Isa. 29:18; think also of Nichodemus' comment: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" [John 3:2].). It could be, however, that Jesus was urging John (and others) not to fall away on account of His *actual* program of fighting the battle at *that time* in the *spiritual* realm rather than militarily. Jesus conducted Yahweh war on spiritual powers in his healings and exorcisms and preeminently in his victory in the heavenlies by His death and resurrection (see Col. 2:13-15).

Christians today are engaged in warfare on this level. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (6:12). We do not (or ought not!) advance the kingdom by the sword.

Phase five of Yahweh war will be the final battle of history when Jesus returns and will once again be military in nature. In Mark 13:26 and Rev. 1:7 we're presented with the imagery of Christ coming on a cloud, an imagery seen in the prophecy of Daniel: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him" (Dan. 7:13). The cloud represents a war chariot.[{12}](#)

Summing up, Longman writes, "The war against the Canaanites was simply an earlier phase of the battle that comes to its climax on the cross and its completion at the final judgment."[{13}](#)

There are several aspects of Yahweh war, not all of which are seen in every battle narrative. Merrill names, among other aspects, the mustering of the people, the consecration of the

soldiers, an oracle of God, and, at the end, the return to their homes or tents. [{14}](#)

The part that concerns us here—the real culmination of Yahweh war—is called *herem*. *Herem* literally means “ban” or “banned.” It means to ban from human use and to give over completely to God. The ESV and NIV give a fuller understanding of the term by translating it “devote to destruction” (the NASB renders it “set apart”). Exodus 22:20 reads, “Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction.” Deuteronomy 7:2, speaking of the conquest of the land, says, “and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.” Tremper Longman writes that “*herem* refers to the climactic aspect of divine warfare: the offering of the conquered people and their possessions to the Lord.” [{15}](#)

Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitsch give a fuller understanding of the meaning of *herem* in their discussion of Lev. 27:29. They write,

Nothing put under the ban, nothing that a man had devoted (banned) to the Lord of his property, of man, beast, or the field of his possession, was to be sold or redeemed, because it was most holy. . . . [Herem], judging from the cognate words in Arabic, . . . , has the primary signification ‘to cut off,’ and denotes that which is taken away from use and abuse on the part of men, and surrendered to God in an irrevocable and unredeemable manner, viz. human beings by being put to death, cattle and inanimate objects by being either given up to the sanctuary for ever or destroyed for the glory of the Lord. . . . [T]here can be no doubt that the idea which lay at the foundation of the ban was that of a compulsory dedication of something which resisted or impeded sanctification; . . . it was an act of the judicial holiness of God manifesting itself in righteousness and judgment. [{16}](#)

The word used to translate *herem* in the Greek translation of the Old Testament—the Septuagint—is *anathema*, a word we encounter in the New Testament as well. There it is translated “accursed”. The same underlying meaning is seen in Gal. 1:8 and 9 where Paul says that anyone who preaches a gospel contrary to what he preaches is to be accursed. About this the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* says:

He who preaches a false gospel is delivered to destruction by God. . . . The curse exposes the culprits to the judicial wrath of God.

In this act of being handed over to God lies the theological meaning of the . . . ban curse. . . . [T]he person sentenced by the anathema is immediately delivered up to the judgment of God. {17}

A major difference, of course, is that, in the New Testament, the “sentence” isn’t carried out by people but by God.

Canaan, because of its sin, was to be devoted to destruction. And Israel was to be the instrument of God for the carrying out of judgment.

The Conquest of Canaan

Let’s turn now to look at the goals of the conquest of Canaan by Israel.

In this conquest, three things were being accomplished: the fulfillment of the promise of land, the judgment of the Canaanites, and the protection of the Israelites.

Possession of the Land

First, the movement of the Israelites into Canaan was the fruition of God’s promises to Abram. We read in Genesis 12 where God promised Abram that He would produce a great nation

through him (vv. 1, 2). When Abraham and his family reached Canaan, Yahweh appeared to him and said, "To your offspring I will give this land" (v.7). This promise was repeated to the people of Israel in the years following (cf. Ex. 33:1; Num. 32:1). When Joshua led the people across the Jordan River into Canaan, he was fulfilling the promise. Since the land wasn't empty, they could only take possession of it by driving the Canaanites out.

Judgment of the Canaanites

The second goal of the conquest was the judgment of the Canaanites. Driving them out wasn't simply a way of making room for Israel. The Canaanites were an evil, depraved people who had to be judged to fulfill the demands of justice. What about these people prompted such a harsh judgment?

For one thing, the Canaanites worshiped other gods. In our pluralistic age, it's easy to forget what an offense that is to the true God. This sounds almost trivial today. As noted previously, Richard Dawkins mocks this "jealous" God. But since Yahweh is the true God who created us, He is the one who ought to be worshiped.

In the worship of their gods, the Canaanites committed other evils. They engaged in temple prostitution which was thought to be a re-enactment of the sexual unions of the gods and goddesses. Writes Bernhard Anderson:

The cooperation with the powers of fertility involved the dramatization in the temples of the story of Baal's loves and wars. Besides the rehearsal of this mythology, a prominent feature of the Canaanite cult was sacred prostitution (see Deut. 23:18). In the act of temple prostitution the man identified himself with Baal, the woman with Ashtart [or Ashtoreth, the mother goddess]. It was believed that human pairs, by imitating the action of Baal and his partner, could bring the divine pair together in fertilizing union. [\[18\]](#)

Although the worship of other gods and temple prostitution might not be sufficient grounds for the overthrow of the Canaanites in the eyes of contemporary atheists, another of their practices should be. In their worship of their gods, Canaanites engaged in the detestable practice of child sacrifice.

The people of Canaan were viciously cruel. Christopher Hitchens speaks of the “Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites” who were “pitilessly driven out of their homes to make room for the ungrateful and mutinous children of Israel.”^{19} (“Ungrateful” and “mutinous” are silly charges in themselves. Ungrateful to whom? I don’t recall the Canaanites issuing an open invitation for the Israelites to move in. And mutinous? Did the Canaanites have some kind of inherent rights to the land? They had taken it from other peoples earlier.) One might get the impression from Hitchens that these were good people (maybe in the mold of good modern Westerners of liberal persuasion) who were just minding their business when out of the blue came this ferocious band of peace-hating Israelites who murdered them and robbed them of their just possession! To speak of the Israelites being “pitiless” with respect to the Canaanites is worse than the pot calling the kettle black. Apparently Mr. Hitchens hasn’t bothered to read up on these people! If he had, he wouldn’t feel so sentimental about their demise. Writes Paul Copan,

The aftermath of Joshua’s victories are featherweight descriptions in comparison to those found in the annals of the major empires of the ANE [Ancient Near East]—whether Hittite and Egyptian (second millennium), Aramaean, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, or Greek (first millennium). Unlike Joshua’s brief, four-verse description of the treatment of the five kings (10:24–27), the Neo-Assyrian annals of Assurnasirpal (tenth century) take pleasure in describing the atrocities which gruesomely describe the flaying of live victims, the impaling of others on poles, and the heaping up

of bodies for display. {20}

In addition to the Old Testament claims about child sacrifice by the Canaanites, there is extra-biblical evidence found by archaeologists as well.

Under the sanctuary in the ancient city of Gezer, urns containing the burnt bones of children have been found that are dated to somewhere between 2000 and 1500 BC, between the time of Abraham and the Exodus. {21} The practice continued among the Canaanites (and sometimes even among the Israelites) even up to the time Israel was deported to Assyria in the late eighth century BC. Jon D. Levenson, professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard, reports that thousands of urns containing human and animal bones were found in Carthage. "These human bones are invariably of children, and almost all of them contain the remains of not one but two children, usually from the same family, one often a newborn and the other 2-4 years of age." It is highly doubtful the urns represent a funerary custom, he says. "The frequency with which the urns were deposited makes it unlikely that natural death could account for all such double deaths in families in a city of such size." {22}

The Canaanites were so evil that God wanted their very name to perish from the earth. Moses said, "But the LORD your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed. And he will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under heaven. No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them" (Deut. 7:23-24; see also 9:3).

Now, a critic today might be happier with a God who simply showed Himself to the Canaanites and invited them to discuss the situation with Him, to negotiate. Wouldn't that be a more civilized way to deal with them? Of course, any criticism from an atheist will have behind it the belief that there is no God

behind such events at all. But just to play along, we have to try to put ourselves in the mindset of people in the Ancient Near East to understand God's way of dealing with them. Philosophical reasoning wasn't the order of the day. God showed Himself to the Canaanites in a way they understood, just as He did earlier with the Egyptians. It might better suit the sensibilities of twentieth-century people for Yahweh to have convinced the Canaanites by rational argument of His existence and rightful place as Lord of the land, but it would have accomplished nothing then (and it doesn't work very well with a lot of people today, either!).

It was typical in ancient times for nations to see the power of gods in military victories. Recall the Rabshakeh's taunt in 2 Kings 18 that the gods of the other peoples they'd conquered hadn't done them any good. There is evidence of this understanding outside Scripture as well. For example, an ancient document with the title "Hymn of Victory of Mer-ne-Ptah" is from a thirteenth-century BC Egyptian ruler who gives praise to Ba-en-Re Meri-Amon, son of the god Re, for victory over Ashkelon, Gezer, and other lands.[{23}](#) In the ninth century BC, Mesha, a king of Moab, built a high place for the god Chemosh, "because he saved me from all the kings and caused me to triumph over all my adversaries."[{24}](#)

When the Israelites were about to attack Jericho, the prostitute Rahab helped the Israelite spies and offered this explanation for her help:

I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the

heavens above and on the earth beneath” (Josh. 2:9-11).

God showed Himself through acts of power, and some people recognized it.

The Protection of Israel

The third goal of removing the Canaanites was the protection of Israel. God said that the Canaanites had grown so evil that “the land vomited out its inhabitants” (Lev. 18:25). And He was concerned that, if they remained in the land, they would draw the Israelites into their evil practices and they, too, would be vomited out (v. 28).

How could the Canaanites have that much influence over the Israelites?

It might be thought that simply being the dominant power in the land would be sufficient to prevent a strong influence by inferior powers. However, the shift from the life of the nomad to the life of the farmer marked a major change in the life of the Israelites. The people of Israel hadn't been settled in one place for over forty years. The generation that entered the promised land knew only a nomadic life. They might easily have become enamored with the established cultural practices of the Canaanites. This happened with other nations in history. Anderson points out that the Akkadians who overcame the Sumerians were strongly influenced by Sumerian culture. Centuries later, Rome conquered the Greeks, but was greatly influenced by Greek culture. [\[25\]](#)

The most important danger for the Israelites was turning to the Canaanite gods. Today the way people have of dropping religion from their lives in favor of no religion isn't a model that would have been understood in the Ancient Near East. The option of atheism or secularism was unknown then. People would serve one god or another or even many gods. If the Israelites turned away from Yahweh, they wouldn't slip

into the complacent secular attitude that is so common today; they would transfer their allegiance to another god or gods.

God knew that, unless they kept the boundaries drawn very clearly, the Israelites would intermarry with the Canaanites who would bring their gods into the marriage and set the stage for compromise.

In Exodus 34, we see this connection:

Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods (vv. 12-16).

In addition, the Israelites would be tempted to imitate Canaanite religious rituals because of their close connection to Canaanite agricultural rhythms. Whether or not each year's crop was successful was of major importance to the Israelites. It would have been very tempting to act out Canaanite religious rituals as a way of insuring a good harvest. To do this didn't necessarily mean abandoning Yahweh. They tried to merge the two religions by adopting Canaanite methods in their worship of Yahweh. God had warned them not to do that (Deut. 12:4, 30, 31). They couldn't straddle the fence for long.

The Israelites had much earlier shown how quickly they would look for a substitute for the true God when Moses went up on the mountain to hear from God, recorded in Ex. 20-31. Moses took too long to come down for the people, so they demanded that Aaron make them some new gods to go before them. Aaron

made a golden calf that the people could see and worship (Ex. 32:1-4). Worshiping gods that were visible in the form of statues was a central part of the religions of their day. It was what everyone did, so the Israelites fell into that way of thinking, too.

The book of Judges is witness to what happened by being in such close proximity to people who worshiped other gods. Repeatedly the Israelites turned away from Yahweh to other gods and were given over by God to their enemies.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress (Jdg. 2:11-15).

Thus, God's judgment wasn't reserved just for the Canaanites. This was the second phase of Yahweh war. The Israelites had been warned (Deut. 4:26; 7:4). By disobeying God, the Israelites experienced the same judgment meted out through them on the Canaanites.

“Save nothing alive that breathes”Pt. 1

In Deuteronomy 20:16, Moses said the Israelites were to “save alive nothing that breathes” in the cities in their new land. The question has been raised whether God really intended the

Israelites to kill *all* the people in the land. I'll address three views on this which deny that the commands and/or reports about the battles are to be taken literally. The first is that the presence of such commands and reports are evidence that the Bible isn't inerrant. The second is that the commands are clearly antithetical to the character of Jesus and so couldn't have come from God. The third is that the commands are authentic but not intended to be taken literally. These three views are ones that are held by people who believe in God and take the Bible seriously.

Untrustworthy Records

Wesley Morrison, a Christian philosopher, believes the conquest narratives which tell of the slaughter of children are strong evidence against the inerrancy of Scripture. I won't go into a defense of inerrancy here, nor will I present a detailed rebuttal, but it might be helpful to take a brief look at the basic framework of Morrison's argument. [\[26\]](#) He writes:

Here is a more careful formulation of the argument that I wish to discuss.

- 1. God exists and is morally perfect.*
- 2. So God would not command one nation to exterminate the people of another unless He had a morally sufficient reason for doing so.*
- 3. According to various OT texts, God sometimes commanded the Israelites to exterminate the people of other nations.*
- 4. It is highly unlikely that God had a morally sufficient reason for issuing these alleged commands.*
- 5. So it is highly unlikely that everything every book of the OT says about God is true.*

I believe that this argument constitutes quite a strong prima facie case against inerrancy. Unless a better argument can be found for rejecting its conclusion, then anyone who thinks that God is perfectly good should acknowledge that there are mistakes in some of the books of the OT. [{27}](#)

In response, I wonder how the argument might look if we *presuppose* inerrancy on *other* bases. Let premises 1 to 3 stand. Then add these premises:

4. Everything the OT says about God is true.

5. God, being perfectly holy, always has morally sufficient reasons for everything He does (acting in keeping with His morally perfect nature).

6. Therefore, God must have had morally sufficient reasons for exterminating the people.

When it has been decided on *other* bases that the Bible is without error, that itself becomes a foundational part of our consideration of the conquest narratives. We might not understand *why* God does some things, but we don't always need to. There are secret things that belong only to God (Deut. 29:29).

A second view which casts doubt on the reliability of the conquest narratives is based on the character of Jesus. Theologian C. S. Cowles, for example, believes that, since Jesus is the best and fullest revelation of God, any characterizations of God that run counter to the character of Christ are wrong. "Jesus made it crystal clear," he writes, "that the 'kind of spirit' that would exterminate">[{28}](#) To show Jesus' attitude toward children, Cowles points to Matt. 18:5,6: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great

millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” When the disciples tried to send people away who were bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed by him, he said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). Surely Jesus would have nothing to do with the wholesale slaughter of innocent children, and thus it couldn’t have been commanded by God.

As Eugene Merrill points out, in his insistence on separating God from violence, Cowles doesn’t take seriously descriptions of God as a warrior elsewhere in Scripture.[{29}](#) Tremper Longman notes the connection of Jesus as divine warrior in the book of the Revelation with God as warrior in the book of Isaiah. In Revelation Jesus is described as wearing a robe dipped in blood (Rev. 19:13 / Isa. 63:2, 3); he has a rod in his mouth (Rev. 19:15 / Isa. 11:4b); he treads the winepress of his wrath (Rev. 19:15 / Isa. 63:3).

To distance God from the stories of slaughter in the Old Testament, Cowles calls for a distinction between the parts of the Old Testament that Jesus endorsed and all the rest which must be rejected as an authentic witness of God.[{30}](#) As with Morrison, the recognition of both Testaments as equally inspired (and true) prior to an examination of particular parts will mean that such a distinction cannot be maintained.[{31}](#)

A Non-Literal Interpretation

Philosopher and apologist Paul Copan offers a detailed discussion of this issue in his article “Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites.” He sets forth two scenarios, one of which takes the commands as being typical of Ancient Near Eastern warfare hyperbole (Scenario 1), and the other of which takes the commands at face value (Scenario 2). He says “we have excellent reason for thinking that Scenario 1 is correct and that we do not need to resort to the default position

[Scenario 2].”{32} He believes that God didn’t really intend the Israelites to literally kill everyone in the cities they attacked. In his article “Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?” Copan writes,

The “obliteration language” in Joshua (for example, “he left no survivor” and “utterly destroyed all who breathed” [10:40]) is clearly hyperbolic. Consider how, despite such language, the text of Joshua itself assumes Canaanites still inhabit the land: “For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know with certainty that the Lord your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you” (23:12-13). Joshua 9-12 utilizes the typical ANE [Ancient Near Eastern] literary conventions of warfare.{33}

How could there be anyone left to marry if everyone was put to death?

In addition to this, drawing on the work of Richard Hess, Copan thinks that the cities which were attacked were primarily military fortresses occupied by soldiers and military leaders, Rahab of Jericho being an exception. Thus, the targets of the Israelites’ attacks were soldiers, not the citizens of the land.{34}

Hess makes the curious comment that “there is no indication in the text of any specific noncombatants who were put to death.”{35} This is so with respect to the accounts of the battles following the crossing of the Jordan. But one wonders what he makes of the vengeance taken on the Midianites recorded in Numbers 31. When the soldiers returned from defeating the Midianites, Moses was angry because they had allowed the women to live. He commanded them, “Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him” (v. 17).

In addition, consider the instructions given in Deuteronomy 20 about warfare. Regarding cities far away, only the males were to be put to the sword; “the women and little ones” were to be taken as plunder (along with everything else; v.14). However, in the cities in the areas they would inhabit, the instruction was to “save alive nothing that breathes, but [to] devote them to complete devotion” (vv. 16, 17). If the distinction isn’t between sparing women and children and killing them, what is it? Hess says that Rahab and her family were the exceptions, but, given the instructions in Deuteronomy 20, perhaps she should be seen as further evidence that there were indeed civilians in these cities.

The distinction just noted along with what Israel did with the Midianites and the clear statement in Lev. 27:29 that every person devoted to destruction was to be killed lead me to conclude that women and children were indeed put to death as Israel cleared the land of the Canaanites. If God *didn’t* mean to kill everyone when it was commanded to “save alive nothing that breathes” (Dt. 20:16), how would He have said it if He *did*?

One further note. Even if we should conclude that the treatment of the Midianites was a unique event and that the army of Israel didn’t kill women and children in their battles, God still won’t be off the hook with critics. Women and children were surely killed in the Flood and in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

“Save nothing alive that breathes” Pt. 2

Intermarriage

But this still leaves unanswered the matter of intermarriage. Who would be left to marry if everyone was put to death?

Glen Miller explains how some would have remained. As he observes, the Israelites didn’t sneak up on the

Canaanites.[{36}](#) People had heard about the Israelites and their God Yahweh, and they had plenty of time to get out of town. Before ever crossing the Jordan River, the Israelites took a whole swath of land from the middle of the Salt Sea on the east side up to the Sea of Chennerith, or the Sea of Galilee as it came to be known later (accounts can be read from Numbers 21 through 31). Recall Rahab's claim that the people of Jericho had heard about the victories given the Israelites by Yahweh. Likewise, Amorite kings heard about the Jordan River drying up for the Israelites to cross over and "their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel" (Josh. 5:1). The inhabitants of Gibeon heard about what happened at Jericho and Ai and were so afraid they devised a deceptive scheme to protect themselves (Josh. 9).

Because of that advance warning, it is quite possible that some people abandoned their cities. Copan agrees:

When a foreign army might pose a threat in the ANE, women and children would be the first to remove themselves from harm's way—not to mention the population at large: "When a city is in danger of falling," observes Goldingay, "people do not simply wait there to be killed; they get out. . . . Only people who do not get out, such as the city's defenders, get killed."[{37}](#)

There is no indication that the Israelites pursued people who escaped. Those who stayed, however, showed their obstinate determination to continue in their ways, and they were to be destroyed. (Josh. 2:9-11). Goldingay supposes that only the cities' defenders remained and were killed, but Moses clearly believed those who remained could include women and children.

Why wouldn't the Israelites have pursued those who escaped? To answer that we must determine what God's main purpose was in this series of events. Earlier I gave three reasons for the

destruction of the Canaanites: possession of the land by the Israelites, judgment on the Canaanites, and the protection of Israel. All these worked together. Yahweh wanted to move the Israelites into a land of their own, but knew that for them to thrive and remain faithful to Him, they would have to be free of the influence of the Canaanites. The Canaanites were also ripe for judgment. Clearing the land, by whatever means, seems to have been the foremost goal.

Glen Miller points out that two kinds of words are used to describe what was to be done with the Canaanites: “dispossession” words and “destruction” words. He notes that the former are used by a three-to-one margin over the latter.[\[38\]](#) Here’s an example of the former:

I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. . . . I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you” (Ex. 23:27, 28, 31).

Unlike the people in Ninevah who repented at the preaching of Jonah (Jon. 3:6-10), the people of Canaan resisted. Because of that, they had to be moved out by force. But their *presence* wasn’t the only problem. Theirs was a debased culture, and it had to be destroyed. Thus, the Old Testament also speaks of the destruction of the Canaanites. Miller believes it was the *nations* that God intended to destroy more than the individual persons.[\[39\]](#) The cities represented the real power centers of the land, so to move the inhabitants out by terror or by destruction would have seriously weakened the nations.

If it’s true that people escaped before the Israelites attacked, then it is possible that the Israelites would marry some of them.

Secondly (and more obviously), the Israelites could marry Canaanites who were not removed from the cities because of their (the Israelites') disobedience. As it turned out, Moses' warning in Deut. 4:25-28 became prophetic. Starting in Judges 1:27 we read that tribe after tribe of Israelites did not drive out all the inhabitants of the cities they inhabited. Verse 28, for example, tells us that "it came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely."

With all this as background, I think we can understand why Moses both commanded that literally everyone was to be destroyed in the cities taken *and* warned the Israelites against intermarriage. The cities, the power centers of Canaanite wicked and idolatrous culture, were to be destroyed along with everyone who obstinately refused to leave. People who escaped could possibly have intermarried with the Israelites. And when the various tribes failed to deal appropriately with the Canaanites, they eventually mixed with them in marriage and in the broader society as well.

The Children

The most disturbing part of the conquest of Canaan for most people is the killing of children. After the defeats of both Heshbon and Bashan, Moses noted that they had "devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children" (Deut. 2:34; 3:3, 6). Why would God have ordered that?

No matter what explanation of the death of children is given, no one except the most cold hearted will find joy in it. God didn't. He gets no pleasure in the death of anyone. In Ezekiel 18:23 we read, "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (see also Ezek. 33:11). When God told Abraham He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham pleaded for them, and God agreed in his mercy that if but only ten righteous people were found, He wouldn't do it.

Long after the conquest of the land, when God decided He would have to destroy Moab, according to Isaiah God “wept bitterly” over her cities (Isa. 16:9; cf. 15:5).

But what about Deuteronomy 24:16 which says that children shall not be put to death because of their fathers’ sins? Isn’t there an inconsistency here?

The law given in Deuteronomy provided regulations for the people of Israel. In the course of normal life, children weren’t to be punished for the sins of their fathers. The situation in Canaan was different. Generation after generation of Canaanites continued in the same evil practices. What was to stop it? God knew it would take the destruction of those nations.

Here are a few factors to take into consideration.

First, the sins of parents, *just like their successes*, have an impact on their children.

Second, if the Canaanite children were allowed to live and remain in the land, they could very well act to avenge their parents when they grew up, or at least to pick up again the practices of their parents.

Third, if one holds that there is an age of accountability for children, and that those younger than that are received into heaven with God when they die, although the means of death were frightful and harsh, the Canaanite children’s experience after death would be better than if they’d continued to live among such a sinful people.[{40}](#) How persuasive this thought is will depend on how seriously we take biblical teaching about our future after the grave.

These ideas may provide little consolation. But we must keep in mind that God is not subject to our contemporary sensibilities.[{41}](#) If we’re going to find peace with much of the Bible, we will have to accept that. There is much to

offend in Scripture: the burden of original sin; that the Israelites were permitted to keep slaves; the gospel itself (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11); the headship of the husband. How about commands about servanthood, suffering for the gospel, and dying to oneself? Such things may still not be as offensive to us as the killing of children, but our sensibilities—especially those of modern individualistic Westerners who haven't grasped the seriousness of sin and of worshiping other gods—do not raise us to the level of judging God. We cannot evaluate this on the basis of contemporary secular ethical thought.

The only test we can put to God is consistency with His own nature and word. Yahweh is a God of justice as well as mercy. He is also a God who takes no more pleasure in the death of adults than in those of children.

This doesn't resolve the issue, but I'll just point out (again) that it's hard to swallow the revulsion people feel at this who themselves support abortion rights. It's well known that the unborn feel pain, and that late term abortion methods are abominable practices, ones pro-choicers wouldn't tolerate if performed on animals. A critic might hastily claim that I am employing a *tu quoque* argument here, but I'm not (that is the fallacy of defending something on the basis that the other person does it, too). I'm not offering it as a defense of the killing of children in the Old Testament. The purpose of the observation is intended simply to make critics stop and think about the charge they are making. It's rather like the adage, "One who lives in a glass house shouldn't throw stones."

Final Comments

Another term used in place of *Yahweh war* is *holy war*. We think of holy war primarily in the context of Islam. Critics may try to paint with a broad brush and claim that what the Israelites did to their neighbors was no different than modern day Islamic *jihad*. How might we respond?

I noted early in this article that the conquest of Canaan presupposed a particular theological background. The one true God was moving His people into their new home and meting out judgment to the Canaanites at the same time. Such warfare could only be conducted at the command of God. After the Israelites rebelled at the news of the spies that the inhabitants of the land were strong and their cities were large and fortified, God pronounced judgment on them. To try to make it up, the Israelites took it on themselves to go up into the land and fight. Moses pled with them not to, but they did anyway, and they were defeated (Num. 14). Even having the ark of the covenant with them wasn't sufficient when they fought against the Philistines apart from the will of God in the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 4:1-11). As Eugene Merrill says, *God* was the protagonist in Yahweh war. If He was not behind it, it would fail. Since today the battle has shifted to the spiritual level, there is no place for military warfare in the service of the advance of God's kingdom. Muslims who engage in *jihād* are not fighting on the side of the true God. Furthermore, for the atheist to criticize Christianity today for what God did a very long time ago is to show a lack of understanding of the progress of revelation and the development of God's plan. What has Jesus called us to do? That is what matters today.

Apologists have the task of answering challenges to biblical faith. We talk about Christianity being "reasonable," and we want to show it to be so. But reasonable by whose standards? The laws of logic are valid no matter one's religious beliefs. But we aren't here talking about the laws of logic. We're talking about moral issues. By whose moral standard will we judge God? We can clarify the conflict between the Canaanites and Israelites to non-believers. We can also appeal to the ethical principles we know Western secularists accept (e.g., prohibitions against child sacrifice). But, bottom line, the only way we can appease modern Westerners in this matter is to deny the inspiration of the text or to re-interpret the text

and so to distance ourselves from what the Israelites did. We certainly shouldn't do the former, and we have to be careful with the latter.

One final note. Our own circumstances will weigh heavily in how we read such texts. Not being oppressed ourselves, we view apparent oppressors (in this case the Israelites) with a jaundiced view. What about people who *are* oppressed?

Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim quotes Walter Brueggemann, another OT scholar. "'It is likely that the violence assigned to Yahweh is to be understood as counterviolence, which functions primarily as a critical principle in order to undermine and destabilize other violence.' And so," Fretheim continues, "God's violence is 'not blind or unbridled violence,' but purposeful in the service of a nonviolent end. In other words, God's violence, whether in judgment or salvation, is never an end in itself, but is always exercised in the service of God's more comprehensive salvific purposes for creation: the deliverance of slaves from oppression (Exod 15:7; Ps 78:49–50), the righteous from their antagonists (Ps 7:6–11), the poor and needy from their abusers (Exod 22:21–24; Isa 1:23–24; Jer 21:12), and Israel from its enemies (Isa 30:27–33; 34:2; Hab 3:12–13)." Quoting Abraham Heschel, he continues, "'This is one of the meanings of the anger of God: the end of indifference' with respect to those who have suffered human cruelty. In so stating the matter, the divine exercise of wrath, which may include violence, is finally a word of good news (for those oppressed) and bad news (for oppressors)."[\[42\]](#)

Notes

1. This article is a more detailed version of my "[God and the Canaanites](#)" which aired on Probe. That version is available on our Web site as well.
2. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008), 51.

3. Ibid., 278-79.
3. William Lane Craig, "Slaughter of the Canaanites," Reasonablefaith.org, www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5767.
5. Seymour Rossel, *The Holocaust: An End to Innocence*, chap. 15, "Genocide," www.rossel.net/Holocaust15.htm. From "Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide," University of the West of England, at: <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/>.
6. Later I'll mention the goal of fulfilling the promise of land to Abraham. To fulfill that promise, God needed only to move the Canaanites out.
7. Here I'm talking specifically about the command to destroy them.
8. The phrases "the Lord's battles" or "battles of the Lord" which make this clear are found in 1 Sam. 18:17 and 25:28. In Deut. 20 one can find the most succinct biblical description of Yahweh war.
9. Eugene H. Merrill, "The Case for Moderate Discontinuity," in C. S. Cowles, Eugene H. Merrill, Daniel L. Gard, and Tremper Longman III, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 65.
10. Ibid., 66.
11. Ibid., 67.
12. Tremper Longman III, "The Case for Spiritual Continuity," in Cowles et al., *Show Them No Mercy*, 182.
13. Ibid., 185.
14. Merrill, "The Case for Moderate Discontinuity," 69.
15. Longman, "The Case for Spiritual Continuity," 172.
16. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans., James Martin, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1: The Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 484-485.
17. Colin Brown, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); s.v. "Curse" by H. Aust and D. Müller, I:415.
18. Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1957), 98. See also Jack

- Finegan, *Myth and Mystery* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 133.
19. Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2007), 101; quoted in Copan "Is God a Moral Monster?"
20. Paul Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites," *Philosophia Christi* 11, no. 1 (2009): 73-92; www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=63.
21. M.G. Kyle, "Canaan," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 550.
22. Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 20-21.
23. "Hymn of Victory of Mer-ne-Ptah," in James B. Pritchard, ed. *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, *An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1958), 231.
24. "The Moabite Stone," in Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East*, 209.
25. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 93-94; 96-103.
26. Paul Copan offers an response to Morrision's argument in his "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."
27. Wesley Morrision, "Did God Command Genocide? A Challenge to the Biblical Inerrantist," *Philosophia Christi*, 11, no. 1 (2009): 7-26.
28. C. S. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," in Cowles et al., *Show Them No Mercy*, 26.
29. Merrill, "A Response to C. S. Cowles," in C. S. Cowles, et al, *Show Them No Mercy*, 49.
30. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," 33.
31. More detailed responses to this argument are found in the responses to C. S. Cowles in *Show Them No Mercy*, 47-60.
32. Paul Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites," *Philosophia Christi* 11, no. 1 (2009): 73-92; www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=63.
33. Paul Copan, "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?", *Philosophia Christi* 10, no. 1 (2008): 7-37; www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=45. Copan also

refers to Deut. 7:2-3 as evidence of this. See also his discussion in "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."

34. See Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."

35. Richard S. Hess, "War in the Hebrew Bible: An Overview," in *War in the Bible and Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Richard S. Hess and Elmer A. Martens (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 25; quoted in Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."

36. Glenn M. Miller, "How could a God of Love order the massacre/annihilation of the Canaanites?" on the web site A Christian Thinktank, christianthinktank.com/qamorite.html.

{37. Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites," quoting John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), chap. 5.

38. Miller, "How could a God of Love order the massacre/annihilation of the Canaanites?"

39. Copan says similarly that "wiping out Canaanite religion was far more significant than wiping out the Canaanites themselves." See his "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?"

40. Cf. Paul Copan, "How Could a Loving God Command Genocide," in *That's Just Your Interpretation* (Grand Rapid: Baker, 2001), 165.

41. And I say "contemporary" because children weren't regarded as highly in the Ancient Near East as they are today. People may not have found this as appalling as we do today (because it so out of keeping with our experience).

42. Terence Fretheim, "God and Violence in the Old Testament," *Word and World*, 24, no. 1 (Winter 2004); accessed online at www2.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/24-1_Violence/24-1_Fretheim.pdf; quoting Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 244, and Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper&Row, 1962), 284.

A Trial in Athens – Apologetics in the New Testament

Acts 17 provides one of the best examples of Paul engaging in apologetics in the New Testament. Rick Wade shows how Paul finds a point of contact with people to get a hearing.

The Apologist Paul

When we think of a biblical basis for apologetics, we typically think of Peter's brief comments about defending the faith in 1 Pet. 3:15. We don't typically think of *Paul* as an apologist. But in his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul said that they were "partakers with [him] in the defense and confirmation of the faith" (1:7; see also v.16). Apologetics was a significant aspect of Paul's ministry.

An event that has received a great amount of attention in the study of Paul's ministry is his address to the Areopagus in Athens, recorded in Acts 17: 16-34. That address will be my topic in this article. Maybe we can be encouraged by Paul's example to speak out for Christ the way he did.

Athens was a still a significant city in Paul's day. Although not so much a major political power, it retained its prestige for its cultural and intellectual achievements.^{1} What we see today as the art treasures of the ancient world, however, Paul saw as images of gods and places for their worship. And there were a lot of them.

Being provoked by this in his spirit, Paul began telling people about Jesus. He made his way to the synagogue as he had

done in various cities before.^{2} There he bore witness to Jews and to God-fearing Gentiles.

He also went to the Agora—the marketplace—to talk with the citizens of Athens.^{3} Among them were Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. After hearing him for a bit, the philosophers started calling Paul a “babblers,” a term of derision that meant literally “seed picker.” F. F. Bruce wrote that “[this word] was used of one who picked up scraps of learning here and there and purveyed them where he could.”^{4}

Peddlers of strange new religious beliefs were fairly common in those days. But this was a risky thing to do. It was unlawful to teach the worship of gods that hadn’t been officially authorized.^{5} Not long before this event, Paul was dragged into the marketplace in Philippi for “advocating customs unlawful for . . . Romans to accept or practice” (Acts 16:19-21). Eventually the people of Athens took Paul to the Areopagus, a powerful court which had authority in matters of religion and philosophy.^{6} They wanted to know about these strange new ideas he was presenting.

Paul had the opportunity to tell the highest religious and philosophical body in Athens about the true God.

Greek Religion

As Paul looked around the city of Athens, his spirit was provoked within him. The people of Athens had surrounded themselves with idols that obscured the reality of the one true God.

Other historical writings affirm the prominence of religion in Athens. For example, a second century writer named Pausanias claimed that “the Athenians are far more devoted to religion than other men.”^{7} His description of Athens names statue after statue, temple after temple. There were statues of gods everywhere, even on the mountains. There were temples built to

Athena, Poseidon, Hephaestus, Zeus, Artemis, Ares, and more.

Paul spoke of the altar to the unknown god (Acts 17:23). There were quite a few such altars in those days. The late New Testament scholar, Bertil Gärtner, wrote that these altars were erected "either because an unknown god was considered the author of tribulations or good fortune, or because men feared to pass over some deity."[\[8\]](#)

Greco-Roman religion was mainly about myth and ritual. Myths were the religious explanations of life and the world, and rituals were reenactments of them. Religion was mostly about appeasing the gods with the proper sacrifices to gain their favor and avoid their wrath.

Although morality wasn't closely associated with religion, that isn't to say that the way one lived was irrelevant.[\[9\]](#) As described in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the souls of the dead were led by the god Hermes to the depths of the earth to await the decision about their eternal place. The guilty were sent to "dark Tartarus." The pious went to the Elysian Fields.[\[10\]](#) In later years, the place of the blessed souls was said to be in the celestial realm. The afterlife, however, was still one of a shadowy existence.

There was no sacred/profane distinction in the Greco-Roman world; religion was not only a part of everyday life, it was integral to all the rest. Because of that, Christianity was not just a threat to religious belief; it threatened to upset all of culture. This is why Paul ran into such harsh opposition not only in Athens but also in Lystra and Philippi and Ephesus.

We live in a pluralistic society today. So did the apostles. But this did not stop the spread of the gospel. As we see at the end of Acts 17, some people did abandon their pluralism for faith in the one true God.

Epicureanism

When Paul went to the Agora in Athens to tell people about Jesus, he encountered some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

Epicureanism and Stoicism had “an influence that eclipsed that of all rival [philosophical] schools.”[{11}](#) The late British scholar Christopher Stead wrote that they “offered a practical policy for ordering one’s life which could appeal to the ordinary man. It has been argued that this was especially needed in the disorientation caused by the decline of the Greek city-states in the face of Alexander’s empire.”[{12}](#)

The school of Epicureanism was founded by Epicurus in the fourth century BC. His primary goal was to help people find happiness and peace of mind. He taught that a happy life is one in which pleasure predominates. These pleasures shouldn’t, however, cause any harm or discomfort. They aren’t found in a life of debauchery. Drinking and revelry just bring pain and confusion.[{13}](#) Pleasure was to be found in living a peaceful life in the company of like-minded friends. The intellectual pleasures of contemplation were the highest, because they could be experienced even if the body suffered.

There was more to Epicureanism than simply a lifestyle, however. Epicureans held two basic beliefs which stand in stark contrast to the message Paul preached to the Areopagus. These beliefs were thought to provide the basis for a tranquil life.

First, although Epicureans believed in the existence of the gods, they believed the gods had no interest in the affairs of people. Epicurus taught that the gods were very much like the Epicureans; they were examples of the ideal tranquil life. Although Epicureans might participate in religious ceremonies and “honour the gods for their excellence,”[{14}](#) they didn’t seek the gods’ favor through sacrifice.

A second key belief was the denial of the afterlife. Epicurus taught that after death comes extinction. According to their cosmogony, the world was created when atoms, falling through space, began to collide and form bodies. Like the heavenly bodies, we also are merely material beings. When we die, our material bodies decay and we no longer exist.[{15}](#) Thus, there was no fear of judgment in an afterlife.

Stoicism

As Paul mingled with the people in the Athenian Agora, he spoke not only with Epicureans, but with Stoics as well.

Stoicism was a school of philosophy founded by Zeno of Cyprus who lived from 335 to 263 BC. During a time of political instability, Stoicism “provided a means for maintaining tranquility amid the struggles of life.”[{16}](#) As with Epicurus, freedom from fear was a motivating force in Zeno’s thought.[{17}](#)

What did the Stoics believe that released them from fear? Stoicism changed over the centuries, but this is a good general description.

While the Epicureans believed the gods didn’t get involved in the affairs of people on earth, Stoics denied the existence of personal gods altogether.

Stoics believed the—universe began with fire that differentiated itself into the other basic elements of water, air, and earth. The universe was composed purely of matter. The coarser matter made up the physical bodies we see. The finer matter was defused throughout everything and held everything together. This they called *logos* (reason) or sometimes breath or spirit or even fire. The idea of *logos* meant there was a rational principle operating in the universe.

Because the universe was thought to be ordered by an inbuilt *principle* and not by a *mind*, Stoics were deterministic. This raises a question, though. If everything was determined, what would that mean for ethics? Virtue was of supreme importance for Stoics. How could one choose the good if one's actions are determined? One answer given was this: while *people* had the freedom to choose, the universe would do what it was determined to do. But if one wanted to live well, one had to live rationally in keeping with the rational order of the universe. To do otherwise was to make oneself miserable.

Some Stoics believed that the universe would one day erupt in a great fire from which would come another universe. Others thought the universe was eternal. Some believed that in future universes, people would repeat their lives over and over. Others believed that death was the end of a person's existence. In either case, there was no immortality as we understand it.

Thus, Stoics sought peace in their troubled times by denying the existence of meddling gods and an afterlife that would bring judgment.

Paul's Speech

When Paul was allowed to speak before the Areopagus, he made a strategic move. By pointing to the altar to the unknown god, and later referring to the comments of the Greeks' own poets, he averted the charge of introducing new gods. At least on the surface!

Having brought their admitted ignorance to light, Paul told them about the true God. His declaration that a personal God made the heavens and the earth was a direct challenge to the Epicureans and Stoics. His announcement that God didn't live in temples or need the service of people was a challenge to the practices of the religious Greeks.

Paul told them that God wasn't far off and unknown. The phrase "in him we live, and move, and have our being," which refers to Zeus, likely comes from Epimenides of Crete. The line, "we are his offspring," is found in a poem by Aratus.[{18}](#) Paul wasn't equating Zeus with God, but was telling them *which* God they were really near to.

Then Paul delivered a charge to the people. God was overlooking their time of ignorance and calling them to repent.[{19}](#) This was more than simply a call to a virtuous life as with the philosophers or a call to perform the required sacrifices to the gods. This repentance was necessary, Paul said, for God has set a time to judge the world through His appointed man, and that judgment is assured by the raising of that man from the dead. (2:26)

This was too much for the people of Athens for a few reasons. First, Paul presented an entirely different cosmology. History, he told them, was bound by the creation of God on one end and the judgment of God on the other. Second, there was no room for a historical resurrection in Greek thought. The dyings and risings of their gods didn't occur in space-time history.

By attacking the Greeks' religion, Paul attacked the foundations of their whole cultural structure. New Testament scholar Kavin Rowe writes that, because religion was so interwoven with the rest of life, Paul's visit to Athens –and to Lystra, Philippi, and Ephesus as well–"[displays] . . . the collision between two different ways of life."[{20}](#)

The gospel we proclaim doesn't just lay claim to our religious beliefs. It affects our entire lives. Paul knew what was central to the Greeks, what was the core issue that had to be addressed. Likewise, we need to know the fundamental worldview beliefs of our neighbors and how to address them with an approach that will get us a hearing.

Notes

1. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 349.
2. Acts 13 gives a good picture of how Paul presented the gospel to his fellow Jews.
3. The Web site Ancient Athens 3D gives an interesting visual representation of the Agora, the marketplace, as it looked in Paul's day. ancientathens3d.com/romagoralEn.htm.
4. Bruce, *Acts*, 351, n. 20.
5. Charles Carter and Ralph Earle, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 256, and Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostle," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., J.D. Douglas, assoc. ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976-1992), CD.
6. See C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 31.
7. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, "Attica", 1:24:1, written c. AD 160, www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/pausanias-bk1.html
8. Bertil Edgar Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis, vol. 21 (Uppsala, 1955), 245, quoted in Everett Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 270. See also the discussion in Carter and Earle, *Acts*, 259.
9. This may seem inconsistent. But one must keep in mind that religion wasn't one aspect of life that was clearly distinguishable from the rest. Life was all of a piece in the ancient world.
10. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 233.
11. Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge, 1998), 40.
12. Ibid.
13. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, quoted in Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, bk. 1, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1985), 407-08.

14. Copleston, *History*, 406.
15. Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 42.
16. Kelly James Clark, Richard Lints, and James K.A. Smith, *101 Key Terms in Philosophy and Their Importance for Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), s.v. "Stoicism."
17. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 333.
18. Carter and Earle note that this line also appears in Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus. I credited Aratus with the line because F. F. Bruce notes that Kirsopp Lake "points out that the immediately following lines of Aratus's poem have 'a strong general resemblance to v. 26 of the Areopagitica'" (Bruce, *Acts*, 360, n. 50). It could be that Aratus got it from Cleanthes (cf. Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 37-38).
19. Some Christians hold that the Greek word for "repent," *metanoēō*, means merely to change one's mind. This sometimes comes up in Lordship salvation debates. The basic meanings of the two parts of the word aren't sufficient for understanding its use. *Metanoēō*, in the New Testament, denotes conversion. "The predominantly intellectual understanding of *metanoēō* as change of mind plays very little part in the NT. Rather the decision by the whole man to turn round is stressed. It is clear that we are concerned neither with a purely outward turning nor with a merely intellectual change of ideas." Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1975), s.v., "Conversion, 358).
20. Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 50, 51.

The Dead Sea Scrolls Shed Light on the Accuracy of our Bible

Dr. Patrick Zukeran reviews the discovery of and important historical findings from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The texts discovered provide clear evidence as to the accuracy of our version of the Old Testament and the care with which it was preserved.

The Story of the Scrolls

Worship at the sacred Jerusalem Temple had become corrupt, with seemingly little hope for reform. A group of devoted Jews removed themselves from the mainstream and began a monastic life in the Judean desert. Their studies of the Old Testament Scriptures led them to believe that God's judgment upon Jerusalem was imminent and that the anointed one would return to restore the nation of Israel and purify their worship. Anticipating this moment, the Essenes retreated into the Qumran desert to await the return of their Messiah. This community, which began in the third century B.C., devoted their days to the study and copying of sacred Scripture as well as theological and sectarian works.

As tensions between the Jews and Romans increased, the community hid their valuable scrolls in caves along the Dead Sea to protect them from the invading armies. Their hope was that one day the scrolls would be retrieved and restored to the nation of Israel. In A.D. 70, the Roman general Titus invaded Israel and destroyed the city of Jerusalem along with its treasured Temple. It is at this time that the Qumran community was overrun and occupied by the Roman army. The scrolls remained hidden for the next two thousand years.

In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd named Muhammad (Ahmed el-Dhib) was searching for his lost goat and came upon a small opening of a cave. Thinking that his goat may have fallen into the cave, he threw rocks into the opening. Instead of hearing a startled goat, he heard the shattering of clay pottery. Lowering himself into the cave, he discovered several sealed jars. He opened them hoping to find treasure. To his disappointment, he found them to contain leather scrolls. He collected seven of the best scrolls and left the other fragments scattered on the ground.

Muhammad eventually brought some of the scrolls to a cobbler and antiquities dealer in Bethlehem named Khando. Khando, thinking the scrolls were written in Syriac, brought them to a Syrian Orthodox Archbishop named Mar (Athanasius) Samuel. Mar Samuel recognized that the scrolls were written in Hebrew and suspected they may be very ancient and valuable. He eventually had the scrolls examined by John Trevor at the American School of Oriental Research (ASOR). Trevor contacted the world's foremost Middle East archaeologist, Dr. William Albright, and together these men confirmed the antiquity of the scrolls and dated them to sometime between the first and second century B.C.

After the initial discovery, archaeologists searched other nearby caves between 1952 and 1956. They found ten other caves that contained thousands of ancient documents as well. One of the greatest treasures of ancient manuscripts had been discovered: the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Date and Contents of the Scrolls

Scholars were anxious to confirm that these Dead Sea Scrolls were the most ancient of all Old Testament manuscripts in the Hebrew language. Three types of dating tools were used: tools from archaeology, from the study of ancient languages, called paleography and orthography, and the carbon-14 dating method. Each can derive accurate results. When all the methods arrive

at the same conclusion, there is an increased reliability in the dating.

Archaeologists studied the pottery, coins, graves, and garments at Khirbet Qumran, where the Essenes lived. They arrived at a date ranging from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D. Paleographers studied the style of writing and arrived at dates ranging from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. Scientists, using the radiocarbon dating method, dated the scrolls to range from the fourth century B.C. to the first century A.D. Since all the methods came to a similar conclusion, scholars are very confident in their assigned date for the texts. The scrolls date as early as the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. {1}

Eleven caves were discovered containing nearly 1,100 ancient documents which included several scrolls and more than 100,000 fragments. {2} Fragments from every Old Testament book except for the book of Esther were discovered. Other works included apocryphal books, commentaries, manuals of discipline for the Qumran community, and theological texts. The majority of the texts were written in the Hebrew language, but there were also manuscripts written in Aramaic and Greek. {3}

Among the eleven caves, Cave 1, which was excavated in 1949, and Cave 4, excavated in 1952, proved to be the most productive caves. One of the most significant discoveries was a well-preserved scroll of the entire book of Isaiah.

The famous Copper Scrolls were discovered in Cave 3 in 1952. Unlike most of the scrolls that were written on leather or parchment, these were written on copper and provided directions to sixty-four sites around Jerusalem that were said to contain hidden treasure. So far, no treasure has been found at the sites that have been investigated.

The oldest known piece of biblical Hebrew is a fragment from the book of Samuel discovered in Cave 4, and is dated from the

third century B.C. [{4}](#) The War Scroll found in Caves 1 and 4 is an eschatological text describing a forty-year war between the Sons of Light and the evil Sons of Darkness. The Temple Scroll discovered in Cave 11 is the largest and describes a future Temple in Jerusalem that will be built at the end of the age.

Indeed, these were the most ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament ever found, and their contents would yield valuable insights to our understanding of Judaism and early Christianity.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text

The Dead Sea Scrolls play a crucial role in assessing the accurate preservation of the Old Testament. With its hundreds of manuscripts from every book except Esther, detailed comparisons can be made with more recent texts.

The Old Testament that we use today is translated from what is called the Masoretic Text. The Masoretes were Jewish scholars who between A.D. 500 and 950 gave the Old Testament the form that we use today. Until the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947, the oldest Hebrew text of the Old Testament was the Masoretic Aleppo Codex which dates to A.D. 935. [{5}](#)

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now had manuscripts that predated the Masoretic Text by about one thousand years. Scholars were anxious to see how the Dead Sea documents would match up with the Masoretic Text. If a significant amount of differences were found, we could conclude that our Old Testament Text had not been well preserved. Critics, along with religious groups such as Muslims and Mormons, often make the claim that the present day Old Testament has been corrupted and is not well preserved. According to these religious groups, this would explain the contradictions between the Old Testament and their religious teachings.

After years of careful study, it has been concluded that the Dead Sea Scrolls give substantial confirmation that our Old Testament has been accurately preserved. The scrolls were found to be almost identical with the Masoretic text. Hebrew Scholar Millar Burrows writes, "It is a matter of wonder that through something like one thousand years the text underwent so little alteration. As I said in my first article on the scroll, 'Herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition.'" [\[6\]](#)

A significant comparison study was conducted with the Isaiah Scroll written around 100 B.C. that was found among the Dead Sea documents and the book of Isaiah found in the Masoretic text. After much research, scholars found that the two texts were practically identical. Most variants were minor spelling differences, and none affected the meaning of the text.

One of the most respected Old Testament scholars, the late Gleason Archer, examined the two Isaiah scrolls found in Cave 1 and wrote, "Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The five percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling." [\[7\]](#)

Despite the thousand year gap, scholars found the Masoretic Text and Dead Sea Scrolls to be nearly identical. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide valuable evidence that the Old Testament had been accurately and carefully preserved.

The Messianic Prophecies and the Scrolls

One of the evidences used in defending the deity of the Christ is the testimony of prophecy. There are over one hundred prophecies regarding Christ in the Old Testament. [\[8\]](#) These prophecies were made centuries before the birth of Christ and

were quite specific in their detail. Skeptics questioned the date of the prophecies and some even charged that they were not recorded until after or at the time of Jesus, and therefore discounted their prophetic nature.

There is strong evidence that the Old Testament canon was completed by 450 B.C. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, is dated about two hundred fifty years before Christ. The translation process occurred during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus who ruled from 285 to 246 B.C. [{9}](#) It can be argued that a complete Hebrew text from which this Greek translation would be derived must have existed prior to the third century B.C.

The Dead Sea Scrolls provided further proof that the Old Testament canon existed prior to the third century B.C. Thousands of manuscript fragments from all the Old Testament books except Esther were found predating Christ's birth, and some date as early as the third century B.C. For example, portions from the book of Samuel date that early, and fragments from Daniel date to the second century B.C. [{10}](#) Portions from the twelve Minor Prophets date from 150 B.C to 25 B.C. [{11}](#) Since the documents were found to be identical with our Masoretic Text, we can be reasonably sure that our Old Testament is the same one that the Essenes were studying and working from.

One of the most important Dead Sea documents is the Isaiah Scroll. This twenty-four foot long scroll is well preserved and contains the complete book of Isaiah. The scroll is dated 100 B.C. and contains one of the clearest and most detailed prophecies of the Messiah in chapter fifty-three, called the "Suffering Servant." Although some Jewish scholars teach that this refers to Israel, a careful reading shows that this prophecy can only refer to Christ.

Here are just a few reasons. The suffering servant is called sinless (53:9), he dies and rises from the dead (53:8-10), and

he suffers and dies for the sins of the people (53:4-6). These characteristics are not true of the nation of Israel. The Isaiah Scroll gives us a manuscript that predates the birth of Christ by a century and contains many of the most important messianic prophecies about Jesus. Skeptics could no longer contend that portions of the book were written after Christ or that first century insertions were added to the text.

Thus, the Dead Sea Scrolls provide further proof that the Old Testament canon was completed by the third century B.C., and that the prophecies foretold of Christ in the Old Testament predated the birth of Christ.

The Messiah and the Scrolls

What kind of Messiah was expected by first century Jews? Critical scholars allege that the idea of a personal Messiah was a later interpretation made by Christians. Instead, they believe that the Messiah was to be the nation of Israel and represented Jewish nationalism.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, written by Old Testament Jews, reveal the messianic expectations of Jews during the time of Christ. Studies have uncovered several parallels to the messianic hope revealed in the New Testament as well as some significant differences. First, they were expecting a personal Messiah rather than a nation or a sense of nationalism. Second, the Messiah would be a descendant of King David. Third, the Messiah would confirm His claims by performing miracles including the resurrection of the dead. Finally, He would be human and yet possess divine attributes.

A manuscript found in Cave 4 entitled the *Messianic Apocalypse*, copied in the first century B.C., describes the anticipated ministry of the Messiah:

For He will honor the pious upon the throne of His eternal kingdom, release the captives, open the eyes of the blind,

lifting up those who are oppressed... For He shall heal the critically wounded, He shall raise the dead, He shall bring good news to the poor.

This passage sounds very similar to the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. In Luke chapter 7:21-22, John the Baptist's disciples come to Jesus and ask him if He is the Messiah. Jesus responds, "Go tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news brought to them."

But, with the similarities there are also differences. Christians have always taught that there is one Messiah while the Essene community believed in two, one an Aaronic or priestly Messiah and the other a Davidic or royal Messiah who leads a war to end the evil age.[{12}](#)

The Essenes were also strict on matters of ceremonial purity while Jesus criticized these laws. He socialized with tax collectors and lepers which was considered defiling by the Jews. Jesus taught us to love one's enemies while the Essenes taught hatred towards theirs. They were strict Sabbatarians, and Jesus often violated this important aspect of the law. The Qumran community rejected the inclusion of women, Gentiles, and sinners, while Christ reached out to these very groups.

The many differences show that the Essenes were not the source of early Christianity as some scholars propose. Rather, Christianity derived its teachings from the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have proven to be a significant discovery, confirming the accurate preservation of our Old Testament text, the messianic prophecies of Christ, and valuable insight into first century Judaism.

Two Major Prophets and the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls have been an asset in the debate regarding two major and well disputed books of the Old Testament, Daniel and Isaiah. Conservative scholars maintained that Daniel was written in the sixth century B.C. as the author declares in the first chapter. The New Testament writers treated Daniel as a prophetic book with predictive prophecies. Liberal scholars began teaching in the eighteenth century that it was written in the Maccabean Period or the second century B.C. If they are correct, Daniel would not be a prophetic book that predicted the rise of Persia, Greece, and Rome.

Before the discovery of the scrolls, critical scholars argued that the Aramaic language used in Daniel was from a time no earlier than 167 B.C. during the Maccabean period. Other scholars, such as well-respected archaeologist Kenneth Kitchen, studied Daniel and found that ninety percent of Daniel's Aramaic vocabulary was used in documents from the fifth century B.C. or earlier.[\[13\]](#) The Dead Sea Scrolls revealed that Kitchen's conclusion was well founded. The Aramaic language used in the Dead Sea Scrolls proved to be very different from that found in the book of Daniel. Old Testament scholars have concluded that the Aramaic in Daniel is closer to the form used in the fourth and fifth century B.C. than to the second century B.C.

Critical scholars challenged the view that Isaiah was written by a single author. Many contended that the first thirty-nine chapters were written by one author in the eighth century B.C., and the final twenty-six chapters were written in the post-Exilic period. The reason for this is that there are some significant differences in the style and content between the two sections. If this were true, Isaiah's prophecies of Babylon in the later chapters would not have been predictive

prophecies but written after the events occurred.

With the discovery of the Isaiah Scroll at Qumran, scholars on both sides were eager to see if the evidence would favor their position. The Isaiah Scroll revealed no break or demarcation between the two major sections of Isaiah. The scribe was not aware of any change in authorship or division of the book.[{14}](#) Ben Sira (second century B.C.), Josephus, and the New Testament writers regarded Isaiah as written by a single author and containing predictive prophecy.[{15}](#) The Dead Sea Scrolls added to the case for the unity and prophetic character of Isaiah.

Inventory of the Scrolls

The following is a brief inventory provided by Dr. Gleason Archer of the discoveries made in each of the Dead Sea caves.[{16}](#)

Cave 1 was the first cave discovered and excavated in 1949. Among the discoveries was found the Isaiah Scroll containing a well-preserved scroll of the entire book of Isaiah. Fragments were found from the other Old Testament books which included Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel, Ezekiel, and Psalms. Non-biblical books included the Book of Enoch, Sayings of Moses, Book of Jubilee, Book of Noah, Testament of Levi and the Wisdom of Solomon. Fragments from commentaries on Psalms, Micah, and Zephaniah were also discovered.

Cave 2 was excavated in 1952. Hundreds of fragments were discovered, including remains from the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Job, Psalms and Ruth.

Cave 3 was excavated in 1952. Here archaeologists found the famous Copper Scrolls. These scrolls contained directions to sixty-four sites containing hidden treasures located around Jerusalem. So far, no treasure has been found at the sites

investigated.

Cave 4, excavated in 1952, proved to be one of the most productive. Thousands of fragments were recovered from nearly four hundred manuscripts. Hundreds of fragments from every Old Testament book were discovered with the exception of the Book of Esther. The fragment from Samuel labeled 4Qsam^[17] is believed to be the oldest known piece of biblical Hebrew, dating from the third century B.C. Also found were fragments of commentaries on the Psalms, Isaiah, and Nahum. The entire collection of Cave 4 is believed to represent the scope of the Essene library.

Cave 5 was excavated in 1952 and fragments from some Old Testament books along with the book of Tobit were found.

Cave 6 excavated in 1952 uncovered papyrus fragments of Daniel, 1 and 2 Kings and some other Essene literature.

Caves 7-10 yielded finds of interest for archaeologists but had little relevance for biblical studies.

Cave 11 was excavated in 1956. It exposed well-preserved copies from some of the Psalms, including the apocryphal Psalm 151. In addition, a well-preserved scroll of part of Leviticus was found, and fragments of an Apocalypse of the New Jerusalem, an Aramaic Targum or paraphrase of Job, was also discovered.

Indeed these were the most ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament ever found, and their contents would soon reveal insights that would impact Judaism and Christianity.

Notes

1. James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco, CA.: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 20-32.
2. Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest

House Publishers, 1997), 278.

3. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1985), 513-517.

4. Vanderkam and Flint, 115.

5. Price, 280.

6. Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 304, quoted in Norman Geisler and William Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 367.

7. Archer, 25.

8. J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1984), 665-670.

9. Geisler and Nix, 503-504.

10. Ibid., 137.

11. Ibid., 138-139.

12. Vanderkam and Flint, 265-266.

13. Randall Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House, 1996), 162.

14. Ibid., 154-155.

15. Ibid., 156-157.

16. Archer, 513-517.

17. Price, 162.

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The New Testament: Can I Trust It?

Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright examine how the New Testament documents measure up when subjected to standard tests for historical reliability.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

“How can any well-educated person believe the New Testament? It was written so long after the events it records that we can’t possibly trust it as historically reliable.” This is a common question on the university campus and deserves an honest answer.

How does one determine the authenticity of an ancient book? C. Sanders, a military historian, outlines three basic tests used by historians and literary critics.^{1} These are the internal, external and bibliographic tests. Let’s consider briefly how the New Testament stands up to each one.

1. The Internal Test

Here our question concerns the trustworthiness of the writers as revealed by the text itself. One of the chief issues is whether or not we have eyewitness testimony. The New Testament

accounts of the life of Christ were written by eyewitnesses or by people relating the accounts of the eyewitnesses of the actual events. John wrote, "what we have seen and heard [concerning Christ], we proclaim to you also." {2} Peter stated that he and his associates were "eyewitnesses of His majesty." {3} Luke claimed that his gospel was based on accounts compiled from eyewitnesses. {4} In a court of law, eyewitness testimony is the most reliable kind.

Another issue in the internal test is the consistency of the reports. If two writers present testimony that is contradictory, doubt is cast on the integrity of one or both records.

Many have charged that the New Testament contains contradictions. To deal with such charges, it is important to understand that "contrary" is defined by Webster as "a proposition so related to another that, though both may be false, they cannot both be true." Thus, the statement, "Joe and Bill are in this room" contradicts the statement, "Only Joe is in this room." It does not, however, contradict the statement, "Joe is in this room." *Omission does not necessarily constitute contradiction.*

With this in mind, consider several alleged New Testament contradictions. Some observe that Luke writes of two angels at the tomb of Jesus after the resurrection {5} while Matthew mentions "an angel." {6} The observation of the statements is accurate, but the interpretation of them as contraries is not. If Matthew explicitly stated that only one angel was present at that time, the two accounts would be dissonant. As it is, they are harmonious.

Others note an apparent discrepancy in the accounts of the birth of Jesus. Hans Conzelmann, a German theologian, writing of Matthew's and Luke's accounts of the nativity, states that "in every detail they disagree." {7} He focuses on apparent geographical inconsistencies.

Simple observation shows that the two accounts do differ. Luke tells of Joseph and Mary starting in Nazareth and traveling to Bethlehem (for the census and the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem). He then records the family's return to Nazareth.[{8}](#) Matthew's account begins with the couple in Bethlehem (and Jesus' birth there) and records their flight into Egypt to escape King Herod's wrath, and relates their travel to Nazareth after Herod's death.[{9}](#)

Contradictory vs. Complementary

Conzelmann regards these details as contradictory, but are they? The Gospels never claim to be exhaustive records of the life of Christ. Any biographer must of necessity be selective. Could not Matthew have chosen to omit the census journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem and Luke the flight into Egypt? As such, the accounts are complementary, rather than contradictory.[{10}](#)

Often such critics seem unable to carefully discern the content of biblical texts because of their own negative presuppositions and lofty speculations. One is inclined to agree with C. S. Lewis' criticism of these skeptics when he writes, "These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence (that they cannot) is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves."[{11}](#) Consider a final (and more difficult) example of alleged inconsistency. Many have noted a difference between the synoptic accounts (those in Matthew, Mark and Luke) and John's account of the dating of the death of Jesus. Specifically, the issue concerns the chronological relationship of the crucifixion to the celebration of the Passover meal by the Jews. Mark refers to some Jews observing the Passover the evening before the crucifixion.[{12}](#) John seems to indicate a Passover celebration *after* the crucifixion.[{13}](#) In a recent definitive article, Dr. Harold Hoehner of Dallas Theological Seminary solves the puzzle.[{14}](#) Citing evidence from the *Mishnah* and the scholars

Strock-Billerbock, Hoehner shows that the Pharisees and Sadducees (two contemporary religious parties) disagreed about the day of the week on which the Passover should fall. The result was that the Pharisees celebrated the Passover one day before the Sadducees did. This makes it entirely plausible that the synoptics use the reckoning of the Pharisees, while John presents that of the Sadducees, thus accounting for the difference.

2. External Test

This test asks whether other historical and archaeological materials confirm or deny the internal testimony provided by the documents themselves. Several authors of antiquity wrote of Jesus as a person of history. Among them were Tacitus, Josephus, Suetonius, and Pliny the Younger.^{15} Sir William Ramsey, an eminent archaeologist, once held that Luke's writings were not historically sound. His own subsequent investigation of near-eastern archaeology forced him to reverse his position and conclude that "Luke is a historian of the first rank."^{16}

Nelson Glueck, former president of Jewish Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, one of the greatest archaeologists, and a Jew, wrote: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."^{17}

Archaeological Evidence

Consider a few examples of archaeological confirmation of the New Testament. In I Corinthians, Paul refers to the meat market in Corinth.^{18} An inscription from ancient Corinth has been discovered which refers to the "meat market."^{19} Luke refers to the temple of Artemis in Ephesus and speaks of a riot that occurred in a theater in the same city.^{20} The temple was excavated in 1803 and measured 100 by 340 feet.^{21} Twentieth-century Austrian archaeologists unearthed the theater and found it could hold nearly 25,000 people.^{22}

Mark writes of Jesus healing a blind man as He left Jericho.[{23}](#) Luke, apparently writing of the same event, says it happened while Jesus was *approaching* Jericho.[{24}](#)

Excavations in 1907-09 by Ernest Sellin, of the German Oriental Society, showed that there were “twin cities” of Jericho in Jesus’ time—an old Jewish city and a Roman city separated by about a mile.[{25}](#) Apparently Mark referred to one and Luke referred to the other, and the incident occurred as Jesus traveled between the two.

William F. Albright, one of the world’s leading biblical archaeologists, adds a helpful comment: “We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date of between A.D. 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today.”[{26}](#) This statement is crucial because it means that some of Christ’s opponents, who were living when He was on earth, were undoubtedly still around when the New Testament books were penned. Their presence would have prompted the New Testament writers to give careful attention to the veracity of the statements. And we can be certain that if any errors were made in their accounts the opponents of Christ (of which there were many) would have been quick to expose them.

3. Bibliographic Test

This final test is necessary because we do not possess the original manuscripts of most ancient documents. The question that must be asked, then, is: “How many early copies do we have and how close in time are they to the original?” A. T. Robertson, author of one of the most comprehensive grammars of New Testament Greek, wrote, “...we have 13,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament.”[{27}](#) Many of these copies are dated only a short time (80-400 years) after the original.

When the New Testament documents are compared with other

writings of antiquity for the numbers of early copies and the chronological proximity of the copies to the original, the New Testament is far superior. (For instance, we have only 10 good copies of *Gallic Wars* and they are 1,000 years after the original; seven copies of Plato's *Tetralogies*, 1,200 years after the original. Similar results hold for the writings of Thucydides, Herodotus and a host of others.)[\[28\]](#)

The late Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum, was one of the leading authorities on the reliability of ancient manuscripts. He drew this conclusion:

"The interval then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."[\[29\]](#)

If one concludes that the New Testament documents are historically reliable, it stands to reason that he should seriously consider the message they present. In the Old Testament and the New, the message of the Bible is the message of Jesus Christ. And He offers an abundant and eternal life to anyone who will consider and respond to His claims: "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life...and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."[\[30\]](#)

Notes

1. Sanders, C. *Introduction to Research in English Literary History* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), pp. 143ff; quoted in Montgomery, John. "History and Christianity," *His Magazine* reprint, Chicago, December 1964-March 1965, pp. 6-9.

2. I John 1:3.
3. 11 Peter 1:16.
4. Luke 1:1-3.
5. Luke 24:1-4.
6. Matthew 28:1-8.
7. Conzelmann, Hans. *Jesus*. The classic article from the RGG expanded and updated (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), pp. 26-27.
8. Luke 1:26, 2:40.
9. Matthew 2:1-23.
10. Cheney, Johnston. *The Life of Christ in Stereo*. (Portland, OR: Western Seminary Press, 1971), pp. 6-14, 243.
11. Hooper, Walter (ed.). *Christian Reflections* (William B. Eerdmans) quoted in McDowell, Josh. *More Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1975), p. 342.
12. Mark 14:12ff.
13. John 18:28.
14. Hoehner, Harold W. "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, Part IV" *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, July, 1974), pp. 241-264.
15. Bruce, F. F. *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp.19-41.
16. Ramsay, W.M. *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*. (1915), p. 222; quoted in Bruce, F. F. *The New Testament Documents – Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 91.

17. Glueck, Nelson. *Rivers in the Desert History of Negev*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society of America, 1969); quoted in McDowell, Josh. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1972), p. 68.
18. 1 Corinthians 10:25.
19. Bruce, *Christian Origins*. p 200.
20. Acts 19:27-29.
21. Free, Joseph P. *Archaeology and Bible History*. (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1951), p.324.
22. Ibid.
23. Mark 10:46-52.
24. Luke 18:35 43.
25. Free, op cit, p. 295; the old Jewish Jericho may have been a "ghost town" or merely a mound in Jesus' day.
26. Albright, William. *Recent Discoveries in Biblical Lands*. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1955), p. 136; quoted in McDowell, op. cit., p. 65.
27. Robertson, A T., *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1925), p. 70; quoted in Montgomery, op. cit., p. 6.
28. McDowell, op. cit., pp. 46-56; Montgomery, op. cit., p. 6; Bruce, op. cit., pp. 10-20.
29. Kenyon, F. G. *The Bible and Archaeology*. (New York and London: Harper, 1940), pp. 288, 89; quoted in Montgomery, op. cit., p. 6.
30. John 8:12, 32.

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