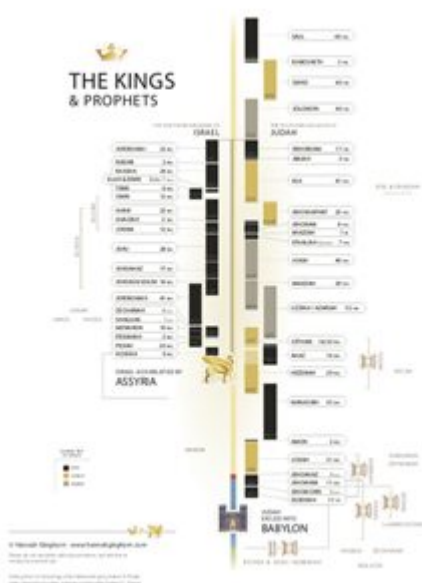


The Reliability of Kings and Chronicles

Dr. Michael Gleghorn shows how the apparent contradictions of two Old Testament historical books can be explained.



Over the past year and a half my wife has been working on what might be called a “visual Bible.” By training and profession my wife, Hannah, is a [graphic designer](#). She tends to understand things best when she can visualize them in some way. Hence, when she began team-teaching a women’s Bible study that covers the entire Bible in just two years, she felt the need to create visuals of what she was studying in order to help her grasp some of the key points in a single glance. Thus, week-by-week, as she readied herself for class, she also prepared a wide array of graphically-designed visuals of the written contents of Scripture.



Everything was going fairly well until she came to the Old Testament books of Kings and Chronicles. Since these books give us a great deal of

information about the kings of Israel and Judah, including the order in which they reigned, the lengths of their reigns, and so on, she decided to create some charts that would present all of this information visually. She had no idea that she was about to enter one of the most baffling and perplexing issues of biblical chronology!

To put it bluntly, the chronology of Kings and Chronicles initially appears to be a hopelessly muddled, and even downright contradictory, mess! Examining this material as an intelligent layperson, Hannah could make no sense of it at all. It also meant that she could not represent the material in a visually coherent way.

Feeling increasingly frustrated, she asked if I knew of any books that dealt with these problems. Although this is an area I know little about, I remembered a book which (I had heard) handled these issues quite well. That book, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, by Edwin Thiele, offered her some much-needed help in making sense of the apparently confused and contradictory information in the books of Kings and Chronicles.[\[2\]](#) Although this book did not solve *all* the difficulties she was facing, it did bring a great deal of order to the apparent chaos of this section of Scripture.

In the remainder of this article we'll first consider the problems posed by "the mysterious numbers of the Hebrew kings." Afterward, we'll briefly look at how all these problems have been solved by contemporary scholars, so that what was previously thought of as a hopeless muddle is instead a testimony to the accuracy of the historical parts of the Old Testament.

Some Difficulties with Old Testament Chronology

In the original preface to *The Mysterious Numbers of the*

Hebrew Kings, Edwin Thiele began his discussion with these words:

For more than two thousand years Hebrew chronology has been a serious problem for Old Testament scholars. Every effort to weave the chronological data of the kings of Israel and Judah into some sort of harmonious scheme seemed doomed to failure. The numbers for the one kingdom could not, it seemed, be made to agree with the numbers of the other.[\[3\]](#)

Indeed, the difficulties with Old Testament chronology at this point were so great that many scholars simply assumed that the biblical records were unreliable. But why? What was it about these numbers that made so many scholars think they were in error?

Since we'll later be discussing the two different kingdoms of Israel and Judah, let's begin by considering two *imaginary* kingdoms, both of which celebrate a new king coming to the throne on March 1 of the same year. In other words, both kings begin their reigns on exactly the same day. Now one would probably think that, as the ensuing years go by, court historians from both kingdoms would agree about how many years each of these kings have ruled their kingdoms. But in fact, this is not necessarily true.

Suppose that one of these kingdoms counts the first year of their new king's reign from his first day on the throne. If he began his reign on March 1 of the year 2000, then this is considered the first year of his reign.[\[4\]](#) On January 1, 2001, he thus begins the *second* year of his reign. But suppose that in the *other* kingdom, the year 2000 is regarded as the *last* year of the *prior* king's reign. In this kingdom, then, even though a new king began to reign in the year 2000, the official first year of his reign is counted from the beginning of the new year, January 1, 2001.[\[5\]](#)

Hence, although both kings began to rule on precisely the same

day, the years of their reigns are counted differently. The first king begins his *second* year of rule on January 1, 2001, while the second king only begins his *first* official year at that time. This is just one of *many* issues that complicate the dating of the kings of Israel and Judah as they're recorded for us in the Bible. Once these issues are taken into account, however, a completely harmonious chronology of these kings becomes possible. Let's now consider a biblical example.

A Biblical Case Study

We've been looking at some of the chronological puzzles in the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles. With apologies for the unavoidable names and numbers which follow, let's consider an example.

After the ten tribes split from Judah and Benjamin to form the northern kingdom of Israel, their first ruler was Jeroboam. Jeroboam was followed by his son Nadab. With Nadab we have a series of synchronisms with the long reign of Asa of the southern kingdom, Judah. The first synchronism is that Nadab began to reign in year 2 of Asa.[{6}](#) The Bible then says that Nadab reigned two years and died in year 3 of Asa.[{7}](#) But it is only one year from Asa's second year to his third year, so how could Nadab begin in year 2 of Asa, reign two years, and die in Asa's 3rd year? Next, Baasha, who killed Nadab, is said to reign 24 years starting in year 3 of Asa;[{8}](#) this should surely put his end, 24 years later, in Asa's year 27. But the Bible says that Baasha died in year 26 of Asa, not year 27.[{9}](#) Baasha's son, Elah, reigned two years, and his death was not in year 28 of Asa (that is, 26 plus 2), but in year 27.[{10}](#)

At this point we have a decision to make. We could decide that all of this shows that the Bible is not to be trusted in its numerical and historical statements. This is the path taken by critics who say that these parts of the Bible were invented many years later than the happenings they describe. Or, we

could give the authors of these texts the benefit of the doubt and consider that these texts show a consistent pattern. The pattern is that the northern kingdom was counting the years of reign for their kings in the fashion mentioned previously, where a king could count the year in which he came to the throne as his first year of reign, so that even if he only reigned exactly one year, he would be given credit for the calendar year in which he became king and also for the calendar year in which he died. This is a method that was used by other Near Eastern kingdoms. With this second approach, success has been achieved in reconstructing the history and exact chronology of the Hebrew kingdom period. We will now consider other factors necessary in understanding these so-called “mysterious numbers” of the Bible.

Co-regencies and Rival Reigns

We’ve seen a pattern in the chronological numbers that the Bible gives for the first years of the divided kingdom. We saw that, in these early years at least, the northern kingdom was counting the year that a king died twice; once for him, and once for his successor, so that one year must be subtracted from a reign length when counting elapsed time. By carefully considering the facts as given in the Bible itself, we can determine when the two kingdoms were using this method of counting, and when they were using the other method in which a king’s first year was not counted until he reigned a full calendar year.

The Bible also gives us sufficient information to determine when there was a co-regency. The word “co-regency” is not a Biblical word, but the principle is there. A co-regency begins when the reigning king appoints one of his sons as his successor. This was always a smart thing to do. We have an example in our own time. When Kim Jong Il, the dictator of North Korea, became ill he appointed his son, Kim Jong Un, as his successor so there wouldn’t be any trouble when he died.

In the Bible, after two of David's sons, Absalom and then Adonijah, tried to usurp the kingdom from their father, the prophet Nathan told David to make it known who was to be his successor. David then had Nathan perform a public anointing of Solomon.[{11}](#) Another example of a co-regency is when Uzziah was struck with leprosy and had to live in a separate house, so that his son Jotham became the real ruler of the land.[{12}](#)

Other co-regencies are not quite so obvious, but the books of Kings and Chronicles always give us enough information so that we can determine when the years of a king's reign are being measured from the start of a sole reign or from the start of a co-regency. For the northern kingdom, Israel, there are also two cases of a rival reign, similar to the rival reigns of Egyptian pharaohs that Egyptologists take into account when reconstructing the chronology of Egypt. As an example, Omri, the father of Ahab, is said to have reigned for twelve years,[{13}](#) but this only makes sense if the twelve years includes the five years in which he had a rival, Tibni, reigning in a different capital.[{14}](#) Co-regencies and rival reigns are the second major key to understanding the chronology of the Hebrew kingdom period.

The Accuracy of Kings and Chronicles

In previous sections we considered two factors to take into account when interpreting the rich chronological data of Kings and Chronicles. The first is that there were two ways of counting the first year of a king's reign; whether it was to be counted twice, once for him and once for the king who died in that year, or just once so that the king's first year was his first full year of reign. The second factor was that occasionally a king's reign was measured from the start of a co-regency or rival reign rather than from the start of his sole reign. Both principles were applied, although not consistently, by some earlier interpreters.[{15}](#) A third principle, discovered by Edwin Thiele, however, was not used

by these interpreters. This principle showed that the southern kingdom, Judah, started counting the years of a king's reign in the fall month of Tishri, while the northern kingdom, Israel, started six months earlier in the spring month of Nisan. Many earlier interpreters thought that both kingdoms started their year in Nisan, but this produced several small errors that they were unable to reconcile. Unknown to Thiele, all three of these principles had been previously found back in the 1920s by a Belgian scholar.[\[16\]](#) But Thiele worked out things in a more satisfactory way, and so his *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* should be the starting place for understanding the chronology of the kingdom period.

Regrettably, however, Thiele did not recognize that a problem he had with the texts of 2 Kings 18 is explained by a co-regency between Ahaz and Hezekiah.[\[17\]](#) His chronology also needed slight adjustments for the reign of Solomon and for the end of the kingdom period.[\[18\]](#) In our own studies we have followed the corrections to Thiele published in several articles by Rodger Young.[\[19\]](#) Young responds to the specious claim that the harmony now evident in the chronology of the kingdom period might be the result of a clever manipulation of the data by those who follow the principles outlined by Thiele. Young answers, "The complexities of 124 exact synchronisms, reign lengths, and dates in 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah and Ezekiel negate that possibility unless the data were historically authentic."[\[20\]](#) With the proper understanding of the methods used by the ancient authors, the chronological data of Kings and Chronicles offer a remarkable testimony to the strict accuracy of the Bible's 400-year history of the two Hebrew kingdoms.

Notes

1. This article was written by Michael Gleghorn and Rodger Young. Gleghorn's initial inspiration for writing this program resulted from conversations with his wife, who struggled with the "mysterious numbers" in Kings and Chronicles for quite

some time before encountering the help provided in the book by Edwin Thiele and, more particularly, the articles of Rodger Young. Mr. Young received a B.A. degree from Reed College, B.A. and M.A. degrees in mathematics from Oxford University, and has done graduate work in theology and biblical languages at the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City. He retired from IBM in 2003 and began writing about OT chronology. He and his wife attend the West Overland Bible Church in the St. Louis area.

2. Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, New rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994).

3. Ibid., 15.

4. Thiele describes this as “nonaccession-year dating” or “antedating”. See Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 231.

5. Thiele terms this “accession-year dating” or “postdating.” See Ibid.

6. 1 Kings 15:25.

7. 1 Kings 15:25, 28.

8. 1 Kings 15:27, 33.

9. 1 Kings 16:8.

10. 1 Kings 16:8, 15.

11. 1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 23:1.

12. 1 Kings 15:5.

13. 1 Kings 16:23.

14. 1 Kings 16:21-23.

15. For example, James Ussher.

16. Valerius Coucke, “Chronologie des rois de Juda et d’Israël,” *Revue Benedictine* 37 (1925): 325-64; idem, “Chronologie biblique” in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. Louis Pirot, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1928), cols. 1245-79.

17. According to Rodger Young, “Several authors put forth this rather obvious solution, among whom were Kenneth Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell, Siegfried Horn, Harold Stigers, R. K. Harrison, Leslie McFall, and Eugene Merrill.” Of course, we could also add Rodger Young’s name to this list as well. For details see Young, “When Was Samaria Captured? The Need for

Precision in Biblical Chronologies," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (2004): 580.

18. For a one-year correction to Thiele's dates for Solomon through Athaliah, see Rodger C. Young, "When Did Solomon Die?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 4 (2003): 589-603. By showing that the dates of Solomon through Athaliah must be moved one year earlier than in Thiele's chronology, Young has resolved a problem that Thiele addressed by revisions in the third and final edition of *Mysterious Numbers*, but Thiele's revisions merely moved his problem with the reign of Jehoshaphat to the reign of Athaliah. Among those accepting Young's solution of the problem are Leslie McFall, "The Chronology of Saul and David," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 4 (2010): 533 (chart), and Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 133-34, 138. Young has also written extensively on why 587 BC, not Thiele's 586 BC, is the correct date for the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. See "When Did Jerusalem Fall?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 1 (2004): 21-38; "Ezekiel 40:1 as a Corrective for Seven Wrong Ideas in Biblical Interpretation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 2 (2006): 267-70.

19. For those who are interested in pursuing these matters further, please see "Rodger Young's Papers on Chronology" here: www.rcyoung.org/papers.html

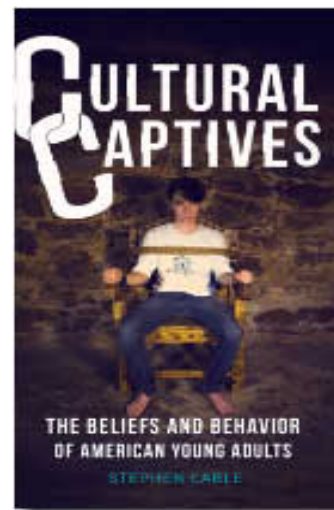
20. Rodger C. Young, "Inductive and Deductive Methods as Applied to OT Chronology," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 18, no. 2 (2007): 116.

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Trend Indicates Over Half of Emerging Adults Will Identify as Non-Christian by 2020

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

One of the dismaying trends I reported on in my book, *Cultural Captives*, was the significant increase in the percentage of people who indicated that their religion was atheist, agnostic, or nothing at all. I referred to this group collectively as the **“nones”** (those with “no religious affiliation”). The percentage of emerging adults (i.e., 18- to 29-year-olds) who self-identified as **“nones”** in 2008 was 25% of the population. This level is a tremendous increase from the 1990 level of 11%.



Now, we have later results from both the General Social Survey (GSS) and the Pew Research Center. Both surveys show another significant increase in the percentage of **“nones”** among this young adult group. In 2014, the GSS survey showed the **percentage of emerging adult “nones” was now up to 33% of the population**, an increase of eight percentage points. The Pew survey of over 35,000 Americans (an astounding number) came up with a similar result, tallying **35% of emerging adults identifying as “nones”** (an increase of nine percentage points over their 2007 survey).

When we consider the number who do not identify as either Protestant or Catholic (i.e., adding in other religions such as Islam and Hinduism), the percentage of emerging adults who do not identify as Christians increases to 43% of the population in both surveys.

If this trend continues at the same rate of growth it has been on since 1990, we will see **over half** of American emerging adults who do not self-identify as Christians by 2020. We will become, at least numerically, a post-Christian culture if things do not turn around.

Acknowledgments:

The General Social Survey 2014 data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by Tom W. Smith and the National Opinion Research Center.

The Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study interactive tool, located at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/> was the source of our data on the Pew survey

I've Got a War Room—Now What Do I Do?



Millions of people have seen the summer blockbuster movie *War Room*, many of them challenged to be more intentional about prayer. Some have even cleaned out a closet or a corner to make their own War Room.

But the movie, for all its motivation to experience the power of prayer, did not provide instructions on what and how to pray. Other than eating potato chips in secret!

Prayer is not about sacred words or flowery religious

language. Biblical prayer is about talking to God, heart to heart. Here are some suggestions for what to do in the War Room.

Many people have found it helpful to follow the structure of the acronym ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

Directing our prayers and thoughts in this particular order aligns the heart with God's heart.

Adoration: This is simply telling God how great He is, focusing on His character and praising Him with words. The book of Psalms is one of the best place to find truths about God and tell Him about it. Several years ago, I went on a treasure hunt as I read through the Bible, drawing a box around every title and name of God I encountered, and writing them down on the blank pages at the back of my Bible. Simply reading some of the titles of God back to Him constitutes adoration. ("You are the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! You are the Bright and Morning Star! You are the Ancient of Days! You are the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth!")

Confession: Quietly consider what unconfessed sin you need to bring out in to the light. Confession means to agree with God. You may not even feel remorseful about it (yet), but it is still important to agree with God that sin is sin and you were wrong. ("Lord, I confess being short-tempered with my family yesterday. I confess yelling at that driver who cut me off in traffic. I confess going all day without once thinking of You. I was wrong. Please forgive me.")

Thanksgiving: Consider the things God has given you, the things He has done for you, just in the past 24 hours, and tell Him "thank You." The discipline of keeping a gratitude journal provides lots of things to give thanks for. The great thing about being mindful of what God is doing so we can give thanks for them, is that it makes us more sensitive to the

many ways in which He shows His love and concern for us throughout each day, which kicks up our gratitude meter, which overflows in more and more thanksgiving, which leads to a joyful heart.

Supplication: NOW we get to the part of asking for the things we need or want, or which we would like to see God do in our lives and in the lives of others. It really helps to keep a list of our requests, just like we see in the movie, so we have a record of how and when God answers them.

This is one of the most misunderstood parts of prayer because often, people mistake having faith in the answers they want, with having faith in the God who answers prayer in His time and in His way. It's fine to ask (not demand, and not presume) for what we want, but it's important not to have unrealistic expectations of getting everything we ask for like a spoiled little kid. (This is one of the reasons people lose heart and can lose their faith—they aren't trusting the God who sees the big picture and knows what is good for us and what isn't, they are looking for the answers to their prayers on a timeline usually faster than the one God is on.)

What should we pray for?

Our daily needs (see also: the Lord's prayer, "give us this day our daily bread," Matthew 6:11), financial provision ("your Father knows what you need before you ask Him," Matthew 6:8), relationships ("it is not good for man to be alone," Genesis 2:18), peace in our relationships ("Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you," John 14:27) . . . whatever comes to mind.

But we get a head start when we pray God's word. This is great War Room material! Consider praying for one's spouse (even a future spouse!) or children or friends the great prayers recorded by the apostle Paul.

"Lord I ask that _____ may be filled with the knowledge of

Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that he will walk in a manner worthy of You, to please You in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of You; strengthened with all power, according to Your glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to You, Father, who have qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." (Colossians 1:9-12)

"I pray that You would grant _____, according to the riches of Your glory, to be strengthened with power through Your Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in his heart through faith; and that he, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that he may be filled up to all the fullness of You." (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Consider praying a Psalm, such as Psalm 1:1-3—

"I pray that _____ would be blessed, that she would not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
I pray her delight would be in the law of the Lord,
And in Your law she would meditate day and night.
I pray she would be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, she would prosper."

Spiritual warfare was one of the elements of the War Room movie, and prayer is how it is battled and won. For the simplest form of it, we can look to how Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17. He asked His Father:

- To keep His disciples safe from the evil one (v. 15)

- To set them apart in the truth (v. 17)
- For oneness (v. 21). The context was oneness within the Body of Christ, the church, but this is a powerful request to pray for our marriages as well.

I am also intrigued by His prayer in v. 23, “You have loved them just as You have loved Me.” Most people have no idea of just how much and how great the Father’s love is for us—He loves us the exact same way and the exact same amount as He loves His Son! I love to pray that God will allow my loved one to grasp this truth, which corresponds to the Ephesians 3 prayer above.

Jesus also prayed for Peter before his spectacular, epic failure when he denied his Lord, that his faith would not [completely and utterly] fail, and that after he turned back, that he would strengthen his brothers. Praying for our loved ones’ faith not to fail, and for God to redeem and use any lapses and stumbles, is a powerful way to pray for them.

An important part of War Room prayer strategy, just as in physical war, is to remove obstacles to effectiveness. In Mark 11:25, Jesus said, ““Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.” An important thing to do in anyone’s War Room is to examine our hearts for any unforgiveness and deal with it.

Well, I think that’s a good start on your War Room! Would you like to add any suggestions? Comment below!

This blog post originally appeared at
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/live_got_a_war_room-now_what_
do_i_do](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/live_got_a_war_room-now_what_do_i_do)

on Sept. 22, 2015

Paul and the Mystery Religions – Christianity Defended

Was early Christian teaching influenced by the mystery religions of the day? Don Closson presents a solid look at this question; concluding that Christian doctrine as taught by Paul and others was grounded in truth and was not influenced by these other religious concepts.

Introduction

A common criticism of Christianity found on college campuses today is that its core ideas or teachings were dependent upon Greek philosophy and religious ideas. It is not unusual for a student to hear from a professor that Christianity is nothing more than a strange combination of the Hebrew cult of Yahweh, notions adopted from the popular Greek mystery religions of the day, and a sprinkling of ideas from Greek philosophic thought. This criticism of traditional Christianity is not new. In fact, its heyday was in the late 1800s to the 1940s and coincides with what is now called the History of Religions movement. This group of theologians and historians accused Paul of adding Greek ideas to his Hebrew upbringing, and in the process, creating a new religion: one that neither Jesus nor His first disciples would recognize.



Was the origin of Christianity dependent on existing Greek philosophical and religious ideas? That question hinges upon how one is using the word “dependent.” Philosopher Ron Nash argues that dependency can be weak or strong and that the

difference is a vital one. A strong dependency would mean that the idea of Jesus as a dying and rising savior-god would never have occurred to early believers if they had not become aware of them first in pagan thought. It would be admitting that Paul and the other new Christians came to believe that Christ was a resurrected God-man who made an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world because of pagan ideas. Proving a strong dependency of Christianity on Greek thought would be very damaging to those who hold a high view of Scripture.

A weak dependency means that the followers of Jesus used common religious terminology of the day in order to be understood by the Hebrew and Greek culture surrounding them. This poses no problem for a high view of Scripture. As Nash states, " . . . the mere presence of parallels in thought and language does not prove any dependence in the strong sense."^[1] Nash and others argue that only a weak dependency can be shown to have existed between Greek religious thought and the Gospel of Christ.

In this article we will consider arguments against the strong dependency claims of the History of Religions movement and modern critics. Specifically, we will compare the theology of the apostle Paul with ideas found in the popular Greek mystery religions present during the early church period.

Although these ideas rarely surface in everyday discussions, Christians entering the academic world of our college campuses would benefit from time spent understanding this issue. In the hands of a professor hostile to Christianity, partial truths and exaggerated similarities between Christianity and the mystery religions can overwhelm an unaware teen. Being conscious of these arguments against Christian thought prepares us to give an answer to everyone who questions the hope that we have in Christ.

Arguments Against a Strong Dependency on Mystery Religions Viewpoint

Previously we noted that the History of Religions movement claimed that Christian thought had a direct and strong dependency on the mystery religions. Although some scholars agreed with this view, many did not. A good example is the famous German historian Adolf von Harnack, who wrote:

We must reject the comparative mythology which finds a causal connection between everything and everything else. . . . By such methods one can turn Christ into a sun god in the twinkling of an eye, or one can bring up the legends attending the birth of every conceivable god, or one can catch all sorts of mythological doves to keep company with the baptismal dove . . . the wand of 'comparative religion' triumphantly eliminate(s) every spontaneous trait in any religion.[{2}](#)

What were the basic traits of the mystery religions? The annual vegetation cycle was often at the center of these cults. Deep significance was given to the concepts of growth, death, decay and rebirth. The cult of Eleusis and its central deity, Demeter, goddess of the soil and farming, is one example. The mystery religions also had secret ceremonies and rites of initiation that separated its members from the outside world. Every mystery religion claimed to impart secret knowledge of the deity. This knowledge would be communicated in clandestine ceremonies often connected to an initiation rite. The focus of this knowledge was not on a set of revealed truths to be shared with the world, but on hidden higher knowledge to be kept within the circle of believers.

At the core of each religion was a myth in which the deity returned to life after death, or else triumphed over his enemies. As one scholar explains, the myth "appealed primarily to the emotions and aimed at producing psychic and mystic

effects by which the neophyte might experience the exaltation of a new life.”[\[3\]](#) On the other hand, the mysteries were not concerned as much with correct doctrine or belief, but with the emotional state of the followers. The goal of the believers was a mystical experience that led them to believe that they had achieved union with their god.

The various religious movements found throughout the Roman Empire were not united in doctrine or practice, and they changed dramatically over time. Any impact that they may have had on Christianity must be evaluated by the time frame in which the religions encountered one another. When comparing religious systems, Philosopher Ronald Nash warns that caution is advised against using careless language. He states, “One frequently encounters scholars who first use Christian terminology to describe pagan beliefs and practices and then marvel at the awesome parallels they think they have discovered.”[\[4\]](#)

What if someone told you that the root of Paul’s New Testament theology was in obscure Greek mystery religions, rather than his Jewish training and his encounter with Jesus Christ? That’s exactly what the History of Religions movement argued at the end of the 19th century. Many scholars still teach that Paul’s portrayal of Jesus as a dying and rising savior would never have occurred without the presence of the mystery religions. Next, we will continue to consider arguments against what might be called “the strong dependency view.”

Weaknesses in the Strong Dependency View

The first argument against this view is the logical fallacy of *false cause*. This fallacy occurs when someone argues that just because two things exist side by side, that one must be the cause of the other. As one theologian has written, the History of Religions School had the tendency “to convert parallels into influences and influences into sources.”[\[5\]](#) Causal

connection is much harder to prove than proximity. The mere fact that other religions may have had a god who died and then came back to life in some manner does not mean that this was the source of Christian ideas, even if it can be shown that the apostles knew of this other set of beliefs.

Some scholars, hostile to Christianity, tend to exaggerate, or invent, similarities between Christianity and the mystery religions. British scholar Edwyn Bevan writes:

Of course if one writes an imaginary description of the Orphic mysteries . . . filling in the large gaps in the picture left by our data from the Christian Eucharist, one produces something very impressive. On this plan, you first put in the Christian elements, and then are staggered to find them there.[{6}](#)

An example might be the practice of the taurobolium in the cult of Cybele or Great Mother. This initiation rite, in which the blood of a sacrificed bull is allowed to pour over a neophyte, is claimed by some to be the source of baptism in Christianity. Arguments have been made that the language “blood of the lamb” (Rev. 7:14), and “blood of Jesus” (1 Peter 1:2) was borrowed from the language of the taurobolium and criobolium in which a ram was slaughtered. In fact, a better argument can be made that the cult borrowed its language from the Christian tradition.

The cult of Cybele did not use the taurobolium until the second century A.D.; the best available evidence for dating the practice places its origin about one hundred years after Paul wrote his epistles.[{7}](#) German scholar Gunter Wagner points out that there was no notion of death and resurrection in the cultic practice.

After noting the change in meaning that the taurobolium experienced over time, scholar Robert Duthoy writes:

It is obvious that this alteration in the taurobolium must have been due to Christianity, when we consider that by A.D. 300 it had become the great competitor of the heathen religions and was known to everyone.[*{8}*](#)

More Weaknesses in the Strong Dependency View

A simple but powerful argument against the likelihood that Paul would have turned to pagan thought for his theology was his strict Jewish training. In Philippians 3:5 Paul boasts of being a Hebrew of Hebrews. He had studied under Gamaliel, the most celebrated teacher of the most orthodox of the Jewish parties, the Pharisees. And in Colossians he warns against the very syncretism he is being accused of proposing. According to Bruce Metzger:

[W]ith regard to Paul himself, scholars are coming once again to acknowledge that the Apostle's prevailing set of mind was rabbinically oriented, and that his newly found Christian faith ran in molds previously formed at the feet of Gamaliel.[*{9}*](#)

We find no accusations in the New Testament of Paul incorporating pagan thought into his theology, nor does he defend himself against such claims.

The very nature of the mystery cults, with the conflicting pantheon of deities and mythical beings, makes it highly unlikely that the strict monotheism and the body of doctrines found in the New Testament would be their source. Although the mystery religions did move towards advancing a solar god above all the others, this change began after 100 A.D., too late to impact the theology of the New Testament.

It should also be noted that early Christianity was an

exclusivistic religion while the mystery cults were not. One could be initiated into the cult of Isis or Mithras without giving up his or her former beliefs. However, to be baptized into the church one had to forsake all other gods and saviors. This was a new development in the ancient world. Machen writes, "Amid the prevailing syncretism of the Greco-Roman world, the religion of Paul, with the religion of Israel, stands absolutely alone."[\[10\]](#)

Paul's religion was grounded in real events. The mystery religions were not. They were based upon dramas written to capture men's hearts and passions. Reformed scholar Herman Ridderbos writes:

Whereas Paul speaks of the death and resurrection of Christ and places it in the middle of history, as an event which took place before many witnesses . . . the myths of the cults in contrast cannot be dated; they appear in all sorts of variations, and do not give any clear conceptions. In short they display the timeless vagueness characteristic of real myths. Thus the myths of the cults . . . are nothing but depictions of annual events of nature in which nothing is to be found of the moral voluntary, redemptive substitutionary meaning, which for Paul is the content of Christ's death and resurrection.[\[11\]](#)

Next we will conclude with further arguments against Paul's use of the mystery religions.

Conclusion

Muslim author Yousuf Saleem Chishti writes that the doctrines of the deity of Christ and the atonement are pagan teachings that come from the apostle Paul, not from Christ Himself.[\[12\]](#) He states that, "The Christian doctrine of atonement was greatly coloured by the influence of the mystery religions, especially Mithraism, which had its own son of God and virgin

Mother, and crucifixion and resurrection after expiating for the sins of mankind and finally his ascension to the seventh heaven.”[\[13\]](#) Were these doctrines something Paul made up or borrowed? What did Jesus teach regarding the atonement?

First, both Jesus and Paul taught that Christianity was the fulfillment of Judaism. In Matthew 5:17 Jesus said that He came to fulfill the law and the teaching of the Prophets, not to abolish them. In Colossians (2:16-17), Paul writes that the religious codes of the Old Testament were merely a foreshadowing of the things that were to come, and that the new reality is found in Christ. Both Christ and Paul taught the necessity of the blood atonement for sin. Jesus stated that, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). At the Last Supper He added, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Paul affirmed Christ’s teachings when he wrote, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Tying the doctrine back to the Old Testament, Paul wrote, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The idea that Jesus was the Son of God, born of a virgin, dying on the cross, and being resurrected are hardly Paul’s ideas alone. They are found in the earliest Christian writings and held consistently wherever the faith spread. The parallels between Christianity and Mithraism claimed by Chishti are hard to evaluate or confirm. He gives us no references as evidence for the similarities.[\[14\]](#) Other scholars who have looked at the issue find that most of the similarities disappear on close inspection. Where they do occur, it can be argued that Mithraism borrowed ideas from Christianity rather than vice versa. Bruce Metzger writes, “It must not be uncritically assumed that the Mysteries always influenced Christianity, for it is not only possible but probable that in certain cases,

the influence moved in the opposite direction.”[\[15\]](#)

Those who find Christianity hard to accept have offered many reasons for not doing so. The claim that the doctrines of Christianity had a strong dependency on the mystery religions stands on shaky ground and should be investigated thoroughly before one rejects the good news of the New Testament writers.

Notes

1. Ronald Nash, *The Gospel And The Greeks*, (Probe Books: Dallas, TX, 1992), 18.
2. Ibid, 118.
3. Ibid, 124.
4. Ibid, 126.
5. Ibid, 193.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid, 154.
8. Ibid, 155.
9. Ibid, 196.
10. Ibid, 197.
11. Ibid. 198.
12. Normal Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Baker Books, 1999), 490.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. 492.
15. Nash, 198.

Bad Blood Reconciled: A Review of Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood"

Probe intern Sarah Withers contrasts Taylor Swift's Bad Blood song to the deep spiritual truths of the gospel of Christ.

Naomi, a young Taylor Swift fan fighting leukemia, adopted Swift's song "[Bad Blood](#)" as her theme song during her battle with cancer. In response to her [video](#) Naomi uploaded on YouTube, Taylor Swift contributed [\\$50,000 to Naomi's medical bills](#). Naomi through her heartwarming story was able to transform the song to make it inspiring and hopeful. However, as most know, the song is not about fighting terrible cancer but instead about a broken relationship. Although Swift did not disclose the antagonist, she no longer sees reconciliation as an option. By contrasting Swift's "Bad Blood" with Christ's reconciling blood, Christians are reminded of the transformative power of the gospel to bring healing and hope to broken relationships.

Destructive Power of Bad Blood

"Bad Blood," through the lyrics and video, paints a picture of the pain that is felt after someone is wronged in a relationship. The antagonist attacking her and "rubbing it in so deep" left Swift with a "a really deep cut." Many, if not all of us, have felt the pangs of being cut deeply with words and actions in a relationship gone wrong. A quick read through the Psalms reveals victims of broken relationships crying out in pain. The Psalmist laments, "Even my closest friend in whom

I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel before me.”[{1}](#)

Not only do broken relationships hurt initially and deeply, but often the pain lingers. Swift captures this experience through the lyrics, “Still got scars in my back from your knives, so don’t think it’s in the past, these kinds of wounds they last and they last.” Again the Psalmist writes, “I am restless in my complaint and I moan, because the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked.”[{2}](#) One thing both the Psalms and Swift can agree on is that broken relationships and betrayal are deeply painful.

For Swift, not only is the relationship broken and painful, it is irreconcilable. She notes the hopelessness of the relationship, “I don’t think we can solve them (problems)” and “in time can heal but this won’t.” This is the most upsetting part of the song.

We all have had broken relationships, yet the ones that hurt the most are the ones that turn from feelings of hurt to feelings of hate. We should hate sin and the pain it brings with it, but we are called to love even our enemies. Ephesians 6 says that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the “spiritual forces of evil.”[{3}](#) As difficult as it may be, we should guard our heart from future pain without hating the individual who hurt us. Thus, reconciliation should always be the ideal goal and in cases where reconciliation cannot or does not occur, forgiveness should still reign in our heart.

Healing Power of Christ’s Blood

It seems like an impossible request to forgive someone and even move towards reconciliation with someone who betrayed and hurt us. This would be an unimaginable task if it were not for someone who did this for us first. The gospel is the perfect example of reconciliation.

When we sin, whether or not it affects anyone, we sin against God. Our most fundamental problem with sin is not that it hurts other people, but that it separates us from the love of God. Those who do not accept Christ as their savior are outside of the effect of Christ's atoning blood and therefore are not able to experience God's love. However, Paul in Ephesians says "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."[\[4\]](#)

Before we can offer true love and reconciliation to others, we must first receive love and be reconciled to God. The only way to turn our bad blood against God into unity with God is through the power of Christ's redeeming blood on the cross. Colossians states, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."[\[5\]](#) His blood cleanses us so that we are filled with the selfless love towards others that the Scriptures ask of us.[\[6\]](#)

Our Fight against Bad Blood

Even for Christians who have been shown love and forgiveness, we still do not always experience an overflowing of love and forgiveness for those who wrong us. We still struggle with having bad blood towards our enemies. We still feel the pain of the broken relationships even though we are in Christ. As Christians, we look forward to a day when we will not feel pain, but while we still live in a fallen world, pain and hurt are very much part of our everyday lives.

However, the wrong that causes our pain has been or will be paid for. As Christians, if we are wronged by a believer in Christ, remember that Jesus died for those sins as well as for ours.[\[7\]](#) Yes, we should still lament that even believers sin and cause pain, yet justice was important enough to Christ that He died for those sins.[\[8\]](#) For those who sin against us and remain outside of Christ, their wrongs will be righted at

the cost of their own life in eternal wrath. The hope of sharing the gospel is to offer others the redemptive power of Christ which indeed makes the gospel good news!

Looking back to the Psalms, there is a life-giving trend even within the darkness and pain. Even in Psalm 88, which is considered to be one of the darkest Psalms, the psalmist still cries out to God. In our broken relationships with others, true reconciliation must start and end with the grace and justice of God.

God knew we had bad blood and provided a Savior to change our hearts. He still continues to hear our cries of pain and sent the Holy Spirit to continue to protect our hearts from holding on to the bad blood in our relationships.

Notes

1. Psalm 41:9 All verses are from the English Standard Version.
2. Psalm 55:2-3, see also Psalm 69.
3. Ephesians 6:12
4. Ephesians 2:13
5. Colossians 1:19-20
6. Hebrews 9:14
7. Ephesians 1:7
8. This is why I think St. Anselm was on the right track in *Cur Deus Homo*, when he argued that Jesus Christ had to become incarnate and die for our sins so that God's justice and grace could be made manifest. If God just ignored our sins, justice would not prevail—thank God He is both just and gracious through Jesus Christ!

How and Why We Should Biblically Analyze Songs

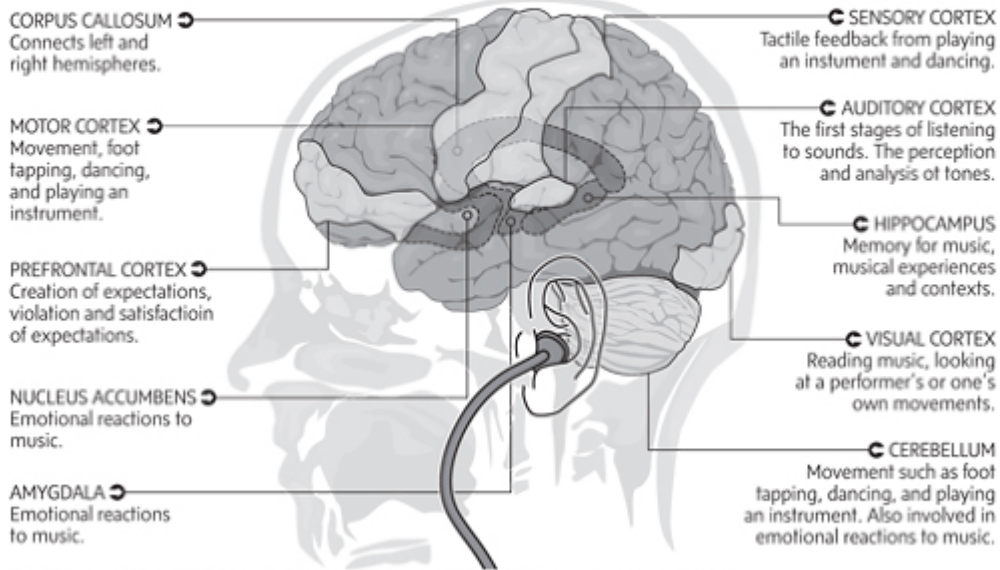
Probe intern Sarah Withers provides insight about thinking biblically about popular songs.

Numerous scientific studies have revealed that music is linked to relieving pain/stress, releasing endorphins, aiding coordination, increasing concentration, expanding memory, improving language skills, and lowering blood pressure, just to list a few.[\[1\]](#) Unfortunately, not all genres of music offer these benefits, so it would be quite misleading to say that critically analyzing songs can act as a remedy for migraines—however convenient and persuasive that claim might be!

While I may not be able to claim health advantages, powerful benefits can be gleaned for us and others by being aware and graciously critical of songs. I hope that I can provide how and why we should biblically analyze songs and challenge you to be a more thoughtful and gracious critical consumer of all types of music.

Music on the mind

When we listen to music, it's processed in many different areas of our brain. The extent of the brain's involvement was scarcely imagined until the early nineties, when functional brain imaging became possible. The major computational centres include:



MIKE FAILE/THE GLOBE AND MAIL ■ SOURCE: THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON MUSIC: THE SCIENCE OF A HUMAN OBSESSION

How Do We Biblically Analyze a Song?

The most obvious first step to biblically analyzing a song is to actively listen to the lyrics and sometimes even watch the music video. It helps me focus and understand if I pull up the lyrics and read along as I listen. While I listen, I think about how the song makes me feel, what the song got right or wrong in its worldview, what I appreciate about the song, and any questions about possible meanings and interpretations. I also think about if or how I can relate to the song's message. Have I ever experienced, desired, or seen something similar to the song's message? If the answer is no, then maybe I could think about how seeing the songwriter's perspective could help me relate and communicate with someone with very different desires and experiences than my own.

Ultimately we biblically critique a song by shining the light of the biblical truths on it. No secular song gets everything right for the obvious reason that the gospel is not present. For some songs all that is missing is an explicit reference to the gospel, while other songs directly conflict with the

gospel. Yet, for even the more difficult songs, Christians can understand the song's message for the glory of God.

For example, Lana Del Rey's song "Born to Die"[{2}](#) provides the message that we should enjoy life because when we die there is nothing left for us. For those in Christ, that song is radically wrong about our purpose and destiny.

However, for those who are outside of Christ, that song paints a rather apt picture of their bleak destiny.[{3}](#) So yes, the song is very dark and upsetting, yet when I hear that song I can mourn for those outside of Christ and praise God that the lyrics of that song are not true for me. In that way, that song can incite worship and foster resolve to reach out to unbelievers-something Del Rey probably would never consider possible! That is the transformative power of the gospel, the greatest good news.

However, there are songs that Christians should avoid. Songs that are overly sexualized or demonic in nature may be too difficult to redeem.[{4}](#) Also some people are more affected by music than others. If you are not able to redeem the song by countering it with life-giving truths from Scripture and the song continues to bring you down, then you should not listen to it. Christians should pray for wisdom and guidance to know when to listen and engage and when to turn it off.[{5}](#)

Why Should We Care?

Since music is so integrated into our daily lives, many of us are consumers of music whether we are intentional about it or not. [The American Academy of Pediatrics in 1996](#) (AAP) found that 14- to 16-year-olds listened to an overage of 40 hours of music per week. For a more conservative number, [RAIN \(Radio and Internet Newsletter\)](#) reported that students "spend an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes a day consuming media, 2 hours 19 minutes of which is spent listening to music."[{6}](#)

While these studies focus on teens and adolescents, it is fair to say that adults also listen to a fair amount of music, whether it is through headphones at work or the radio in the car. When it comes down to it, music is very much part of our everyday life. For some it can be avoided, but by most, it is accepted and greatly enjoyed.

Musical lyrics are also sticky. It never ceases to amaze me how I can still easily sing along to songs from my childhood the second the second it plays. Yet, when discussing my project of biblically analyzing popular music, a common response is that people often do not listen to the lyrics, but rather just enjoy the melody and beat. The AAP (1996) reported that "in one study 30% of teenagers knew the lyrics to their favorite songs," which would seem to affirm that initial claim.

With those intuitions and findings, it would be easy to undermine this project as interesting but unimportant. However, the same AAP (2009) article cited the Knobloch-Westerwick *et al.* study that "although young listeners might not understand all the details in lyrics, they recognize enough to obtain a general idea of the message they bring."

Moreover, the fact that we do remember song lyrics well after we have stopped listening to them shows that we are aware of the words even if we are not actively thinking about the message. In many respects we have become passive consumers of information and entertainment, especially when it comes to music. It is in light of this passivity that we should strive to be active listeners.

Every song with words carries a message, although some are more obvious and dangerous than others. For example, current artists such as Macklemore, Hozier, Lana Del Rey, and Lady Gaga proclaim more explicit messages and agendas in their songs-something as Christians we should be aware of and ready to critique. The AAP (1996) claimed that "awareness of, and

sensitivity to, the potential impact of music lyrics by consumers, the media, and the music industry is crucial.”

Although the rate and impact of the consumption of songs can be debated, there are still benefits of being aware of and engaging with our culture through songs.

What Are the Benefits?

Well, there are three main benefits to biblically analyzing songs. First, we refine our ability to enjoy music. For many this will be very counterintuitive. People I have talked with have feared that if they are too critical of the music’s message, then they will no longer be able to enjoy it. I will agree, there are some songs that might be ruined by listening critically to the lyrics. However, Christians should likely avoid listening to those songs anyway.

Even with songs we don’t like, we can still enjoy them for their musicality and benefit from some insights, however hard to find. The vast majority of songs are redeemable even though they may counter the gospel. Where God provides the songwriter with common grace insights, there is an opportunity to redeem the song. Remember Lana Del Rey’s song; I am still able to enjoy her powerful use of a darker sound and message, but I am also reminded of the hope I have in the gospel.

If we get to a point where we become cynical and antagonistic towards our music culture, we should remember that God gave us music and culture as a gift. The Psalms are examples of a great variety of songs that were written to offer the expression of truth about God, humanity, and our world. The obvious difference is that the Psalms are God-breathed and inspired—yet there are often truths that can be gleaned even from secular and popular songs. After all, we are all made in God’s image and bear His music-loving traits.

Another benefit of analyzing songs is the ability to learn

about our culture and the people influenced by it. Regardless of whether the lyrics are true, they are believed to be true by the songwriter and often by people in our culture. Part of the appeal of songs is that they are relatable. Relatability makes the song powerful and influential.

We can gain invaluable insight into the thoughts of our culture and younger generations through the lyrics of songs. Many songs provide commentary on our culture's view of alcohol consumption, drug use, violence, relationships, sexuality, freedom, and self-worth. By learning what the songs say about such topics, we can be better equipped to understand where people are coming from.

The final benefit which naturally flows from the previous one is being able to relate and engage with our culture. By engaging with themes in songs, we are ultimately practicing how to engage with people. I was talking with a group of high school students about one of Macklemore's songs called "Starting Over" which is about his relapse as an alcoholic. The song is marked with shame, a deep sense of failure, and loss of identity. Before listening to the song, I encouraged them to listen to the lyrics as if a person was talking with them. With that perspective, students would be less likely to immediately judge him as a failure, and instead would be more likely to empathize and relate as we are all failures and slaves to sin outside of Christ.

By being aware of songs, we can better engage the lies of our culture and counter them with the truths of Scripture.^{[\[7\]](#)} The AAP (1996 & 2009), encourages parents to "become media-literate" which means "watching television with their children and teenagers, discussing the content with them, and initiating the process of selective viewing at an early age." Later in the article, the authors even suggest that parents should look up the lyrics and become familiar with them. Even if you are not a parent, as Christians one way we can help

correct lies of our culture is through conversations about popular music.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It is our hope and joy that we have been redeemed and my prayer that Christians will show others the light of Christ.

So, the goal of analyzing songs from a Christian perspective is not merely an academic exercise that challenges critical thought, but to move us to action. Peter claimed that Christians were saved so "that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."[\[8\]](#) Ultimately we should be encouraged to talk, relate, empathize, and love others. Through songs we can help others to "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."[\[9\]](#)

Notes

1. Another article that was particularly helpful was from the [eMedExpert](#). However, if you just search "benefits to music" (or the like) and you will be overwhelmed by how many articles develop all the unique benefits to music.
2. The video includes sexual content, brief drug use, and a violent image at the end.
3. I should note however, that the song seems to hold the message of mere extinction at death. As Christians, we believe that souls are immortal which means even the non-believer persists. For those outside of Christ, they will experience death as eternal wrath and destruction. See John 3:36, Roman 6:23, Matthew 25:46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and Revelation 21:8.
4. To address briefly the pushback on the idea that we can or should "redeem culture": The confusion rests in the nuanced

difference in meaning of the word “redeemed.” I use the word “redeemed” in this context to mean something closer to transformed by truth, not redeemed in the sense God has redeemed believers. Yes, Scriptures never call us to “redeem culture” but God does call us to let the light of truth shine. By engaging culture with the truth of Scriptures, Christians can make aspects of culture honoring to God, thus in that sense redeeming them. For example, pornography falls under the category of “unredeemable,” meaning that there is no way someone could make pornography honoring to God. However, with different aspects of culture this task is possible and I think should be encouraged.

5. See Hebrews 5:14.

6. RAIN cited [The Kaiser Family Foundation study](#) for these statistics. The report also broke down how the kids and teens were listening to the music, finding that on average per day they listen to 41 minutes of music on their iPod and similar devices, 32 minutes of music on computers (iTunes and Internet radio), and 32 minutes listening to the radio.

7. See Ephesians 6:17-20 and 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

8. 1 Peter 2:9.

9. Colossians 2:8

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Why Have So Many Christians and Churches Become Pro-Gay?

A recent email from a friend: “Sue, I’m seeing more and more ‘evangelical’ churches come out in support of gay marriage. Also, Christian friends are changing their views on the validity of the LGBT lifestyle being acceptable for a Christ-

follower. I start worrying that I'm missing something, and even start questioning my beliefs."

No, my dear friend, you are not missing something, but it *is* a good time to question (not doubt) your beliefs so you can be more convinced than ever that the Creator God has not changed and neither has His word.

I think there are two big reasons so many confessing believers in Christ have allowed themselves to be more shaped by the culture than by the truth of God's word, drifting into spiritual compromise and even into apostasy (abandoning the truth of one's faith). This is not a new problem; the apostle Paul urged his readers in Rome, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within. . ." (Romans 12:2, Phillips).

Reason One: Rejecting the Authority of God's Word

The bitter fruit of several decades of shallow preaching, teaching and discipleship is that many believers have been especially vulnerable to Satan's deceptive question to Eve in the Garden of Eden: "Did God really say . . .?" When Christians ignore or flat-out reject the unmistakably clear biblical statements condemning homosexual relationships, they are playing into the enemy's temptation to justify disobedience by making feelings and perceptions more important than God's design and standards.

There are now two streams of thought on same-sex relationships and behavior, the Traditional View and the Revisionist View. The Revisionist View basically says, "It doesn't matter what the Bible actually says, it doesn't mean what 2000 years of church history has said it means, it means what we want it to say."

People are redefining the Bible, gender and marriage according

to what will let them do what they want, when they should (in my opinion) be asking the insightful question posed by Paul Mooris in *Shadow of Sodom*, “[A]m I trying to interpret Scripture in the light of my proclivity, or should I interpret my proclivity in the light of Scripture?”

The Bible	
<i>Traditional View</i>	<i>Revisionist View</i>
<p>The Bible is inspired by a Holy God and is inherently true and trustworthy. The Bible is written by men, but divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit and is sealed by a God of truth and authority.</p>	<p>The scriptures which traditional Christianity understands to condemn homosexuality [such as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10] have either been mistranslated, yanked out of context or were only appropriate to the culture of that time. Therefore, we no longer have to follow passages we don't like.</p>
Sexuality	
<i>Traditional View</i>	<i>Revisionist View</i>
<p>Sexuality and sex are God's good gifts to men and women. While sexuality is an essential attribute of human nature, our Creator did not intend it to be the defining characteristic of humanity.</p>	<p>Sexuality—the feelings and attractions one feels for other people—is God ordained, diverse, deeply personal and morally permissible. One's sexual orientation, whatever it is, should be celebrated as one of God's good gifts.</p>
Gender	
<i>Traditional View</i>	<i>Revisionist View</i>

<p>God created both male and female in His image, and each gender reflects different aspects of the <i>imago Dei</i>. God's sovereign choice of gender for every person reflects His intention for that person's identity; it is one of the ways in which he or she glorifies Him as Creator.</p>	<p>We are free to make a distinction between sex and gender. Sex is biological maleness or femaleness at birth, and gender is how one feels about their "true" maleness or femaleness internally. Based on Galatians 3:28, "there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."</p>
Marriage	
<i>Traditional View</i>	<i>Revisionist View</i>
<p>Marriage is God-ordained between one man and one woman in a lifelong, monogamous, covenantal relationship. The Bible begins with the marriage of Adam and Eve, and ends with the marriage of the Lamb (Jesus) and the Bride (the church). The complementarity of husband and wife express God's intention of both genders in marriage.</p>	<p>Homosexual behavior is appropriate within the confines of a committed, loving, monogamous, lifelong, Christ-centered relationship.</p>

Both individual Christians and churches have drifted into endorsing same-sex relationships because it always feels better to follow one's flesh than to follow Jesus' call to "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24).

Reason Two: Snagged by the Gay Agenda

In addition to those several decades of shallow preaching, teaching and discipleship I mentioned earlier, many believers have not been submitting themselves to the truth of the Word

of God. By default, then, they were easily shaped and swayed by the six points of a brilliantly designed "Gay Manifesto" spelled out in a book called *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s*. Originally published as an essay called "The Overhauling of Straight America" that was published in a gay magazine, the authors laid out this plan which has been executed perfectly in the United States. (The quotes below are from the essay, found [here](#))

1. *Desensitization and normalization of homosexuals in mainstream America.* Talk about gays and gayness as loudly and often as possible.

"The principle behind this advice is simple: almost any behavior begins to look normal if you are exposed to enough of it at close quarters and among your acquaintances.

"In the early stages of any campaign to reach straight America, the masses should not be shocked and repelled by premature exposure to homosexual behavior itself. Instead, the imagery of sex should be downplayed and gay rights should be reduced to an abstract social question as much as possible. First let the camel get his nose inside the tent—only later his unsightly derriere!"

2. *Portray members of the LGBTQ community as victims.* Indoctrinate mainstream America that members of the LGBTQ community were "born this way."

"In any campaign to win over the public, gays must be cast as victims in need of protection so that straights will be inclined by reflex to assume the role of protector."

"Now, there are two different messages about the Gay Victim that are worth communicating. First, the mainstream should be told that gays are victims of fate, in the sense that most never had a choice to accept or reject their sexual preference. The message must read: 'As far as gays can tell,

they were born gay, just as you were born heterosexual or white or black or bright or athletic. Nobody ever tricked or seduced them; they never made a choice, and are not morally blameworthy. What they do isn't willfully contrary – it's only natural for them. This twist of fate could as easily have happened to you!'"

3. Give protectors a just cause: anti-discrimination

"Our campaign should not demand direct support for homosexual practices, should instead take anti-discrimination as its theme."

4. The use of TV, music, film and social media to desensitize mainstream Americans to their plight as gay people

Over the past 25 years, gay characters, on TV especially, have captured the hearts of American viewers because they were attractive, funny, smart—the kind of characters viewers would like to be. No one was shown the dark underside of gay bars and bathhouses, or same-sex domestic violence, or having to get one's HIV+ status checked.

5. Portray gays and lesbians as pillars in society. Make gays look good.

"From Socrates to Shakespeare, from Alexander the Great to Alexander Hamilton, from Michelangelo to Walt Whitman, from Sappho to Gertrude Stein, the list is old hat to us but shocking news to heterosexual America. In no time, a skillful and clever media campaign could have the gay community looking like the veritable fairy godmother to Western Civilization."

Use celebrities and celebrity endorsement. And who doesn't love Ellen DeGeneres?

6. Once homosexuals have begun to gain acceptance, anti-gay opponents must be vilified, causing them to be viewed as repulsive outcasts of society.

“Our goal is here is twofold. First, we seek to replace the mainstream’s self-righteous pride about its homophobia with shame and guilt. Second, we intend to make the antigays look so nasty that average Americans will want to dissociate themselves from such types.

“The public should be shown images of ranting homophobes whose secondary traits and beliefs disgust middle America. These images might include: the Ku Klux Klan demanding that gays be burned alive or castrated; bigoted southern ministers drooling with hysterical hatred to a degree that looks both comical and deranged; menacing punks, thugs, and convicts speaking coolly about the ‘fags’ they have killed or would like to kill; a tour of Nazi concentration camps where homosexuals were tortured and gassed.”

This is how I see how we got to this place where so many people have been deceived. They didn’t anchor themselves to the Truth of the Word of God, and they opened themselves to the cultural brine of Kirk and Madsen’s plan to overhaul straight America.

And it worked.

I will close with three personal observations about this situation:

- Christians have bought into the culture’s worship of feelings over God’s unchanging revelation
- People love how being a protector of the underdog makes them feel
- Not enough of us Christ-followers are living lives that demonstrate the beauty and satisfaction of abiding in Christ

To my sweet friend who asked the question, let me say: God’s good gift of sex and the intimacy of the marriage relationship is still intended ONLY for one man and one woman for life. In the beginning, one (Adam) became two (when God formed Eve from

Adam), and then the two became one again. That is a deep mystery that makes all variations and deviations on God's intention *wrong*.

I am indebted to Hope Harris for her insight and analysis of this question.

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blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/why_have_so_many_christians_and_churches_become_pro-gay
on June 30, 2015.

The Church and the Social Media Revolution

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese examines social media's massive communication shift, with insights for the church.

What is Social Media?

Any media that uses two-way communication as opposed to one-way communication is *social media* rather than *mass media*, such as TV, radio, and print which deliver a message to a mass audience. Mass media is not personal like the telephone, or letter writing; it is directed to the crowd or to a particular niche in the crowd that does not allow for the audience to talk back, with some exceptions. Mass media is not social because it does not permit a conversation with its audience. Social media, such as social websites like Facebook, Twitter, and the new Youtoo Social TV website, allows for dialogue and two-way communication between speaker and audience. It is dialogue rather than monologue. Social media use is not limited to just the popular websites. Any form of electronic

communication involving computers and cell phones is part of the social media revolution because these technologies offer the individual the ability to respond.



It is estimated that one-third of the world is now connected to the internet. If you have an email address you are involved in social media. This sizeable amount constitutes a revolution in communication because it changes the way we communicate and it changes *what* we communicate. In calling social media a revolution we simply mean this is a new way of communicating. It does not mean mass media will be abolished. Media, along with most technological progress, operates in a layering system where a new layer or technology builds on the old one rather than abolishing it. Mass media begins with the printing press. The telephone, radio, and TV come later. Television remains the most prominent mass medium; while the printed word has not disappeared, it is certainly not as central as it was in the nineteenth century. The computer adds another layer to our media and brings them all together. It will overshadow them all, but not abolish them.

With about a third of the actual world online or engaged in social media, it is necessary that the church, which is in the business of communication, makes sure its message is accurately represented there. But the task is not as easy as starting a new profile page since there are certain problems that must be addressed as we communicate.

The Medium Is the Message

Close to 2,247,000,000 people use social media worldwide. This is a remarkable change in just a few years and easily qualifies as a new way of communicating, unprecedented in the

history of the world. It is a revolution because it changes the way we communicate from face-to-face individual contact to an electronic mediation with certain advantages and disadvantages.

We have all heard the saying, “the medium is the message.”^[1] This means the way we say something is as important as what we say, or that the medium affects the content of what is said. Preaching is not unaffected by this principle. Simply because someone preaches the word of God does not mean immunity to the potential negative aspects of his chosen medium just as with radio, TV, and the internet. For example, radio and TV are effective in reaching a mass audience, but this usually must come at the expense of the quality of the message; it must be toned down to fit these media. Any subject with many ideas and complex logic may work in a book format but not on TV. Telephones put you in touch with a disembodied voice, superior to not talking or letter writing, but still not as good as actually talking to someone in person. Anyone involved with persuasion in business deals where you absolutely must communicate a convincing point knows the importance of body language, tone of voice, eye contact, appearance, and attitude—all conveyed by personal presence but lost over the phone. The phone itself shapes what you say by how it is said. It reduces communication from all five senses to one: hearing. The results are predictable: the phone reduces communication compared to actually being there.

A basic law of media says the wider the audience the less substantive a message simply because it must appeal to the common denominator in the general audience. The more people you want to reach, the less of a message you will have, which means keep it simple when it comes to a general audience so the majority of people can understand it. This is the drawback of instant and mass communication. We sacrifice quality of thought and depth of analysis for instant access to a mass audience and for immediate applicability of a general

principle. In other words, we are telling people what to do without reflection, which is time consuming, slow, and simply awkward. Analysis is meant for the personal level, and mass communication is not personal. The reductionist trend in media can be circumvented to some extent through niche audiences which many social media sites actually represent. This is a fair reflection of actual communities. What is society but the collection of smaller groups put into a whole?

Disembodiment

Social media represents a disembodied form of community. This of course is the nature of long distance relationships and communication. The reduction of knowledge to its simplest forms brings with it the sense that knowledge or community is simply information. The gospel can be communicated as information but it is more than that. The same is true with traditional forms of preaching, books, or even TV. We know after all has been said there still remains a side of the gospel that must be experienced or encountered in real people. The gospel must be embodied and not simply read about or talked about. This was the gist of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians: "you are a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3-4). We might as well say written not electronically on the transient screen with flickering pixels, but in flesh and blood and in one-to-one encounters with friends, family, and neighbors. Media, as good as it is, cannot substitute for personal experience of God and fellowship with others. This brings the idea of an online community, church or school into question. There is no doubt that people communicate effectively this way, even on Facebook, and they can learn through this medium just like any traditional means, but there is a doubt as to how qualitative one's learning or one's community will be if there is no personal encounter. Can long

lasting bonds and relationships form strictly through electronic means?

Social media is excellent at giving you a wide audience just like TV and radio and even meeting new people, but it is not a replacement for face-to-face contact. Media technology may best be seen as an excellent supplement to relationships and community, but not a replacement. It can be used to stay in touch and keep people connected, but it cannot ultimately replace our community and social network of actual people. I think the goal of an online church should be to get people out from behind a computer and into contact and fellowship with others. Social media can facilitate friendship, but it cannot replace it. We are warm-blooded creatures and need other warm-blooded people to have community, something a computer screen cannot provide. Social media serves as a supplement to community, not a substitute!

Social Media and Privacy

What happens in Vegas stays on Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter. Privacy is dead. The computer killed it, and no one cares. Every step forward in technological progress has a price to pay. We have moved forward in creating social media which enables us to communicate with a wider audience, but society has paid a terrible price with the loss of privacy. The computer remembers everything. This reality should cause some pause and reflection on what we say simply because it can be potentially recalled and even used against us. Employers routinely check Facebook pages of potential employees. Creditors use Facebook to collect debts. The police use Facebook to find people and build cases against them. We think of social media as fun and games, much like a video game, when in fact it is much more serious. All social media communication such as email or texting exists in a nether world between an illusion of privacy and the potential public access by everyone. The user falsely assumes his message is

private without realizing it may be available to anyone. Future generations will archive and access all that we say today.

Even more seriously, the NSA is currently building a supercomputer called the Utah Data Center scheduled to go online in 2013 that will monitor all your digital actions including email, cell phone calls, even Google searches.^{2} It will be able to track all your purchases electronically. Whatever you do digitally will be available for scrutiny by the government. I know you wanted to hear how great social media is for communicating, evangelism, and so forth, and it is great, but there are pitfalls and dangers that we must also confront. Let's not get so swept up with our enthusiasm for social media that we stick our head in the sand when it comes to the dangers. This is the greatest problem I see Christians make when they analyze technology. They see only the advantages and positive sides of their technological involvement and refuse to consider what may go wrong. It will not create a damper to analyze the potential problems of our technology use, rather it will make us sober-minded as we are commanded to be (1 Peter 1:13, 4:7 and 5:8).

Dialogue vs. Monologue

Social media does offer a great advantage over the traditional means of mass communication that the church has used in print, TV, and radio. Social media represents a democratization of media including TV. Mass media is traditionally one-sided communication or monologue where one powerful voice does all the speaking, especially on TV. Social media allows for multiple voices to be heard at once and in contrast with each other, allowing for a dialogue and conversation as opposed to the pedagogy of monologue. This is significant because, as we are told by media experts like Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Ellul, propaganda is usually the result of only one voice being permitted in a discussion or the absence of dialogue,

much like in a commercial where only one view point is promoted. McLuhan notes the importance of dialogue with media: "The environment as a processor of information is propaganda. Propaganda ends where dialogue begins. You must talk to the media, not to the programmer. To talk to the programmer is like complaining to a hot dog vendor at a ballpark about how badly your favorite team is playing."[\[3\]](#)

Really, for the first time in history does the general public have a chance to talk back to knowledge brokers and those creating information and to those creating faith. A few tell the many what to think through mass media; through social media an individual tells the mass what he thinks. Social media offers a multitude of voices on all topics. It may appear chaotic and directionless at times, and at other times there appears incisive wisdom. Social media reflects the turmoil and sanity of its users. Social media is many things, but unlike its big brother mass media, social media is not propaganda. The church needs to soberly join this conversation.

Notes

1. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).
2. James Bamford, "The NSA is Building the Country's Biggest Spy Center (watch what you say)" in *Wired* March 17, 2012.
3. Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam, 1967, 142); Jaques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1965).

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 Papyri

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.

Church and Poverty

The church in general, and evangelical Christians in particular, has been helping people in poverty. But you wouldn't know that if you attended a roundtable discussion of poverty at Georgetown University. President Obama made lots of critical comments, but I wanted to focus on just one of his statements.

The president was critical of churches focusing so much time on social issues and so little time on poverty. He wanted "faith-based organizations to speak out on" the issue of poverty and stop being obsessed with what he called "reproductive issues" or same-sex marriage.

Evangelical Christians do have concerns about abortion and same-sex marriage, but that hasn't kept them from also doing a great deal to help the poor. In fact, Christians are the most generous with their time, treasure, and talents. Also, conservative people are more generous than liberal people. In previous commentaries, I have quoted from the extensive research done by Arthur Brooks in his book, *Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth about Compassionate Conservatism*.

What about the institutional church? In term of disaster relief, the Southern Baptist Convention spent more than \$6 million. It was the third largest provider behind the Red Cross and Salvation Army. And that is just one Protestant denomination.

An op-ed in the *Washington Post* by Rob Schwarzwalder and Pat

Fagan concluded that: “the evangelical relief group World Vision spent roughly \$2.8 billion annually to care for the poor.” They added: “That would rank World Vision about 12th within the G-20 nations in terms of overseas development assistance.” And I might mention that World Vision is just one evangelical ministry. “Groups such as Samaritan’s Purse, Food for the Hungry, World Relief and many others provide hundreds of millions of dollars in anti-poverty programs at home and abroad.”

The church has been one of the most effective social outreach programs in history, even if the president doesn’t think so.

This blog post originally appeared at
pointofview.net/viewpoints/church-and-poverty/ on May 26,
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