Biblical Archaeology

Kerby Anderson provides an update on recent archaeological finds that corroborate the historicity of the Bible.

One of the most important proofs for the historical accuracy of the Bible can be found in archaeology. Ancient history and archaeology should confirm the accuracy of this record. That is what we find when comparing these finds with the written record of Scripture.



My focus will be to summarize a few of the past archaeological finds that confirm the Bible and then provide an update on some of the newest archaeological discoveries made in just the last few years that are very significant. On the Probe website, we have an excellent summary done twenty years ago of archaeology and the Old Testament (probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/) and archaeology and the New Testament (probe.org/archaeology-and-the-new-testament/).

Archaeology not only has confirmed the historical record found in the Bible, but it also provides additional details not found in the original writings of the biblical authors. Archaeology also helps explain Bible passages by providing context of the surrounding culture as well as the social and political circumstances.

We must also admit the limitations of archaeology. Although these archaeological finds can establish the historical accuracy of the record, they cannot prove the divine inspiration of the Bible. Also, we must admit that even when we have an archaeological find, it still must be interpreted. Those interpretations are obviously affected by the worldview perspective and even bias of the historians and archaeologists.

Even granting the skeptical bias that can be found in this

field, it is still amazing that many archaeologists acknowledge the biblical confirmation that has come from significant archaeological finds.

Dr. William Albright observed, “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition.”{1}

Archaeologist Nelson Glueck and president of Hebrew Union College concluded, “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical description has often led to amazing discoveries.”{2}

Millar Burrows, Professor of Archaeology at Yale University, remarked that “On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.”{3}

Old Testament Archaeology

There are so many significant archaeological finds that confirm the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. Perhaps the most famous and most significant find is the Dead Sea scrolls. A young shepherd boy found the first of them in a cave in 1947. Eventually over 800 fragments were found. This includes a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah.

Many of these scrolls are from before the time of Jesus Christ. That is important because it provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament. The earliest copies of the Old Testament that we had before this discovery were a thousand years later. When we compare the

Dead Sea scrolls to these later manuscripts, we can see that there were very few variations (mostly due to changes in spelling or grammar). The transmission through the scribe was very accurate.

Another significant find was archaeological documentation of King David. Archaeologists working at one site uncovered an inscription that means “house of David” that dates to the ninth century BC.

Another important archaeological find was the Hittite nation. The Hittites are mentioned nearly 50 times in the Old Testament, but there was no solid archaeological evidence they existed until the 20th century. Some argued that the Bible must be wrong since it mentions this nation but archaeological evidence was lacking.

The Hittites were a major force against the Jews. Israel needed to conquer them in order to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 11:3-4). King David had Uriah the Hittite killed because of his adultery with his wife, Bathsheba (2 Kings 11:3-21). Fortunately, archaeologists did uncover abundant evidence of the Hittites in Turkey. They found a temple, sculptures, a storeroom with 10,000 clay tablets. Later they even uncovered the Hittite capital city of Hattusha.

Archaeologists with the Israel Antiquities Authority digging at Tel Lachish found an ancient toilet that confirms Old Testament history. To understand its significance, we need to look at the record of King Hezekiah. We read in 2 Kings that he removed the Asherah poles from the high places and smashed the sacred stones that were used in the Canaanite cultic worship.

Archaeologists discovered large rooms that appear to be a shrine where four-horned altars were destroyed. They also found a seat carved in stone with the hole in it that was used as a toilet. It was mostly likely placed there as a form of

desecration for the whole room.{4} This correlates with the biblical description in 2 Kings 10:27 that Jehu and his followers “demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day.”

New Testament Archaeology

Jesus spent much of his time in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. It is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of the fishing industry there (anchors, fishhooks), which would have been used by many of the disciples. The houses were one-story buildings, with roofs of wooden beams or branches. This explains how men carried a man to the roof and let him down in front of Jesus (Mark 2:1-4). Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-22, Luke 4:31-36). The remains of a synagogue built in the 4th century sits atop the black basalt foundations of this synagogue that existed at the time of Jesus.

In Jerusalem are many archaeological discoveries from the time of Jesus. That includes the remains of the temple as well as the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15) and the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-7).

Archaeology (as well as history) verifies the existence of many political leaders mentioned in the New Testament. A Denarius coin shows a portrait of Tiberius Caesar. This is also significant because Jesus asked the people whose likeness was on the coin (Mark 12:17). The name Pontius Pilate was found in an inscription at Caesarea Maritima.

Sometimes archaeology can shed light on what seems like a sharp disagreement in the Bible. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he recounts what he said to Peter who stopped eating meals with gentile Christians. He argued that Peter lived like a Gentile even though he was a Jew.

The answer lies in the fact that Paul was a devout Pharisee,

who took kosher food laws and purity very seriously. Peter, though Jewish, was not a Pharisee and grew up in Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeological excavations uncovered some non-kosher evidence. Some were eating wild boar and catfish, which were considered unclean and not to be eaten by Jew following the Torah.{5}

Archaeological finds at Corinth include the city's *bema* seat, where Paul stood trial (Acts 18:12-17) and an inscription with the name Erastus, a city administrator who was an associate of Paul (Acts 19:22; 2 Timothy 4:20; Romans 16:23).

Critics have challenged the historical record of Luke because of alleged inaccuracies. Classical scholar Colin Hemer documents that Luke is a very accurate historian.{6} He identifies 84 facts in the Book of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This includes nautical details, names of gods, designation of magistrates, and proper names and titles.

These are just a few of the archaeological discoveries in the past that have confirmed the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the next section we will look at some of the most recent archaeological discoveries.

Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Within the last few years, there have been major archaeological discoveries that further confirm biblical history. An article in *Christianity Today* provides a list of the top ten archaeological discoveries.{7} Here are just a few of these important discoveries.

The Israel Antiquities Authority announced the discovery of a limestone column on which the world "Jerusalem" was spelled out in Aramaic. This is the oldest inscription of this nature found so far. You might expect that there would be lots of such inscriptions, but that turn out to be very rare.

The inscription was found in an ancient potter's village that must have served pilgrims making their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. A potter's field calls to mind the one bought by the priests (Matthew 27:7) with the money Judas returned.

The Jewish tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were located for a time in Shiloh. Excavation there produced a clay pomegranate. In the Bible, the pomegranate was a common temple decoration (1 Kings 7:18; 2 Kings 25:17). Small pomegranates embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet yarns hung from the hems of the priestly robes (Exodus 28:33). This discovery affirms the sacredness of Shiloh.

Scientists and archaeologists believe they made have found the site of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. They found evidence that a "high-heat" explosive event north of the Dead Sea wiped out all civilization in the affected area. It killed all the people within a 25-kilometer circular area. The fertile soil would have been stripped of nutrients by the high heat. Waves of briny salt would have washed over the surrounding area and spread through hot winds.

The scientists suggest that a cosmic airburst event from a meteor was the reason for the disappearance from the site. It apparently took 600 years for the region to recover before it could once again be inhabited. This fits with the description in Genesis 19, which says that burning sulfur rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah and killed all the people and all the vegetation of the land.

Archaeologist Dr. Stephen Collins says that there was a violent conflagration that ended occupation at the site. There is "melted pottery, scorched foundation stones, and several feet of ash and destruction debris churned into a dark gray matrix as if in a Cuisinart." He and another author in a joint paper conclude that all of this provides "signs of a highly destructive and thermal event that one might expect from what is described in Genesis 19."{8}

Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Above we looked at a few of the most recent archaeological discoveries that confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible. Most of them were found in an article in *Christianity Today*. Here are a few more significant discoveries.

An inscribed piece of limestone discovered in a tomb along the west bank of the Nile was revealed to be a Semitic abecedary (alphabet in ABC order). It dates back to the time of Moses and fits with the statement that "Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said" (Exodus 24:4). It turns out he wasn't the only one writing in a Semitic script in Egypt at that time.

When ISIS terrorists captured Mosul, they blew up the tomb of the prophet Jonah. This uncovered the remains of a palace of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon. Previous archaeological teams stopped digging in certain sites in Iraq for fear of destroying them. That was a case of the traditional tomb of Jonah, until ISIS started digging beneath it to find artifacts to sell. As one article put it, "ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible."{9} The tunnels they dug revealed a previously untouched Assyrian palace in the ancient city of Ninevah. Inscriptions found in the old city of Nineveh give an order of Assyrian kings that matches perfectly with the biblical order.

Extra careful processing of dirt from an archaeological dig in the southwest corner of the Temple Mount provided a *beka* weight. This was used (Exodus 38:6) to measure the silver in the half-shekel temple tax that was collected from each member of the Jewish community.

Another seal impression seems to be (a letter is missing) the name "Isaiah the prophet." It was found near the Temple Mount near another seal impression that says "King Hezekiah of Judah" that was uncovered two years earlier. Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah are mentioned in the same verse 17 times. This

clay seal gives the impression that Isaiah had access to the king's palace as his adviser.

A ring with the name "Pontius Pilate" on it was excavated decades ago but only could be read recently due to advanced photographic techniques. Of course, this is not the first time that his name has surfaced in archaeology, but it is still a significant find. The ring is not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate. It was probably worn by someone authorized to act on his authority and would use it to seal official communications.

This is an exciting time for archaeological investigation. New finds provide even more evidence of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Archaeology has provided abundant confirmation of the Bible.

Notes

1. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religions of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 176.
2. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert* (New York: Farrar, Strous and Cudahy, 1959), 136.
3. Millar Burrows, *What Mean These Stones?* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 1.
4. Richard Gray, "The wrong kind throne: Toilet discovered 2-800-year-old shrine," *Daily Mail*, 28 September 2016.
5. Craig A. Evans, "Why Archaeology Matters for Bible Study," *Bible Study Magazine*, March/April 2019, 18-19.
6. Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 1990).
7. Gordon Govier, "Biblical Archaeology's Top 10 Discoveries of 2018, *Christianity Today*, December 27, 2018.
8. Amanda Borschel-Dan, "Evidence of Sodom? Meteor blast cause of biblical destruction, say scientists," *Times of Israel*, 22 November 2018.
9. "ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible," *Facts and Trends*, March 19, 2018.

©2020 Probe Ministries

Biblical Reliability

Kerby Anderson provides classic reasons the bible can be believed and trusted as a divine book from God.

Is the Bible historically reliable? That is an important question that deserves an answer since so many people today believe that the Bible is not accurate or reliable. We will look at various tests we can use to evaluate any book and will discover that the Bible is reliable and trustworthy. But before we look at the Bible's reliability, it is worth mentioning its uniqueness.



No doubt you have heard people say they don't read the Bible because it is merely another book. That is not true. Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell spend pages in their book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, listing all the many ways the Bible is unique.

First, it is unique in character. This includes the fact that it is unique in time span, geographical production, authorship, literary genres, and languages. Professor F.F. Bruce, in *The Books and the Parchments*, summarized it this way: "The Bible, at first sight, appears to be a collection of literature—mainly Jewish. If we enquire into the circumstances under which the various Biblical documents were written, we find that they were written at intervals over a space of nearly 1400 years the writers wrote in various lands, from Italy in the west to Mesopotamia and possible Persia in the east."

He goes on to remind us that "The writers themselves were a

heterogeneous number of people, not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles but belonging to the most diverse walks of life . . . The writings themselves belong to a great variety of literary types. They include history, law, religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively Biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic."

The Bible is also unique in its theology. There are teachings in the Bible that are not found in any other religious book. And the Bible is certainly unique in its impact (art, literature, history) and circulation (best-selling book of all time).

The Bible is unique, but it is reliable? The Bible makes significant claims about itself, and events recorded in the Bible. These are historical events and can be tested by the same criteria used to evaluate other historical documents.

There are three specific tests scholars, researchers, and archaeologists use to determine the authenticity of historical material. There are three basic principles of historiography: the internal test, the external test, and the bibliographic test. We will apply these three tests to the Bible to determine its reliability as an accurate historical source.

Internal Test

The internal test looks at a document to first see what the document claims for itself, and then to see if there are internal contradictions. What does the Bible claim for itself?

The Bible makes some very significant claims. It claims to be the Word of God. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Just because the Bible claims to be inspired is not enough to accept that

claim, but it does serve to remind us about the unique nature of the Bible. Jesus made an even more significant claim: “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail” (Luke 16:17).

The Bible is unique in another significant way: its unity. Consider that the Bible was written over a 1400-year period, by over 40 authors, from many walks of life. It was written in three languages, on different continents, under different circumstances. And it addresses numerous controversial topics, and yet we have unity and consistency throughout the Bible. Imagine if you had three people living at the same time, same place, speaking the same language writing on one controversial topic. Would they agree? They would not. The unity of the Bible suggests its inspiration.

But this raises another question. Skeptics often like to point to contradictions in the Bible. My quick answer often is to merely point to the number of books written over the last few centuries that provide reasonable answers to apparent contradictions. These many books illustrate that these difficult biblical texts can be resolved.

Professor Gleason Archer has written about Bible difficulties and concludes, “As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied alleged contradictions between the biblical record and evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly certified and strengthened.”

The reliability of the gospels is also supported by what is called undesigned coincidences. Professor Tim McGrew has been on my radio program to talk about these, and his wife Lydia has written a book on the subject. The writer in one gospel provides part of a testimony, while the writer of another gospel provides another key fact. These are not planned but give a fuller picture of the event. They are like pieces of a puzzle and provide yet another important piece of evidence for

the internal test.

External Test

The external test looks at how the document aligns itself with facts, dates, and persons from its world. The facts from archaeology and history validate the historical accuracy of the Bible. In previous articles, we have provided many examples of archaeological verification of the historical accuracy of the Bible.{1}

Dr. William Albright concluded, “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Bible.” Yale professor and expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Millar Burrows explained, “Archeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.”

One of the most famous and most significant archeological finds was the Dead Sea Scrolls. Over 800 fragments were found, including a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah. It has provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament.

Another archaeological find occurred in 1993 when a stone monument fragment was discovered near the border of Israel and Syria. It mentions the “House of David” and implies a victory by Ben-Hadad, king of Damascus (1 Kings 15:20).

More recently, archaeologists uncovered a Curse Tablet found in Joshua’s altar on Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30). This ancient Hebrew inscription is centuries older than any known Hebrew inscription from ancient Israel. This is the earliest recorded Divine name in Israel and supports the biblical date of the Exodus.

There are also archaeological finds that validate the New

Testament. In 1961, archeological work at Caesarea Maritima discovered a stone with the name “Pontius Pilate.” He was a prefect of the Roman province of Judea and was responsible for ordering the crucifixion of Jesus. More recently, a ring was found at the Herodium (a desert palace outside of Bethlehem) with the inscription “Pontius Pilate.” The ring was not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate and was likely used for official communications.

Classical scholar and historian Colin Hemer chronicles Luke’s accuracy in the book of Acts. With painstaking detail, he identifies 84 facts in the last 16 chapters of the Book of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This includes nautical details, names of gods, designation of magistrates, and proper names and titles.

Bibliographic Test

Now we will look at the bibliographic test. Since we do not have the original documents of any ancient literature, this test is used to evaluate the transmission from the original document to the manuscripts we possess today. The Bible is far superior to any ancient historical book in its- manuscript evidence with respect to time and the number of manuscripts.

Sir Frederic Kenyon observed, “In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament.”

Many of the books on apologetics or biblical reliability provide a chart of the gap between the original manuscript and the earliest copy that we have: Plato (1200 years), Thucydides, *History* (1300 years), and Tacitus, *Annals* (1000 years). That smallest gap is Homer’s *Iliad* (500 years). By contrast, the gap for the New Testament is just a few decades.

Above, we mentioned the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Until their discovery, there was a significant gap between the original and the earliest copy (around AD 900). The discovery allowed us to now see there was an accurate transmission over a 1000-year period.

The number of manuscripts is also important. When we have more manuscripts, we can compare them and have a better understanding of what was written in the original document. We have seven copies of Plato, eight copies of Thucydides, and twenty copies of Tacitus. There are over six hundred copies of Homer's *Illiad*.

By contrast, the number of manuscripts for the Bible is significant. The total number of Greek and non-Greek New Testament manuscripts is nearly 24,000. The number of Old Testament scrolls is more than 42,000. F.F. Bruce concludes, "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."

The early church fathers also quoted from the New Testament as they wrote to each other. We have more than 36,000 scripture citations from them as well.

John Warwick Montgomery concluded, "To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity; for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament."

One Last Test: Prophecy

We have discussed three tests that show the reliability of the Bible, especially when compared to other literature of antiquity. The Bible passed the internal test because of its unity and cohesion. The Bible passed the external test because of the history and archaeology that confirm its accuracy. And the Bible passes the bibliographic test because of the number

of manuscripts and the short time gap between the original and its copies.

But there is an additional test that only the Bible can meet. More than one-fourth of the Bible's content was prophetic at the time that it was originally written. More than half of these 1000+ prophecies have been fulfilled down to the minutest detail. No other book (religious or secular) can make this claim.

Fifty years ago, J. Barton Payne compiled the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*. It lists 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament, for a total of 1,817. These encompass 8,352 verses.

In previous articles we have discussed the prophecies of the Messiah. Hundreds of prophecies written down in the Old Testament are literally fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. For example, Zechariah records prophecies about the Messiah that were fulfilled by Jesus during the week He entered Jerusalem and was crucified. He predicted that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). That was fulfilled during what we often call "Palm Sunday" (Matthew 21:5; Luke 19:32-37).

The price of his betrayal would be thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13) and the money would be cast onto the floor of the Temple. That was fulfilled by Judas and the chief priests (Matthew 27:3-10). Also, he predicted that the betrayal money would be used to buy a potter's field- (Zechariah 11:13). We read about its fulfillment in Matthew 27:6-10.

Prophecy is history written before it happens and is another indication of the inspiration of the Bible. It can also give us confidence that prophecies that have not been fulfilled will be fulfilled in the future.

The Bible is historically accurate, and it also shows in many

ways that it is also the inspired word of God.

Additional Resources

F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1984.

F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964.

Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, Eisenbrauns reprint edition 1990.

Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017.

Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts,* Deward Publishing, 2017.

J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973.

Chauncey Saunders, *Introduction to Research in English Literary History*, New York: Macmillan, 1952.

Notes

1. probe.org/biblical-archaeology/, probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/, probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/

©2024 Probe Ministries

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 Massretic 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 Siniaticus

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

2. Older Papyrii

Earlier still, fragments and papyrus copies of portions of the New Testament date from 100 to 200 years (180-225 A.D.) before Vaticanus and Sinaticus. 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, *Gospel*	ca. 0-70?	4 BC – AD 30	50 – 65/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years
Mark, *Gospel*	ca. 15-90?	27 – 30	65/70	ca. 225	<50 years	<200 years
Luke, *Gospel*	ca. 10-80?	5 BC – AD 30	60/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years
John, *Gospel*	ca. 10-100	27-30	90-110	ca. 130	<80 years	<100 years

Paul, *Letters*	ca. 0-65	30	50-65	ca. 200	20-30 years	<200 years
Josephus, *War*	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 70	ca. 80	ca. 950	10-300 years	900-1200 years
Josephus, *Antiquities*	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 65	ca. 95	ca. 1050	30-300 years	1000-1300 years
Tacitus, *Annals*	ca. 56-120	AD 14-68	100-120	ca. 850	30-100 years	800-850 years
Seutonius, *Lives*	ca. 69-130	50 BC – AD 95	ca. 120	ca. 850	25-170 years	750-900 years
Pliny, *Letters*	ca. 60-115	97-112	110-112	ca. 850	0-3 years	725-750 years
Plutarch, *Lives*	ca. 50-120	500 BC – AD 70	ca. 100	ca. 950	30-600 years	850-1500 years
Herodotus, *History*	ca. 485-425 BC	546-478 BC	430-425 BC	ca. 900	50-125 years	1400-1450 years
Thucydides, *History*	ca. 460-400 BC	431-411 BC	410-400 BC	ca. 900	0-30 years	1300-1350 years
Xenophon, *Anabasis*	ca. 430-355 BC	401-399 BC	385-375 BC	ca. 1350	15-25 years	1750 years
Polybius, *History*	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.

© 1995 Probe Ministries

Authority of the Bible – A Strong Argument for Christianity

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

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

There are many books today that claim to be the Word of God. The Koran, the *Bhagavad Gita*, The Book of Mormon, and other religious works all claim to be divinely inspired. The Bible claims to be the only book that is divinely inspired and that all other claims of inspiration from other works should be ruled out. Does the Bible confirm its exclusive claim to be the Word of God? The totality of evidences presents a strong case for the divine inspiration of the Bible.



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

Jesus directly affirmed the authority of the Old Testament and indirectly affirmed the New Testament. In Luke 11:51, Jesus identified the prophets and the canon of the Old Testament. He

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

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

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

Prophecy

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

compare to the Bible when it comes to the fulfillment of prophecy.

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

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

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

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

However, in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These

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

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

Unity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Archaeology

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

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

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

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

However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, archaeologists in Turkey discovered a city which proved to be the capital of the Hittite empire. In the city they discovered a massive library of thousands of tablets. These tablets

showed that the Hittite language was an early relative of the Indo-European languages.

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

Archaeology has also demonstrated the accuracy of the New Testament. One of the most well attested to New Testament authors is Luke. Scholars have found him to be a very accurate historian, even in many of his details. In the Gospel of Luke and Acts, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands without error.{8} A. N. Sherwin-White states, For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.{9}

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

The Bible Alone Is God's Word

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

However, only the Bible proves to be divinely inspired by God and therefore, other claims of divine inspiration should be ruled out for several reasons.

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

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

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

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

The Koran, the holy book of Islam, denies the deity of Christ, the triune nature of God, and the atoning work of Christ on the cross (Sura 4:116, 168). These are foundational truths

taught in the Bible. The Pali Canon, the holy scriptures of Southern Buddhism, teach a naturalistic worldview (or pantheistic, as some schools interpret it). It also teaches salvation by works and the doctrine of reincarnation. The worldview of the Pali Canon and its view of salvation contradict biblical teachings. Since these works contradict biblical teaching, we reject their claim to divine inspiration.

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

Notes

1. For more information refer to the articles "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels" (probe.org/historical-reliability-of-the-gospels/) and "The Uniqueness of Jesus" (www.probe.org/uniqueness-of-jesus).
2. Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 869.
3. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible,* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1986), 364-367.
4. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1959), 31.
5. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1953), 176.
6. Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 25.
7. Ibid., 152-53.
8. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), s.v., Archaeology, New Testament.
9. Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers,1999), 66.

© 2005 Probe Ministries

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

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

This article is also available in Spanish. 

Differences Between the Four Gospels

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

Are the Gospels historical or mythological?

The first challenge to address is how to account for the differences among the four Gospels. They are each different in nature, content, and the facts they include or exclude. The reason for the variations is that each author wrote to a different audience and from his own unique perspective. Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience to prove to them that Jesus is indeed their Messiah. That's why Matthew includes many of the teachings of Christ and makes numerous references to Old Testament prophecies. Mark wrote to a Greek or Gentile audience to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, he

makes his case by focusing on the events of Christ's life. His gospel moves very quickly from one event to another, demonstrating Christ's lordship over all creation. Luke wrote to give an accurate historical account of Jesus' life. John wrote after reflecting on his encounter with Christ for many years. With that insight, near the end of his life John sat down and wrote the most theological of all the Gospels.

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

Let me give you an example. Imagine if four people wrote a biography on your life: your son, your father, a co-worker, and a good friend. They would each focus on different aspects of your life and write from a unique perspective. One would be writing about you as a parent, another as a child growing up, one as a professional, and one as a peer. Each may include different stories or see the same event from a different angle, but their differences would not mean they are in error. When we put all four accounts together, we would get a richer picture of your life and character. That is what is taking place in the Gospels.

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

The Date of the New Testament Writings: Internal Evidence

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

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

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

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

A.D. 60. Furthermore, most scholars agree Mark precedes Luke, making Mark's Gospel even earlier.

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

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

The Date of the Gospels: External Evidence

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

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

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

The Bodmer Papyri contains most of John, and dates to A.D. 200. Another is the Rylands Papyri that was found in Egypt

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

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

Another line of evidence is the writings of the church fathers. Clement of Rome sent a letter to the Corinthian church in A.D. 95. in which he quoted from the Gospels and other portions of the N.T. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote a letter before his martyrdom in Rome in A.D. 115, quoting all the Gospels and other N.T. letters. Polycarp wrote to the Philippians in A.D. 120 and quoted from the Gospels and N.T. letters. Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) quotes John 3. Church fathers of the early second century were familiar with the apostle's writings and quoted them as inspired Scripture.

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

From the evidence, we can conclude the Gospels were indeed

written by the authors they are attributed to.

How Reliable was the Oral Tradition?

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

The evidence shows that in oral cultures where memory has been trained for generations, oral memory can accurately preserve and pass on large amounts of information. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reveals to us how important oral instruction and memory of divine teaching was stressed in Jewish culture. It is a well-known fact that the rabbis had the O.T. and much of the oral law committed to memory. The Jews placed a high value on memorizing whatever wri ting reflected inspired Scripture and the wisdom of God. I studied under a Greek professor who had the Gospels memorized word perfect. In a culture where this was practiced, memorization skills were far advanced compared to ours today. New Testament scholar Darrell Bock states that the Jewish culture was "a culture of memory."{5}

Rainer Reisner presents six key reasons why oral tradition accurately preserved Jesus' teachings.{6} First, Jesus used the Old Testament prophets' practice of proclaiming the word of God which demanded accurate preservation of inspired teaching. Second, Jesus' presentations of Himself as Messiah would reinforce among His followers the need to preserve His words accurately. Third, ninety percent of Jesus' teachings and sayings use mnemonic methods similar to those used in Hebrew poetry. Fourth, Jesus trained His disciples to teach His lessons even while He was on earth. Fifth, Jewish boys

were educated until they were twelve, so the disciples likely knew how to read and write. Finally, just as Jewish and Greek teachers gathered disciples, Jesus gathered and trained His to carry on after His death.

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

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

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

The Transmission of the Gospel Texts

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

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

So the original writings were accurate. However, we do not have the original manuscripts. What we have are copies of copies of copies. Are these accurate, or have they been tampered with? As shown earlier, we have 5000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. When you include the quotes

from the church fathers, manuscripts from other early translations like the Latin Vulgate, the Ethiopic text, and others, the total comes out to over 24,000 ancient texts. With so many ancient texts, significant alterations should be easy to spot. However, those who accuse the New Testament of being corrupted have not produced such evidence. This is significant because it should be easy to do with so many manuscripts available. The truth is, the large number of manuscripts confirm the accurate preservation and transmission of the New Testament writings.

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

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

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

Do Miracles Discredit the Gospels?

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

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

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

There are also non-Christian sources that attest to the miracles of Christ. Josephus writes, "Now there was about that

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

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

Notes

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

2. Ibid., 9.

3. F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 14.

4. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics,* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002), 530.
5. Michael Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire,* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 80.

6. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels,* 27-28.

7. Geisler, 474.

8. Ibid.

9. Quoted by Norman Geisler, *General Introduction to the Bible,* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 405.

© 2004 Probe Ministries.

“There is No Proof Your Pathetic Manmade God Ever Lived”

There is not one proof that Jesus ever lived. Everything you quoted on your stupid page was all hearsay that was passed along by g*dd*mn fools. Yeshu was real and lived one hundred years before your concocted fake savior. There was jesus of gamala who was another savior. There was jesus bar kocba, yet another savior. Josephus never wrote that passage about jesus and only a f*ing fool would believe it was anything other than another ‘christian’ lie and forgery. Josephus was a Jew and would have been stoned to death for such a statement. You people lie like dogs and couldn’t tell the truth if your lives depended on it. There were at least 50 well known authors/historians during the era that your pathetic manmade god was said to have lived yet not one of them bothered to write one word about him. Hell, man don’t you think with all his miracles and dead people popping out of graves during his crucifixion that someone might sit up and take notice? There are no people on this planet meaner or more insane that Christians. Also, our Founders did not found this nation on your sickening repulsive deadly religion and most of them hated it. History is completely silent on all the major bible characters, including the child raping killer Moses and the pimp Abraham. Thank goodness, for you couldn’t find a more disgusting and perverted bunch if you spent your life looking. Yahweh was a real b*stard that I wouldn’t allow in my neighborhood. Why don’t you try the truth for a change?**

I am sorry that our material has caused you to respond with such negative emotion.

But if I may, I'd like to engage some of your points.

> ***There is not one proof that jesus ever lived. Everything you quoted on your stupid page was all hearsay that was passed along by g*dd*mn fools.***

This is a fairly broad generalization. Could you refer to something specific so we can get a better idea of what you object to most?

> ***Yeshu was real and lived one hundred years before your concocted fake savior. There was jesus of gamala who was another savior. There was jesus bar kocba, yet another savior.***

Do you have some documentation for these various Jesus characters so we can research ourselves? This is a commonly held notion but the documentation we often see is not reliable.

> ***Josephus never wrote that passage about jesus and only a f***ing fool would believe it was anything other than another 'christian' lie and forgery. Josephus was a jew and would have been stoned to death for such a statement.***

Concerning Josephus, Michael [Gleghorn] clearly indicates that the second passage he refers to by Josephus was likely edited by a Christian scholar to include the references to Jesus as the Christ and other messianic phrases. Most scholars regard the rest of the passage as genuine. www.probe.org/ancient-evidence-for-jesus-from-non-christian-sources/.

> You people lie like dogs and couldn't tell the truth if your lives depended on it. There were at least 50 well known authors/historians during the era that your pathetic manmade god was said to have lived yet not one of them bothered to write one word about him.

Can you provide us a list of a few of these authors/historians? You have to consider that any news did not travel very far or very fast in that era. Many of Jesus' miracles would be beyond belief for many and would have just been dismissed. It makes sense therefore, that Jesus was noted a few decades later when the number of his followers continued to grow despite severe persecution.

> ***Hell, man don't you think with all his miracles and dead people popping out of graves during his crucifixion that someone might sit up and take notice? There are no people on this planet meaner or more insane that Christians. Also, our Founders did not found this nation on your sickening repulsive deadly religion and most of them hated it.***

I agree with you to a degree. Jefferson and Franklin were likely deists who used the Bible when it suited them. George Washington however, seems to be a genuine Christian. Do you have sources who indicate otherwise?

> ***History is completely silent on all the major bible characters, including the child raping killer moses and the pimp abraham.***

Well, that's not exactly true. Roman and Jewish historians make reference to Jesus and Christians in the first century. Also a stone from around 800BC contained the phrase "House of David." Babylonian records refer to the appropriate kings of Judah in the early years of the Babylonian captivity, both those left in Jerusalem and those taken to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is real as are the accounts of various Assyrian kings mentioned in Chronicles and Kings. The Babylonian and Persian kings are accurately reflected in Daniel. It's quite unlikely to find any archeological references to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were nomadic herders who didn't keep any history.

> ***Thank goodness, for you couldn't find a more disgusting and***

perverted bunch if you spent your life looking. Yahweh was a real b*stard that I wouldn't allow in my neighborhood. Why don't you try the truth for a change?

We are looking for the truth and confidently believe we have found it in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I suspect that something else besides your perceived lack of evidence is driving the strength of your rejection. Whatever that may be, I am truly sorry that some Christian or group of Christians have grievously harmed you in some way in the past. No true Christians ever claim to be perfect or to have exhaustive knowledge. But we have seen and experienced the truth in ways that are quite convincing.

Respectfully,

Raymond G. Bohlin, Ph.D.

---

https://sites.google.com/site/yahwehelohiym/sons-of-god/the-boundaries-of-the-nations

Yahweh was just a hateful petty tribal god and one of the many sons of el elyon, the most high god, and your bible proves it but you people do not understand what the hell you read and keep the lies going.

I'm afraid your source is a bit behind the times. While some of what he says is correct, that some names of God go back to the Ugaritic language, his/her reliance on the Documentary Hypothesis is outdated. www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/09/24/the-documentary-hypothesis.aspx#Article

"Sons of God" appears elsewhere in the Old Testament, in Genesis 6:2,4 and Job 38:7. In each case it is either a reference to men who followed God (Genesis 6) or angels (Job 38). Nothing new or damaging here.

If you just look a little further in the Old Testament you find Isaiah saying;

> I am the Lord, I have no peer,
> there is no God but me.
> I arm you for battle, even though you do not recognize me.
> I do this so people will recognize from east to west
> that there is no God but me;
> I am the Lord, I have no peer.
> Remember what I accomplished in antiquity!
> Truly I am God, I have no peer;
> I am God, and there is none like me (45:5-9)

The God of the Bible is a monotheistic God throughout. And we do have a nearly complete Book of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the only difference with the Masoretic text of AD 900 is a few spelling changes.

One item at a time.

www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/buckner_ncn.html

I also advise you to read *Liars for Jesus* and Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*. Paine helped word our Constitution and Bill of Rights and named this country The United States of America. Few Christians will speak about his book because it cannot be refuted intelligently. His part 3 proves there are NO OT prophecies of jesus and makes jackasses of anyone who says otherwise. Can you people read? Christians don't follow the doctrine of jesus, they follow the apostate liar paul. Read the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* to find the Lord's Prayer and the so-called ten commandments along with many other items the murdering jews (who are not jews but are liars from the synagogue of satan) stole and created their rotten religion. Much of what they stole was from the ancient Sumerians who lived about 1000 years before the hyksos came to be known as Hebrews. Their epic of creation was used by these maggots to

create the most bloody and perverted religion this world has known, until Christians showed up.

Hmmm. I don't recall claiming that the U.S. is a Christian nation. You won't find that anywhere on our website. But do read from George Washington's farewell address:

> Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

Clearly he doesn't say what religion, but there was little else in America at that time except for different forms of Christianity. Even if he only means a loose form of deism, he clearly questions that government can function for long without it.

So you really want to use Thomas Paine as your source for the conviction that there are no OT prophesies about Jesus? There is so much we didn't know in the late 18th century. Archaeology was barely a fledgling science. So many manuscripts were unknown. We have thousands of OT and NT manuscripts today that Paine had no knowledge of whatsoever.

Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12 is about as clear a prophecy of Jesus that you will find. And remember we have a complete copy of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls, well before Jesus lived.

Liars for Jesus looks like an interesting book. I have no doubt there has been sloppy scholarship on the part of many in the religious right. At Probe Ministries we make every effort to research with integrity and write with a biblical reasonableness and respect for those we disagree with.

Two of the foremost and revered Jewish Archaeologists in Israel have proven the OT is a lie but preachers will never tell that. They are greedy dogs and deceivers. www.hiddenmysteries.org/mysteries/history/jehovah.html

I am familiar with the archaeologists you mention and their conclusions are quite controversial. Archaeology comes with a need for publicity to help donors and foundations continue your funding. Making such an outrageous claim would certainly get headlines and keep the dollars flowing.

I'm not surprised that there are "official" documents declaring that YHWH had Ashterah as a consort. The Jewish histories of the Bible are filled with condemnation for continuing to worship in the high places and using Ashterah poles for fertility. They did indeed worship many gods at times. The Bible doesn't hide that.

But again, this document refers to the Documentary Hypothesis and the P source. This has been debunked for decades but is still used in many secular universities because it fits their predetermined conclusions about biblical texts.

By the way, you can find documentation for the House of David inscription here: www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/category/archaeology/.

Also we do have the oldest form of writing from Tell Mardikh,

the Ebla Tablets. These date to between the 26th and 23rd centuries BCE. There are names, of places, people, and customs similar to those found in Genesis. If Genesis was supposedly written in the 7th century BCE as many claim, these names, places and customs could not be known.

evidenceforchristianity.blogspot.com/2008/11/ebla-tablets-ancient-sumerian.html

---

Elba Tablets?! Ha, your man was long ago discredited. You must keep up.

www.infidels.org/library/modern/james_still/reliability.html

Everything the so-called jews have or ever had was stolen from other cultures. It is easy to understand why those horrid creatures have been tossed out of every nation they tried to infiltrate with their money making schemes and corruptions. They were the central bankers our founders hated and tried to keep out of this nation. The Presidents who came against them were assassinated. Jackson managed to survive the attempts they made on his life but they still managed to gain the upper hand again and now the swine damn near own this entire nation. The only method used to gain control of Palestine was more lies. Go figure. You don't have a clue what is even happening in this world and who is in control.

I don't think Mr. Still refutes much of anything about the Ebla Tablets. He admits that Pettinato is a Sumerologist and therefore will have skills of translation. The only quibble Mr. Still seems to have with Pettinato is his claim to find the name Yah, similar to Yahweh. OK fine, he just offers another opinion. He says nothing about the names of the cities on the plain. He lost almost all credibility with me in his opening three paragraphs, claiming that Christianity is just a faith and mystery religion according to Paul. Then says Josh McDowell's theology is in tension with this since McDowell

wants an inerrant scripture based on facts. Sorry, I don't see any tension at all. Paul refers to actual events in his letters, things that happened to him and things he learned from the apostles. Paul is the one in 1 Corinthians 15 who puts a lot of weight on the historical resurrection. There's no tension. He's making mountains out of ant hills.

His account of how the gospels came about is some shoddy tying together of weird threads. The so-called "Q" document does not exist. It is only supposed to exist because it fits this model. He refers to some of the church fathers to back up some of his points but not to the early tradition among those same church fathers that Mark was written by Mark from Peter's recollections. Luke is indeed an historian. Still's confusion over the middle chapters is not worth responding to. Most conservative scholars now suggest that all the gospels were written before AD 70 because none of them mention the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple when Jesus specifically predicts this in all three synoptic gospels. It would be easy to add this as an editorial proof that Jesus got it right. Especially if these gospels were supposedly cobbled together from sayings and other recollections.

Last, I really liked the part about Jesus waving a magic wand over Lazarus in the catacombs indicating they saw him as a magician. I haven't actually seen the picture though I looked for one. Found a few articles stating the same but no documentation. I suspect that it's another Everest out of an ant hill.

I'm still working on the Thomas Paine refutation of messianic prophecies. Not terribly impressed though. As suspected some of his objections no longer hold up. He also assumes away the supernatural so when Isaiah refers to the Persian Cyrus who wasn't even born in Isaiah's time, he uses that to say that obviously Isaiah was written after 500 BCE. It's bad form to assume away what you are trying to discredit.

Funny how you keep claiming that men like Paine just assume things while he at least existed and that is more than you can say about your bible supermen. It would be one thing to have one of these paragons of virtue (not) to disappear but to have the great majority of them to vaporize from all historical records should wake up even the village idiot. I guess when a man makes his living off conning the sheeple he will stand by his deception until the end. Religion is now a trillion dollar a year BUSINESS. That is like waiting for a used car salesman to tell the buyer to be ware, there may be something wrong with his intended purchase. If Christians really claim the bible is the word of god they must really be confused about what the book says since there are over 3000 sects of Christianity and they disagree on many points. If god is not the author of confusion he sure messed up with his only written word to man. Not only is the bible a mess of contradictions and falsehoods, it is by far the filthiest and bloodiest book ever penned by man. You claim the Creator of this entire world had any part of that filth and to me that is where blasphemy truly is found. You are obviously rooted in lies or you are just taking advantage of brainwashed people to make a living. Either way, you will never open your eyes. Enjoy the holiday of greed and materialism with the rest of the Christian world.

Your hatred blinds you at least as much as you would say my faith blinds me.

I will readily admit that much that passes for Christianity indeed is little more than business. But I would say you are guilty of following the old adage of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. We’re not all liars, cheats and frauds.

Jesus did/does exist.

He indeed fulfilled dozens of OT prophecies about the Messiah.

Performed signs and miracles beyond the plain ability of a simple magician, control over nature that frightened even his own disciples, raised a man dead for four days, healed a man blind from birth.

He died for my sins and for yours.

His historical resurrection proved his claims of deity and opened the door for all who call Him Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, will be saved. Ten of eleven disciples died a martyr's death, believing all that they saw and heard was real.

You are following the imaginations of those who are guilty of seeking to destroy what they simply don't like. Besides, as the evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane said, "If my brain is simply composed of atoms, and my thoughts are simply the interaction of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose my brain to be composed of atoms" (loose paraphrase). In a fully materialistic universe, there is no truth, no way to truly know what is real; truth is simply what works, for the moment. Truth is indeed relative and ultimately unknowable. So why bother with your crusade? If some choose to belief a benevolent fiction, what do you care? Obviously you do care, you believe some things to be true and false. I only observe that you need to borrow from a Christian worldview to do so.

Pascal's wager is still worth considering; if I am wrong and death is the end and there is no afterlife, I've lost nothing. I've lived a good life, loved my wife and kids, kind to my neighbors, supported an Indian boy, and help give others hope. If you're wrong, you lose everything.

I will enjoy the celebration of the Incarnation that the now secular culture of the USA has turned into a necessary economic ritual. My family will enjoy a very modest Christmas.

I hope you can enjoy some time with friends or family during this end of year.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ray Bohlin

Posted Dec. 26, 2011
© 2011 Probe Ministries

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

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

The Story of the Scrolls

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

As tensions between the Jews and Romans increased, the

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

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

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

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

Date and Contents of the Scrolls

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

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

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

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

The famous Copper Scrolls were discovered in Cave 3 in 1952.

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

The oldest known piece of biblical Hebrew is a fragment from the book of Samuel discovered in Cave 4, and is dated from the third century B.C.{4} The War Scroll found in Caves 1 and 4 is an eschatological text describing a forty-year war between the Sons of Light and the evil Sons of Darkness. The Temple Scroll discovered in Cave 11 is the largest and describes a future Temple in Jerusalem that will be built at the end of the age.

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

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text

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

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

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now had manuscripts that predated the Masoretic Text by about one thousand years. Scholars were anxious to see how the Dead Sea documents would match up with the Masoretic Text. If a

significant amount of differences were found, we could conclude that our Old Testament Text had not been well preserved. Critics, along with religious groups such as Muslims and Mormons, often make the claim that the present day Old Testament has been corrupted and is not well preserved. According to these religious groups, this would explain the contradictions between the Old Testament and their religious teachings.

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

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

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

Despite the thousand year gap, scholars found the Masoretic Text and Dead Sea Scrolls to be nearly identical. The Dead Sea

Scrolls provide valuable evidence that the Old Testament had been accurately and carefully preserved.

The Messianic Prophecies and the Scrolls

One of the evidences used in defending the deity of the Christ is the testimony of prophecy. There are over one hundred prophecies regarding Christ in the Old Testament.{8} These prophecies were made centuries before the birth of Christ and were quite specific in their detail. Skeptics questioned the date of the prophecies and some even charged that they were not recorded until after or at the time of Jesus, and therefore discounted their prophetic nature.

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

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

One of the most important Dead Sea documents is the Isaiah Scroll. This twenty-four foot long scroll is well preserved

and contains the complete book of Isaiah. The scroll is dated 100 B.C. and contains one of the clearest and most detailed prophecies of the Messiah in chapter fifty-three, called the "Suffering Servant." Although some Jewish scholars teach that this refers to Israel, a careful reading shows that this prophecy can only refer to Christ.

Here are just a few reasons. The suffering servant is called sinless (53:9), he dies and rises from the dead (53:8-10), and he suffers and dies for the sins of the people (53:4-6). These characteristics are not true of the nation of Israel. The Isaiah Scroll gives us a manuscript that predates the birth of Christ by a century and contains many of the most important messianic prophecies about Jesus. Skeptics could no longer contend that portions of the book were written after Christ or that first century insertions were added to the text.

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

The Messiah and the Scrolls

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

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

including the resurrection of the dead. Finally, He would be human and yet possess divine attributes.

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

> For He will honor the pious upon the throne of His eternal kingdom, release the captives, open the eyes of the blind, lifting up those who are oppressed… For He shall heal the critically wounded, He shall raise the dead, He shall bring good news to the poor.

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

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

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

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

the ministry of Jesus.

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

Two Major Prophets and the Dead Sea Scrolls

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

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

Critical scholars challenged the view that Isaiah was written by a single author. Many contended that the first thirty-nine

chapters were written by one author in the eighth century B.C., and the final twenty-six chapters were written in the post-Exilic period. The reason for this is that there are some significant differences in the style and content between the two sections. If this were true, Isaiah's prophecies of Babylon in the later chapters would not have been predictive prophecies but written after the events occurred.

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

Inventory of the Scrolls

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

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

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

and Ruth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

1. James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco, CA.: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 20-32.
2. Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 278.
3. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1985), 513-517.
4. Vanderkam and Flint, 115.
5. Price, 280.
6. Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 304, quoted in Norman Geisler and William Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 367.
7. Archer, 25.
8. J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1984), 665-670.
9. Geisler and Nix, 503-504.
10. Ibid., 137.
11. Ibid., 138-139.
12. Vanderkam and Flint, 265-266.
13. Randall Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House, 1996), 162.
14. Ibid., 154-155.
15. Ibid., 156-157.
16. Archer, 513-517.
17. Price, 162.

Bibliography

Archer, Gleason. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1985.

Geisler, Norman and William Nix. *General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

Payne, J. Barton. *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy.* Grand

Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1984.

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

Scanlin, Harold. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Modern Translations of the Old Testament*. Wheaton, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993.

Vanderkam, James and Peter Flint. *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. San Francisco, CA.: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002.

© 2006 Probe Ministries

"How Do We Know Christ Rose from the Dead? And Who Wrote the Bible?"

I have been struggling within myself for nearly all my life as to whether to believe that Christ actually rose from the dead. For without that fact, Christianity is an empty promise. So I ask myself, "What evidence is there?" The Bible is the only source of documentation we have to examine. I have often asked and never received an answer, as to exactly who wrote the Bible. The New Testament appears to have been written (opinions differ) from 75 to 400 years after Jesus was to have been around. Who put the pen to the paper on the originals? Who wrote the Old Testament? And when? Jesus was using a copy. Who compiled all the books of the O. T.? Why were they compiled before the coming of Christ? Did they come from a common geographical area, or were different continents involved? What language was used?

I hear statements like "They found hundreds of complete copies of the Bible in jars in the Dead Sea caves." I try to envision how many thousands of papyri must have been preserved for that to be true. Do you have some light on this subject?

Thank you for your recent e-mail requesting answers regarding the Resurrection, and how the Old and New Testaments came to be developed.

I will try to give you an answer on each of your questions.

> I have been struggling within myself for nearly all my life as to whether to believe that Christ actually rose from the dead. For without that fact, Christianity is an empty promise. So I ask myself, "What evidence is there?"

There are a number of components that would suggest Christ actually rose from the dead. I believe this to be an historical event.

I liken the Resurrection to a space probe to Mars or Venus. Once it is launched, it is on the way to its destination upon the basis of the powerful impetus from its origination.

There is no doubt that something monumental must have occurred around 32 A.D.!

I would suggest you go back to the Probe Web site and you will find essays speaking to this issue. We suggest these:

The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?
Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?
Who's Got the Body?
Jesus Must Have Risen: Disciples' Lives Changed
Cruci-fiction and Resuscitation
A (Not So) Brief Defense of Christianity

There are many good reasons to believe this event actually occurred.

You cannot explain the origination of Christianity if you leave a dead Jew hanging on a Cross. The cowardice of the disciples was immediately replaced with a boldness and an affirmation, declaring that Christ arose from the Dead, and eleven of "the Twelve" sealed their belief in this event with the spilling of their own blood, becoming the first Christian martyrs.

The idea that they all got together and conjured this up among themselves is preposterous! They would not have died for what they knew was a lie. In effect, the rapid and dramatic spread of Christianity through out the Greco-Roman World is a second "booster" which changed the world that was. And we are still feeling the impact!

> The Bible is the only source of documentation we have to examine. I have often asked and never received an answer, as to exactly who wrote the Bible. It appears to have been written (opinions differ) from 75 to 400 years after Jesus was to have been around.

I'm not sure where you got the idea that the New Testament was developed in a time frame from "75-400 years." This is definitely not accurate, and needs clarification.

What we do have over those four centuries is a great deal of manuscript evidence of the New Testament. We need to start with the first century A.D., the century when all of the New Testament documents were written.

To do this, we need to establish and delineate the time frames of events, from the birth of Christ to the end of the first century A.D.

JESUS: Let's start with His life. The span of his life begins around 6 B.C. We have a very firm date for Herod the Great. He died in 4 B.C. So, given the two years allowed for his order to slaughter the first born male infants up two years old in Bethlehem, Jesus' birth could have occurred as early as 6 B.C.

Doing the math suggests that Jesus may have been 38 years old when He was crucified. (The date for the crucifixion by most scholars is fixed at 32 A.D.)

Our first consideration is the time span from Christ's resurrection to the end of the book of Acts. As you probably know, Acts is "Volume 2" (Luke's Second Treatise) whch follows his first Treatise, The Gospel of Luke.

You may remember that at the end of the Book of Acts, Luke is still Paul's traveling companion, and they are both still alive and ministering. The dates for the writing of these are 58 A.D. for Luke and 66-67 A.D. for Acts.

We have a pretty firm date for the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in Rome at the hands of Nero in 68 A.D. He served as Emperor from 50 to 68 A.D. If so, his suicide occurred in the same year he executed Peter and Paul.

Now you must recognize that the Four Gospels, Acts, and all the Epistles (letters) were written by the late Sixties, with John's Gospel and his three Epistles of John and his Book of Revelation coming a little later, around 90-95 A.D.

And even before any of the New Testament documents were written down, we know that there was an oral tradition already circulating: that is, a verbal collection of the sayings, stories, and actions of Christ.

CHURCH FATHERS: We also know that about 100 A. D. we have two epistles written by Clement, one of the early bishops of Rome. He wrote both of them to the Church at Corinth at just about the time John was writing the Book of Revelation. He speaks with some authority to them and perhaps other bishops and churches. And in these letters, there are indications that he was familiar with some of the writings and teachings of the Apostle Paul. You will remember that Paul gave instructions in some of his epistles, asking that the churches he wrote to should copy his epistles and send them to the other churches

for instruction and encouragement.

All of this is to say, that the books which make up our New Testament were all written and being passed around and being copied within the first century A.D.!

Now it is true that we do not have one original scrap (we call the original the "autograph") of any of the New Testament documents. But we do have, through the combined writings and citations of the Church Fathers from 100 to 400 A.D., an enormous amount of material. With the exception of a few verses, we are able to reconstruct the entire New Testament from the Scripture quotations of the Church Fathers!

Let me give you an example. Let's say you were a teacher and you wrote the Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) on the chalk board. Then you had all of your students copy those 18 verses in their notebooks. After they had done so, let's say you went back to the chalk board and erased the Prologue you wrote. Now, have we lost the Autograph? Yes. We have lost the original, but we have 25 copies of it that we can compare with each other and see where there might be a misspelled word, or a missing phrase or sentence, etc.

And this is what we call the science of "Textual Criticism." Obviously, the earliest extant manuscripts are the most valuable to us. For example, I was recently in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland and saw some of the most ancient manuscripts, portions of the New Testament (papyrus) which date back to the beginning of the second century (the 100s). You would be amazed at how much of the New Testament is in that library, from the second to the fourth Centuries! You could probably get the whole layout on the Web. (Please see my essay "Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?"). I was able to see with my own eyes, what I had always wanted to see, a little fragment from the Gospel of John (18:31-33) which is dated at 120 A.D. We have an actual fragment that is only about 24 years old from the time John wrote his gospel in 96

A.D.

So, you ask: “Who put the pen to the paper on the originals?” We have supplied the answer above. The authors begin with Matthew and end with John (the book of Revelation). And as stated above, the autographs, the original documents, were all written in the first century A.D. And again may I say that one little scrap of Scripture from the second century is more valuable that 10,000 paperback copies of *Good News for Modern Man*?!

OLD TESTAMENT: Now let’s turn to the Old Testament. You ask,

> Who wrote the Old Testament? And when? Jesus was using a copy. Who compiled all the books of the O. T.? Why were they compiled before the coming of Christ? Did they come from a common geographical area, or were different continents involved? What language was used?

First of all, we need to realize that while the Old and New Testaments are linked, they developed from two different time contexts: Judaism, and the Greco/Roman world. They spoke different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic/Greek and Latin). They lived in different places. They developed different cultures. And while they overlap in time to a small extent, the Jewish heritage is much older than the Greco/Roman world of Jesus’ time.

The Hebrews (Jews) begin to appear in the Middle East at around 2000 B.C. (or 4,000 years from our time). Abraham, the Father and Founder, was living in Ur near where the mouths of the Tigris & Euphrates rivers flow into the Persian Gulf. The broader “Holy Land” would include Modern Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza, and Arabia: these constitute what we now know as Palestine, or Israel.

We begin to see archaeological indications of a definite the presence of Hebrews in the 1500 & 1400 B.C.

As language and phonetics developed, there came to be several distinct, Semitic dialects, out of which came the Hebrew alphabet and other cognate strains (Phoenician, Arabic, Ethiopic, Hebrew and Aramaic) throughout the Middle East.

At the time of the Exodus, we learn that Moses, educated by the Pharaoh in Egypt, was a man of letters. You may remember that Jesus alluded to this in John 5:46: "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for He wrote of me."

As the Jews began to settle in Israel, they became powerful. All along they recorded their history, either in writing or by oral tradition. The Old Testament books are a diverse collection of different kinds of Hebrew literature. All of this literature was preserved by creating scrolls from sheep or goat skins (synagogues all over the world still use them) upon which the precious documents were copied and preserved.

The creation of the official Old Testament canon we know today all came together around the sixth century B.C. (the historical time of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah).

THE SEPTUAGINT: Because of the spread of the Greek language (thanks to Alexander the Great), in 250 B.C. Jewish scholars felt the need to translate the Old Testament into Greek so the common people could read it. Jesus knew and read the Biblical Hebrew of the Scrolls when he read in the synagogues. And He no doubt spoke Aramaic (same Hebrew alphabet) to His disciples and to the crowds that gathered.

The value of the Septuagint is that we can examine the Greek translation of the O.T. by these scholars to see how the Hebrew text was rendered into Greek by these translators at that time.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS: Now a word about the Dead Sea Scrolls. You say,

I hear statements like 'They found hundreds of complete

> *copies of the Bible in jars in the Dead Sea Caves'. I try to envision how many thousands of papyrus must have been preserved for that to be true. Do you have some light on this subject*

Yes, I do. Let me explain. When the Qumran Scrolls were first discovered, there was a great deal of excitement that we would find significant links to the four Gospels and clear connections to Jesus and the New Testament. But after study over six decades, there does not seem to be much overlap. I have been to Qumran, seem the caves, and I have read the entire translation of all the material that has been gathered and translated. (See Ceza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*).

And I can tell you that no such "hundreds of complete copies of the Bible have been found in jars in the Dead Sea caves." There are many thousands of fragments, some as small as postage stamps with a few Hebrew words on them. Today, Qumran scholars continue to study the fragments, designated from each cave/location, and it is just one big puzzle-like task of trying to link one to another. It is a long and tedious process that will not be completed for a long, long time. And many fragments desired are either lost, overlooked, or stolen to sell.

The benefits of Qumran lie in the Old Testament fragments which can be compared with the Septuagint and the Hebrew Texts of the Synagogues. The outstanding example is the comparison of the Book of Isaiah. What is striking is the fact that there is very little variance between the two texts. The famous Qumran scroll and the official, Massoretic text used in synagogues today have a 95% agreement.

So, let's summarize the sequence of the development of the O.T.:

2000 B.C.	Authors begin writing, preserving literary heritage
465-424 B.C.	O.T. writings are gathered and the Canon formed (Ezra)
280-250 B.C.	Septuagint translation (Greek)
150 B.C.	Qumran Community (Essenes) Originated in the north (Damascus). Persecution drove them south to Qumran. (Dead Sea Scrolls)
45-96 A.D.	N.T. We have still another confirmation of the Old Testament text: all the O.T. verses which are quoted by the N.T. authors.

You can, and should have a certainty about this. _____, I hope this helps answer your questions.

Sincerely and warm regards,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

P.S. At one time in my life (college years), I was where you seem to be right now. I considered myself a Christian because I lived in America and hadn't killed anybody! But I came to understand that I was not a real Christian, and I didn't know how to become one. I finally understood what God was requiring of me, and I acted upon it. I find that most people don't know how to become a Christian. There are many in the pews who assume they are, but that can't explain why. That is a dangerous perspective.

If you want to explore this, I would suggest that you read two of my essays in this order:

"A Moral Life Won't Get Us to Heaven"

"The Most Important Decision of your Life."

© 2005 Probe Ministries.

"If the Biblical Documents Are So Reliable, How Do You Explain the Differences?"

Dear Mr. Williams,

I read your article, "Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?" and I have a question about the Massoretic tribes. If the Massoretes counted the characters (letters) in each text as you stated to verify the total number of alephs, beths, gimels, etc., in the original document, and if they also counted to be sure that the middle character was the same in the copy as in the original, how is it that the Qumran scroll of Isaiah 53 had 17 additional characters that are different from the Massoretic text? Did they just forget how to count?

The accuracy of the Massoretic documents is given by your article as evidence for the bibliographic authenticity of the Old Testament. This accuracy is based upon your description of their methods in copying documents. Finally, the scrolls found at Qumran are compared to available and historically more recent copies, on the assumption that the same methods were used in copying both sets.

If the Qumran scrolls are practically identical with the previously available documents, or so the argument goes, then we can rest assured that the Massoretic tradition of impeccable copying has been carried on faithfully throughout

the millenia, and that—by implication—our own Bibles have been translated from accurate texts.

In fact, the details of exactly how the Massoretes maintained accuracy by counting characters, finding the middle character of the copy and the original, etc., tell us that either the Massoretes did not make create the Qumran scrolls, or their method changed over the years; or they never used the character-counting method in the first place.

Without the original insistence that we know how the Massoretes kept accurate copies, the strong similarity between the previously available and more recent documents, and the Qumran scrolls which were more ancient documents, would have been a convincing argument for the accurate translation or "Bibliographical authenticity" of Scripture.

With that detail of Massoretic method, however, your argument falls apart. This bothers me all the more, as I realize I have used the same argument in the past myself. Can't we do better than this?

Thank you for your e-mail. First of all, I must point out an error in your analysis. You ask, "How is it that the Qumran scroll of Isaiah 53 had 17 additional characters that are different from the Massoretic text?" You misread what I said in my essay on the Reliability of the Biblical Documents about the variants. The 17 additional characters were not in the Qumran text; they are in the Massoretic text. In other words, over the thousand years between the two texts, these 17 additional characters were added by scribes. But I refer you back to my essay and my comments about how inconsequential they really are with regard to the text and its meaning. Does that change anything for you? I will come back to this, but a larger question you pose has to do with the transmission of the text over 3,000+ years.

The answer to your concern has to do with the historical

development of copying the Hebrew text. Let me begin with some info about the Massoretes.

They flourished in the tenth century A.D. We don't have to guess that this procedure of "counting characters" was being practiced at that time—we know that it was. And in order for the Massoretes to have such a remarkable agreement with the Qumran scrolls (we use the term "scrolls"—there are a few, but the bulk of the material are fragments) tells us that there must have been a similar rabbinic tradition stretching back a thousand years to the time of Christ and Qumran. We know this counting method was in operation in the tenth century, but we do not know how far this practice goes back, or when it was first implemented. But for there to be such close agreement in tenth century A.D., care for the preservation and accuracy of text had to be practiced by scribes from the first to the tenth century A.D. So this answers part of your question.

Preservation of Hebrew life and religious practice really got going after the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) when Titus destroyed it. The major center of rabbinic tradition after 70 A.D. developed at Tiberius, a city on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. It was here, after the temple was destroyed and the Jews were dispersed from Jerusalem, that the Rabbis began to rethink and preserve Jewish life and religion. Many areas of Jewish thought and religious practice developed over that time, and it was here that the later Massoretes would live.

You need to read a little bit more on what was actually going on at Qumran. This group of Jews is identified by most scholars with the "Essenes." The basis of this acceptance among most scholars comes from extant testimony of three contemporary writers, Josephus (A.D. 37-c.100), Pliny (A.D. 61-113), and Philo (c. 20 B.C.-50 A.D.). The information from these writers about the Essenes fits very well with what we know about the Qumran Community.

Originating in Syria around 200 B.C., this monastic community

was really a “splinter” group which rejected some of the teachings of the main Jewish tradition which were in force from c. 200 B.C. to the wars fought against the Romans (A.D. 68-73). Around 75-50 B.C. they moved to Qumran. Archaeology seems to indicate that the Romans destroyed the Qumran community after the fall of Jerusalem, and probably during the two years they were trying to take Masada. No further archeological evidence appears there after the first century, and Josephus says all of the inhabitants—men, women, children—were killed by the Romans.

I don’t know how familiar you are with the Dead Sea Scroll materials, but I will focus on the actual copies and fragments which relate only to the biblical text. A study of this material includes both biblical and the non-biblical texts (which are made up mostly of either commentaries on the 39 OT books in the Protestant Bible, and commentaries on the Apocryphal books, or of texts about the history and governance of the Qumran Community).

As a protest movement, Qumran did many things differently from those main-stream Jews practicing their religion in Jerusalem/Palestine prior to 70 A.D. I would strongly suggest that you read *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* by Geza Vermes (Penguin Press). I have read them all. Without going into detail, Vermes points out that, while the Essenes highly prized the Hebrew scriptures, and studied and copied them diligently, their process for doing so was much more fluid than what we find in the Massoretic tradition. There are different textual traditions at work in a number of O.T. books, but perhaps the most interesting is the Book of Jeremiah. These are not major, but some sections are placed in a different order, and by this time the tradition of the Septuagint (the Greek Translation of the O.T.) also provides another and somewhat different text which was also translated back into Hebrew!

The major value of the Qumran texts is that they allow us to

get 1000 years closer to the originals than the Massoretic text allowed before 1947 (when the scrolls were first discovered). As far as the Hebrew Text is concerned, from c. 1000 AD to our time, changes in the Hebrew text are literally non-existent. The Hebrew texts as we know them have changed little since the Massoretes wrote them down a thousand years ago. We actually have copies of the Hebrew text which date to the 10th Century.

Now I go back to your question concerning the variants in Isaiah 53. Perhaps my correction of your interpretive error above has solved this problem. You seem to be outraged that there were 17 variables which crept in to Isaiah 53 over a thousand years. I would ask you to look again at my essay on the Biblical Documents and study the nature of those variants! They are insignificant! In light of what I have said above about the Qumran community and the more fluid nature of their handling of Scriptural material, the amazing thing to me is how clean and void the Massoretic text still is of variants when compared with the Qumran texts!

In order for the Massoretes to have possessed such manuscripts in their day with only slight variations from the Qumran text, we can be sure of one thing: I say again the major rabbinic tradition of the first century (after the Temple was destroyed) must have already been treating the copying of Scripture with great care. Otherwise, the Massoretes ten centuries later would not have had access to such a text so pure that only seventeen little non-essential variants had crept into Isaiah 53 over a thousand years! And remember, the Qumran texts were not available to these Massoretic Rabbis. The Qumran texts were still buried in the caves by the Dead Sea, waiting to be discovered a thousand years later!

To sum up, not only do we have two Hebrew texts a thousand years apart, we also have two traditions, the Massoretic tradition/text and the Qumran tradition/text. Both of these Jewish traditions developed out of the same era: c.200 B.C.-73

A.D. While these two flourishing Jewish communities had many things in common, they were, at the time, pretty much estranged, if not outright enemies. Their differences are fairly well-defined from the data that we have available.

Obviously, the biblical texts at Qumran came from the other community, because there was no Qumran sect until c.200-150 B.C. The fact that the biblical textual material at Qumran contains an Isaiah text (for example) of such quality would also be an indication, or a "pointer" that the Hebrew texts were being carefully copied at the time when the Qumran group acquired their copies of the Old Testament scriptures! So you have to ask the question, "From what text (manuscript, copy) of Isaiah, for example, did the Qumran scribes have to copy?" We don't know. But what we do know is what their copy looked like, because we can go to Jerusalem and into the Shrine of the Book and see it!

_____, I don't see where my argument falls apart. Have I missed something here? Let me hear from you. . . .

Jimmy Williams
Founder, Probe Ministries

The question I am posing is, What do we know about the authenticity of the Bible, based on the written records. As far as I can see you are telling me that the Massoretic tradition does not extend backwards in history to the creation of the original documents. Therefore the accuracy with which the Massoretes worked is relevant if, and only if, we accept that between the original documents and the Massoretic tradition, which I believe you say spans something like ten centuries, somehow accuracy was maintained.

I believe you have information on the Massoretic tradition, and on the Qumran work also. I believe you do not have information on the period from the original creation of the

manuscripts, up to the Massoretic time.

I am not trying to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Bible. I have my own reasons for believing that it is the word of God. However, the argument which you have put forward is false. We cannot believe that today's Bible is accurate just based on your argument; because it has nothing to do with the link between the original manuscripts and the stuff that the Massoretes had to work with.

There's no clear link between the original documents and the hands of the first Massoretic scribe, unless I'm missing something.

Dear _____,

I think you are missing something. Let me run through it again.

You conclude by saying "there is no clear link between the original documents and the hands of the first Massoretic scribe." First, let's get the chronology clearly in mind. There are many indications of "links," and I will list them in reverse order:

Massoretic text	Tenth Century A.D	Hebrew
Syriac Peshitta	Third Century A.D.	Aramaic/Syriac: Very early.
Latin Vulgate	Fourth Century A.D.	Jerome Translation (386 A.D.)
Qumran Scrolls	First Century A.D.	Aramaic and Old Hebrew
Septuagint	Third Century B.C.	Greek
Ezra/Nehemiah	Fifth Century B.C.	

Era of the Prophets	Eighth to Fifth Century B.C.	
Kings & Chronicles	Eighth to Fifth Century B.C.	
Wisdom Literature	Tenth to Fifth Century B.C.	
Exodus/Judges	Twelfth to Tenth Century B.C.	

Now we have no extant material of any Old Testament text. None of the original, actual documents have survived. But we do have the above textual traditions in various languages, which all contain translations of the Hebrew text. This leads us to consider the possible elements, times, traditions, communities which were involved in the development and transmission of the Hebrew text from the original autographs to the present.

And you have to remember that the texts of the Old Testament (when the original documents were actually created) were a "work in progress" over many centuries. Within the Bible itself, we find numerous indications of both oral and written documentation being preserved and passed on clear back to the Pentateuch, and throughout the historical books, the wisdom literature, and the prophets beginning with the eleventh and tenth centuries B.C.

We can go back to the fifth century B.C., for example, at that time when Ezra and Nehemiah brought the Jews back to Jerusalem from their captivity in Babylon and rebuilt the temple and the city walls. The Bible records there was a great revival at that time which included the rediscovery of written biblical documents which were read aloud to the people. This indicates an even earlier source which the Jews, the Qumran community and later the Massoretes would later benefit from in the preservation of the text. If these were written materials at that time, it suggests that there must have been even earlier textual material already present among the Jews.

Another source is available to us for comparison which comes from the third century B.C—the very important source for comparison comes from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). Due to Hellenistic influences in the Middle East, many Jews now spoke Greek. The date of the Septuagint's creation may have been as early as 280 B.C. We can compare this translation with Qumran and the Massoretic texts and find that it agrees in all essentials with the Hebrew Manuscripts. Again, we must conclude that this Greek translation of the third century B.C. could only have been produced from the Hebrew texts that were available to them at the time these scholars set about to render the Hebrew text into the Greek language.

So I believe that your charge that there are no clear links from the original autographs to the Massoretic tradition is not defensible. No matter which text material we look at, the remarkable thing about all of these different translations when compared is the fact that agreement reaches about 95%, and none of the variants, interpolations, additions, etc., do anything to change the substance and meaning of the Hebrew text.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

A (Not So) Brief Defense of Christianity

Faith

Everybody has faith. From the meticulous scientist to the most irrational religious fanatic, everyone believes in something, and everyone acts on that belief somehow. The question is not whether we WILL have faith; it is whether or not the things we believe are true. Unfortunately, many people never evaluate the basis for their beliefs. They go with the flow of society, which today is dominated by the idea of *religious pluralism*. Religious pluralism means that we look at one another's beliefs and in effect say, "I'm OK and you're OK." A remark often heard, especially on campus is, "I don't think it really makes much difference what you believe as long as you're sincere."

Truth

Many of us are hesitant or feel it's wrong to make distinctions between people or their ideas. This is because we feel it is arrogant, exclusionary, undemocratic, or socially inappropriate. We want people to like us, so we try not to be disagreeable. Ironically, this very pluralistic environment creates a hesitancy to express personal convictions for fear of offending another. In reality, this creates an atmosphere where all views held are of equal value and are therefore "true." It also may explain why so many people today regard themselves as atheists or agnostics. Viewing so many "religious" options which profess to be THE truth, they become agnostics or atheists, disclaiming the religious idea of "faith" altogether. Some militant atheists propose philosophical and scientific "proofs" to explain away the existence of God, hoping to convince others logically. Other atheists and agnostics have not come to their beliefs logically, but rather believe what they do simply because they prefer or are more comfortable with it.

The Need for Apologetics

A committed, thinking Christians desire must be to challenge that complacency. If there is such a thing as truth, and if

different worldviews do contradict one another, then we need to make sure that the one we choose is the right one and that we have good reasons for believing it to be so. Further, 1 Peter 3:15 tells us that we are to be ready always to give a "defense" (*apologia*), to give answers, reasons for why we believe as we do. This particular outline is designed to provide some of those answers: thus, the title, "A Brief Defense of Christianity." There are three primary reasons why such apologetical information is important:

1. The religious pluralism rampant in our culture demands it. Many today are spiritually hungry and looking for truth in a culture of "isms" very similar to what we find in the Graeco-Roman world of the New Testament. It was in this kind of cultural environment that Christianity came, flourished, and ultimately dominated Western Civilization for 15 centuries. It has been said that Christianity prevailed because the first Christians "out-thought" and "out-loved" the ancient world. Many contemporary Christians are so enamored of having a personal "experience" with God in the safety of their various religious enclaves they have little time left to defend the faith and convert the pagans. *Mind Games* is designed to help us better connect with the wider world through solid thinking and loving care.

2. In the light of Peter's admonition above, Christians are to prepare themselves to share their faith with others and help remove the obstacles to faith which hinder some non-Christians from giving serious consideration to Christ and His claims upon their lives. Apologetics can help remove these obstacles and demonstrate the "reasonableness" of Christianity.

3. Apologetics can also serve to strengthen the faith of young Christians as well as provide them with the discernment necessary to identify and counter non-Christian thinking and worldviews. This enhances personal spiritual growth and better equips the Christian for more effective evangelism. Finally, we noted above that EVERYONE has faithatheist, agnostic, and

Christian. The real issue is not to have faith, but rather to have a worthy OBJECT for our faith. As you walk out on a frozen pond, which would you prefer, a LITTLE faith in a sheet of ice two-feet thick, or a LOT of faith in 1/4 inch of ice? Faith is important, but the object of our faith is all-important. The material in this outline is designed to help assure you that to stand upon Christ and the world view which He taught is to rest upon an object most worthy of your faith. To demonstrate this, we are going to ask and then answer some basic questions concerning the truthfulness of the Christian faith.

SECTION I: THEISM

What is the most reasonable worldview?

Metaphysical options

We have stated that the most basic philosophical question is not that NOTHING is here, but rather SOMETHING IS HERE, and it demands explanation. I am a part of some kind of reality. I have consciousness. Something is happening and I am part of it. Where did it come from? Did everything come from nothing? Or has the material universe always been here and things just accidentally got started? Or is there something or someone that transcends the material universe and is responsible for bringing it into being, and us with it? All of these questions relate to the philosophical concept of *metaphysics*. Webster defines it thusly: “That division of philosophy which includes ontology, or the science of being, and cosmology, or the science of the fundamental causes and processes in things.”

When we seek to answer these basic questions, then, we are thinking “metaphysically,” thinking about the origin and causes of the present reality. And we really have few options, or possible answers to consider:

1. The idea that “something came from nothing.” (Most reject this view, since the very idea defies rationality).

2. The idea that matter is eternal and capable of producing the present reality through blind chance. This second view has spawned two basic worldviews: *Materialism* (or *Naturalism*) and *Pantheism*. Both hold to the idea that nothing exists beyond matter. Materialism is therefore atheistic by definition. Pantheism is similar with the exception that since God does not exist, nature becomes “god” in all its parts.

3. The idea that Someone both transcends and did create the material universe of which we are a part (*Theism*). THERE ARE NO OTHER LOGICAL EXPLANATIONS. Christians of course would embrace this third view, theism, as the most reasonable explanation for what we believe AND for what we find to be true in ourselves and in reality at large. These ideas will be developed more fully in the section on the arguments for the existence of God.

In order to argue for the truth of Christianity, therefore, we must begin with the existence of God. Christianity is a theistic religion. That is, we believe that there is one God who created all things. This is not simply a statement of blind faith. There are sound and rational reasons for preferring this view above the others. We will begin to explore those, but first, let’s briefly evaluate atheism and agnosticism.

Atheism and Agnosticism

Atheism

Ever since the “Enlightenment” in the eighteenth century, philosophers have argued that ALL of reality is to be observed only in space and time. Any notion of a God who is transcendent, eternal, and not bound by natural laws has been largely rejected as “unscientific” or “unproveable.” Since we

cannot “prove” the existence or the non-existence of God, they reason, there is no real benefit or practical value in considering theism as a metaphysical option. An atheist is a person who makes the bold assertion, “There is no God.” It is bold because it claims in an absolute manner what we have just said was not possible: i.e., the existence or non-existence of God cannot be proven. It is also bold because in order to make such an assertion, the atheist would have to be God himself. He would need to possess the qualities and capabilities to travel the entire universe and examine every nook and cranny of the material world before he would even begin to be qualified to come to such a dogmatic conclusion.

The most brilliant, highly-educated, widely-traveled human on earth today, having maximized his/her brain cells at optimum learning levels for a lifetime could not possibly “know” 1/1000th of all that *could* be known; and knowledge is now *doubling* by the years rather than by decades or centuries! Is it possible that God could still exist outside this very limited, personal/knowledge experience of one highly intelligent human being? By faith, the atheist says, “No.” Another curious thing about the atheist is that before he can identify himself as one, he must first *acknowledge* the very idea, or concept, or possibility of God so he can then *deny* His existence! David saw the fallacy of this long ago when he said, “Only the fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God.'” (Psalm 14:1). (Note: For those who desire additional, more formal material on the existence of God, see the Appendix at the end of this outline, where this subject is addressed in greater detail by such philosophers as Anthony Flew, Ludwig Feuerbach, and David Hume).[Editor’s note: Anthony Flew disavowed his atheism in 2005 after grappling with the impossibility of DNA arising from purely naturalistic, random forces.]

Agnosticism

By definition, agnosticism takes the position that “neither the existence nor the nature of God, nor the ultimate origin

of the universe is known or knowable" (Webster). Here again are some bold statements. The agnostic says, "You can't know." What he really means is, "I can't know, you can't know, and nobody can know." Leith Samuel in his little book, *Impossibility of Agnosticism,* mentions three kinds of agnostics:

1. *Dogmatic.* "I don't know, you don't know, and no one can know." Here is a person who already has his mind made up. He has the same problem as the atheist abovehe must know everything in order to say it dogmatically.

2. *Indifferent.* "I don't know, and I don't care." God will never reveal Himself to someone who does not care to know.

3. *Dissatisfied.* "I don't know, but I'd like to know." Here is a person who demonstrates an openness to truth and is willing to change his position if he has sufficient reason to do so. He is also demonstrating what should be true about agnosticism, that is, for one who is searching for truth, agnosticism should be temporary, a path on the way to a less skeptical view of life.

Theism

Those who have not found atheism and agnosticism philosophically, scientifically, or personally satisfying may, at some time in their lives consider the third alternative, that of theism. They may come to ask our next question:

"Is it reasonable to believe that God exists?"

Theism is a reasonable idea. Theologians have traditionally used several philosophical proofs in arguing for the existence of God. These arguments are not always persuasive, but that probably says as much about us as it does about the arguments. People most often reject God for reasons other than logic. These arguments, however, do provide insights that, while not PROVING the existence of God, do provide insights that may be

used to show EVIDENCE of His existence.

The Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument is quite similar to one that the Bible uses in Psalm 19, Psalm 8, and Romans 1. The existence of the "cosmos," the creation, strongly suggests the existence of a Creator. Central to this argument is the following proposition: If anything now exists, something must be eternal. Otherwise, something not eternal must have emerged from nothing. If something exists right now, it must have come from something else, come from nothing, or always existed. If it came from something else, then that something else must have come from nothing, always existed, or come from something else itself. Ultimately, either something has always existed, or at some point something came into being from nothing.

Someone may argue that it is possible that nothing now exists. That is both absurd and self-defeating, because someone must personally exist in order to make the statement that nothing exists. Therefore it is undeniable that we ourselves exist.

Therefore, if I exist, then something must be eternal. If something is eternal, it is then either an eternal being or an eternal universe. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that the universe is not eternal, but that it had a beginning. In addition, if the non-personal universe is that which is eternal, one must explain the presence of personal creatures within that universe. How does personal come from non-personal? If something is eternal and personal while the universe is finite and non-personal, then there must be an eternal being. If there is an eternal being, that being must by definition have certain characteristics. He must have always existed, and he must be the ultimate cause of all that we can see. He must possess infinite knowledge, or else he himself would be limited, not eternal. Similarly, he must possess infinite power and an unchanging nature.

We do not have to go very far with these arguments to realize that we are describing the God of the Bible. One of the questions asked most frequently concerning this cosmological argument is, “Where did God come from?” While it is reasonable to ask this question about the universe, since as stated above, the strongest evidence argues for a universe which had a beginning. Asking that same question of God is irrational, since it implies of Him something found only in the finite universe: time. By definition, something eternal must exist outside both time and space. God has no beginning; He IS (Exod. 3:14).

The Teleological Argument

Another philosophical argument for the existence of God is the teleological argument. This comes from the Greek word *telos*, meaning “end” or “goal.” The idea behind this argument is that the observable order in the universe demonstrates that it functions according to an intelligent design. The classic expression of this argument is William Paley’s analogy of the watchmaker in his book, *Evidences*. If we were walking on a beach and found a watch in the sand, we would not assume that it washed up on the shore having been formed through the natural processes of the sea. We would assume that it had been lost by its owner and that somewhere there was a watchmaker who had designed it and built it with a specific purpose.

Some evolutionists maintain that the argument from design has been invalidated by the theory of natural selection. Richard Dawkins, a scientist at Oxford, even speaks of evolution as “The Blind Watchmaker,” saying that it brings order without purpose. However, the theory of evolution faces major obstacles in scientific circles to this day, and it is grossly inadequate in its explanation of the ordered species of animals in this world. The best explanation for the order and complexity that we see in nature is that the divine Designer created it with a purpose and maintains all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17).

The Moral Argument

The moral argument recognizes humankind's universal and inherent sense of right and wrong (cf. Rom. 2:14,15) and says this comes from more than societal standards. All cultures recognize honesty as a virtue along with wisdom, courage, and justice. These are thought of as absolutes, but they cannot be absolute standards apart from an absolute authority! The changeless character of God is the only true source of universal moral principles; otherwise all morality would be relative to culture preferences (See "Rights and Wrongs" outline). Each of these arguments follows the same basic pattern. What we see in the creation must have come from a sufficient cause. This is the argument of Romans 1, and it is the argument used by Paul in Acts 14 and 17. God has provided us with a witness to Himself in the creation, and we are called upon to believe in Him on the basis of what we have seen Him do: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

Pantheism

Pantheism offers a self-defeating alternative. Pantheism is the belief that all is god. Pantheists maintain that there are no real distinctions between persons, creatures, or objects; that all is divine. For many years, the only pantheists most of us would have been exposed to were Buddhists. However, with the rise of the New Age movement, which is extremely pantheistic, pantheism has become a very popular worldview in North America. The hope of pantheism is an irrational one. Evil is regarded as an illusion, however real it may seem, and the cruel actions of others are attributed to their misunderstanding, or non-enlightenment. Shirley MacLaine, an actress who has been one of the most popular spokespersons for the New Age movement, writes, "There is no such thing as evil or good. There is only enlightened awareness or ignorance."

Since all is one and all is divine, there are no real contradictions. There are no black-and-white distinctions between truth and falsity. Instead, reality consists of that which seems contradictory, but really is not. Buddhists are sometimes encouraged to meditate on "the sound of one hand clapping." There can be no sound with just one hand, and that's the point. For the pantheist, reality is irrational. Since there are not distinctions and all is divine according to pantheists, Shirley MacLaine and others believe themselves to be perfectly justified in declaring, "I am God." This "realization" is thought to be the key to unlocking one's true potential, for to realize you are God is to realize that you have no finite limitations. But that is the precise problem with the claim. If God does not have limited knowledge and abilities, why would we have to grow in knowledge if we are God? Why would we even have to come to the conclusion that we are divine? If we are unlimited, why are we so limited that we do not always realize we are unlimited? If New Age pantheism violates reason, as it obviously and admittedly does, then how can it be defended? We are told that the concepts cannot be adequate comprehended apart from one's personal experience of them, but the fact is that reality is logical. To argue that logic does not apply to reality would be self-defeating, because one cannot make the claim without using logic. Reality IS logical, and there are distinctions in our world. I am not you, and you are not me. Common sense tells us that as we converse. The pantheistic option, then, is both illogical and self-defeating. It is tragic that it has become such a popular viewpoint in our day.

The Possibility of God

Some five hundred years ago the rise of modern science initiated a process we could call the "demythologizing of nature," the material world. Superstition and ignorance had ascribed spirit life to forest, brook, and mountain. Things that were not understood scientifically were routinely

designated as the hand of supernatural forces at work.

Theistic Skepticism

Slowly, the mysterious, the spiritual dimension was drained away as scholars and scientists provided natural explanations and theories for how and why things worked quite apart from supernatural forces. Man and earth were now no longer at the center of the universe with the sun, the planets, and the stars revolving around this uniquely important globe. Human significance diminished in the vastness of the cosmos, and only time, not God, was needed to explain the totality of the natural order.

Re-emergence of the Spiritual

Ironically, the same science which took God away then, is bringing the possibility of His existence back today. Physics and quantum mechanics have now brought us to the edge of physicality, to the extent that the sub-atomic particle structure is described by some as characterized more as spirit, ghost-like in quality. Neurophysiologists grapple with enigmatic observations which suggest that the mind transcends the brain. Psychology has developed an entirely new branch of study (parapsychology) which postulates that psycho-spiritual forces (ESP, Biofeedback, etc.) beyond the physical realm actually function. Molecular biologists and geneticists, faced with the highly-ordered and complex structures of DNA, ascribed a word implying "intelligence" to the chaining sequences: "the genetic CODE." Astrophysics has settled on the "Big Bang theory," one which seems to contradict the idea that matter is eternal, but rather that the universe had a definite beginning. Huge as it is, the universe appears to be finite.

The Reasonability of Theism

It certainly seems more reasonable to believe that God exists than to suggest the alternatives explored above. And this brings us to the next important question.

III. If God does exist, how could we know He is there?

Introduction

Herbert Spencer, an agnostic, once pointed out that no bird ever flew out of the heavens and therefore concluded that man cannot know God." What Spencer is saying is that man in his finiteness, like the bird, can only go so far and no farther. There is a ceiling, a veil which separates us from God, and we are helpless to penetrate it from our side and find Him. Tennessee Williams, in his drama, "Sweet Bird of Youth," was making the same point when his character, the "Heckler," comes on stage and says, "I believe that the long silence of God, the absolute speechlessness of Him is a long, long and awful thing that the world is lost because of, and I think that it is yet to be broken to any man." These statements hit on a crucial point of epistemology (how we know). If God does not exist, then knowing can come to us only through one of two avenues: experience (empiricism) or reason (rationalism).

The Possibility of Revelation

What both of these men are saying is simply that if God does exist, man cannot make contact with Him through any effort of his own. But both have forgotten one other very important possibility. If God exists and so desires, would He be able to penetrate the veil from HIS side and make His presence known? Of course He could. The next question would logically be, "Has He ever done so?" Christians would answer a resounding, "Yes!" God did so in the Person of Jesus Christ. "The Word Who was with God and was God became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory" (John 1:1,14). Theologically, this event is called the Incarnation. If true, humans have an additional source of knowing truthrevelation.

Who Was Jesus?

There have been many great and outstanding men and women of history. But Christian and non-Christian alike would have to agree that Jesus of Nazareth has had the greatest and most far-reaching impact on earth than any person who ever walked the planet. One anonymous writer said,

> *All the armies that ever marched,*
>
> *all the navies that ever sailed,*
>
> *all the parliaments that have ever sat, put together,*
>
> *have not affected life on this planet as much as has that*
>
> *One Solitary Life.*

What do we really know about this Jesus? Some think Him merely a man, the founder of a religion, like Muhammad or Zoroaster. Others believe He lived, but His followers embellished the story and made a god out of him. Or they postulate that He was either a clever "con man" who purposefully engineered His personal circumstances toward Messianic ends, or a paranoid schizophrenic with "delusions of grandeur." Still others don't even believe He was ever an historical person. For them Jesus is a mythological figure. Before we can examine His Person, His Work, and His extraordinary claim to be the Son of God in human flesh, we must first determine if He every actually lived, and if so, what can the source materials tell us about the kind of man He was and about the things He did or said.

Was Jesus a Historical Person?

Introduction

Let us begin by saying that Christianity is rooted in history. Christ's birth was counted in a Roman census, and his death was no doubt recorded in the Roman Archives. What do we know

about Him? We are solely dependent upon the accuracy and the validity of the sources handed down to us. But what do we know about Julius Caesar? Charlemagne? George Washington, or any other person of history? We must rely on those sources which have survived and give information concerning their lives.

Extra-Biblical Sources

Ignoring for the moment the reliability of the biblical documents concerning Jesus, we will examine other sources from antiquity which verify that Jesus actually lived in the first century.

Jewish Sources

Josephus (37-95 A.D.). "And there arose about this time Jesus, a wise man . . . for he was a doer of marvelous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure. He led away many Jews, and also many of the Greeks. . . . And when Pilate had condemned him to the cross on his impeachment by the chief men among us, those who had loved him at first did not cease . . . and even now the tribe of Christians, so named after him, has not yet died out."

Rabbinical Writings. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Jewish religious scholars began to codify the legal and theological traditions of Jewry based on the Old Testament. The Mishnah (legal code) and the Gemera (commentaries on the Mishnah) developed in the early A.D. centuries to form The Talmud which was reduced from an oral tradition to writing about 500 A.D. There are a number of statements or allusions to Jesus and Christianity contained within. F. F. Bruce points out that while most of these references were hostile, they all refer without question to Jesus as a historical person. He says, "According to the earlier Rabbis whose opinions are recorded in these writings, Jesus of Nazareth was a transgressor in Israel, who practiced magic, scorned the words of the wise, led the people astray, and said he had not come

to destroy the law but to add to it. He was hanged on Passover Eve for heresy and misleading the people. His disciples, of whom five are named, healed the sick in his name."

Roman Sources

Cornelius Tacitus (55-117 A.D.). (Regarding Nero and the burning of Rome in 64 A.D.): "Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius. . ." (Annals, XV.44).

Seutonius ( ). In his work, *Life of Nero,* Seutonius also mentions the Christians in conjunction with the Great Fire of Rome: "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men addicted to a novel and mischievous superstition."

Another possible reference to Christians may be found in his *Life of Claudius:* "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."

Pliny the Younger ( ). In 112 A.D. Pliny Secundus, governor of Bithynia in Asia, wrote to Emperor Trajan requesting advice about how to deal with the "Christian" problem: "they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed, but to abstain from all fraud, theft and adultery, never to break their word, or deny a trust when called upon to honor it; after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind."

Archeology/Artifacts

Ossuaries. Hebrew University professor E. L. Sukenik found in

1945 what he believed to be the earliest record of Christianity: two inscriptions scratched on two ossuaries (containers for human bones) found near Jerusalem. One was a prayer to Jesus for help; the other prayed Jesus would raise from the dead the person whose bones were contained therein.

Name of Pontius Pilate. While Josephus and Tacitus both name Pontius Pilate in their writings, artifacts are stronger evidence. In 1971, Pilate's actual name was found in Caesarea Maritima by archeologists. "Found in a step of the theater, it was originally part of a nearby temple. The Latin reads, 'Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judea, has dedicated to the people of Caesarea a temple in honor of Tiberius.'

The Cross. For Paul and the other New Testament writers to speak of the cross as a symbol of faith, would be the equivalent of our doing the same thing today with the electric chair. Yet Tertullian (145-220 A.D.) speaks of its early prominence in the Christian community: "In all travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupies us, we mark our forehead with the sign of the cross."

Conclusion

Without the aid of the biblical documents, we here find a Christianity and a Jesus with which we are familiar, a perspective that moves from "a good and wise man, a doer of wonderful works" to one who "practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel." From the annals of history, we know that this man, Yeshua, underwent trial and persecution by the reigning religious and Roman authorities (including the name of the Procurator (Pilate) who pronounced sentence upon him), was executed by crucifixion, and that his teachings became the foundation for a "cult" of religious worshippers called Christians. These sources corroborate, rather than contradict, the Jesus portrayed in the biblical documents. We now turn to

the crucial question of how reliable these documents are.

SECTION II: ARE THE BIBLICAL DOCUMENTS RELIABLE?

Introduction

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 Massoretic Text

During the early part of the tenth century (916 A.D.), there was a group of Jews called the Massoretes. These Jews were meticulous in their copying. The texts they had were all in

capital letters, and there was no punctuation or paragraphs. The Massoretes 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 Massoretic 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 Massoretic tradition.”{2}

The supreme value of these Qumran documents lies in the ability of biblical scholars to compare them with the Massoretic Hebrew texts of the tenth century A.D. If, upon examination, there were little or no textual changes in those Massoretic texts where comparisons were possible, an assumption could then be made that the Massoretic 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 Massoretic 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 Massoretic text. Ten of these are mere differences in spelling (like our “honor” and the English “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 Massoretic text. The Septuagint is

often referred to as the LXX because it was reputedly done by seventy 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 which date from the 4th century (325-450 A.D.). Sinaiticus contains the entire New Testament, and Vaticanus contains most of it.{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 Papyri (P45, P46, P47) and the Bodmer Papyri II, XIV, XV (P66, 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,*Gospel*	ca. 0-70?	4 BC – AD 30	50 – 65/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years
Mark,*Gospel*	ca. 15-90?	27 – 30	65/70	ca. 225	<50 years	<200 years

Luke,*Gospel*	ca. 10-80?	5 BC – AD 30	60/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years
John,*Gospel*	ca. 10-100	27-30	90-110	ca. 130	<80 years	<100 years
Paul,*Letters*	ca. 0-65	30	50-65	ca. 200	20-30 years	<200 years
Josephus,*War*	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 70	ca. 80	ca. 950	10-300 years	900-1200 years
Josephus,*Antiquities*	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 65	ca. 95	ca. 1050	30-300 years	1000-1300 years
Tacitus,*Annals*	ca. 56-120	AD 14-68	100-120	ca. 850	30-100 years	800-850 years
Seutonius,*Lives*	ca. 69-130	50 BC – AD 95	ca. 120	ca. 850	25-170 years	750-900 years
Pliny,*Letters*	ca. 60-115	97-112	110-112	ca. 850	0-3 years	725-750 years
Plutarch,*Lives*	ca. 50-120	500 BC – AD 70	ca. 100	ca. 950	30-600 years	850-1500 years
Herodotus,*History*	ca. 485-425 BC	546-478 BC	430-425 BC	ca. 900	50-125 years	1400-1450 years
Thucydides,*History*	ca. 460-400 BC	431-411 BC	410-400 BC	ca. 900	0-30 years	1300-1350 years
Xenophon,*Anabasis*	ca. 430-355 BC	401-399 BC	385-375 BC	ca. 1350	15-25 years	1750 years
Polybius,*History*	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.

SECTION III: WHO WAS JESUS?

Jesus Was a Man of History

Having established above the overwhelming historical reliability of the extra-biblical and biblical source documents concerning His life, only dishonest scholarship would lead one to the conclusion that Jesus never lived. From the evidence, there is a high probability that He did, and we can therefore discard the notion that He is only a mythological figure, like Zeus or Santa Claus.

Jesus Is the Unique Man of History

But there seems to be a problem for many with the portrayal of Jesus in the source documents. He does things which defy our rationality. He is born of a virgin. He makes strange statements about Himself and His mission. After years of obscurity, He appears for a brief time in a flurry of public ministry in a small and insignificant province of the Roman Empire. He loves and heals and serves. He is a master teacher, but all of His teaching points to Himself, to His identity. The following claims which He makes concerning Himself are extraordinary.

The Claims of Christ

1. Able to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-10).

2. A Healer of disease (Mark 5:21).

3. Allows others to worship Him (Matt. 14:33, 28:9; cf. also Acts 10:25,26;14:12-15).

4. Claims to be "other worldly" in origin and destiny (John 6:38).

5. Performs miracles over nature (Luke 9:16,17).

6. Claims He has absolute, moral purity (John 8:46, 2 Cor. 5:21).

7. Claimed to be God, Messiah, and the way to God (Mark 14:61,62; John 10:30; 14:6-9).

8. Claimed to be the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament (John 5:46-7; Luke 24:44).

9. Allowed others to call Him God and Messiah (John 20:29; Matt. 16:15-17).

Responding to the Claims

The wide divergence of opinion about who Jesus really was is not based, as we have seen, on a lack of good and adequate historical evidence; it rather comes from grappling with His unique and audacious claims listed above. There is no intellectually honest way to carve up the documents according to our own liking and philosophical preferences. Many have done this, including a great American patriot and president, Thomas Jefferson. He admired Jesus as a moral man, but would have nothing to do with the supernatural elements found in the documents. Using scissors and paste, the Sage of Monticello left on the cutting floor anything, he felt, which contravened the laws of nature. Jefferson entitled his creation, *The Life and Morals of Jesus.* Only 82 columns, or little more than one tenth of the 700 columns in the King James Bible remained. The other nine tenths of the gospel record were discarded. His book ended with the words, "There laid they Jesus (John 19:42)

. . . and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed (Matt. 28:60).” One way to deal with the claims is to remove the historical material which is offensive to us, such as Jefferson did. The other option is to honestly accept the historical accuracy of the documents and come up with a plausible explanation. Our choices are reduced to one of four: He was either a Liar, a Lunatic, a Legend, or our Lord.

Considering the Options

Liar. Everything that we know about Jesus discourages us from selecting this option. It is incomprehensible that the One who spoke of truth and righteousness was the greatest deceiver of history. He cannot be a great moral teacher and a liar at the same time.

Lunatic. Paranoid schizophrenics do not behave as Jesus did. Their behavior is often bizarre, out of control. They generally do not like other people and are mostly self-absorbed. Nor do they handle pressure well. Jesus exhibits none of these characteristics. He is kind and others-centered, and He faces pressure situations, including the events leading to and including His death, with composure and control.

Legend. The greatest difficulty with this option is the issue of *time*. Legends take time to develop. Yet most of the New Testament, including Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, and all of Paul’s Epistles were written by 68 A.D. An equivalent amount of time today would be the interval between President Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 to the present. For people to start saying Kennedy claimed to be God, forgave people’s sins, and was raised from the dead would be a difficult task to make credible. There are still too many people around who knew Jack Kennedy . . . and know better.

Lord. In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis said,

> *A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a*

> *lunaticon a level with the man who says he is a poached eggor else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse."*

Other than the fact that the Liar, Lunatic, and Legend choices are not persuasive as explanations for who Jesus was, we are still faced with the question of why we should accept Him as Lord. During the latter days of His ministry, Jesus was confronted by a hostile crowd which posed this question to Him: "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." Jesus answered, "An adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:38-40). Here we are led to understand that Jesus pointed to His bodily resurrection as THE authenticating sign by which He would confirm His own unique claims. Later on, the Apostle Paul, in speaking of the importance of this event to the faith of a Christian would say, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins (1 Cor. 15:13-17)." We now turn to explore the possibility of such an event occurring.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a Historical Fact

There are really two points that we must prove in order to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. First, the tomb of Jesus Christ was found empty on the third day after His death. Second, the tomb was empty because Jesus was alive.

The tomb of Jesus Christ was found empty on the third day.

Many people have denied that Jesus' tomb was found empty on the third day after His death, but their reasons have generally been theological or philosophical. It's extremely difficult to argue against the empty tomb on the basis of historical evidence. Here are some historical facts that support the idea that Jesus' body was no longer in the grave.

Christians have argued that the tomb was empty on the third day since the beginning.

It usually takes at least two generations for false legends to develop, for the simple reason that it takes about that long for those witnesses who might contradict the tale to die off. By all accounts, however, the followers of Jesus began proclaiming *right away* that he had been raised from the dead. The books of the New Testament were written early enough that eyewitnesses could have still contradicted them, and those books at times reveal oral traditions (in the form of early creeds, songs, or sayings) that show the church's belief in the resurrection to be even older. There does not appear to have been sufficient time for a legendary account to have developed the resurrection was talked about immediately after the death of Christ.

Even the opponents of Christianity believed that the tomb was empty. If Jesus' body had still been in the tomb, it would have been pretty easy for the opponents of Christianity to discredit the resurrection. They could have simply produced the corpse, paraded it around town, and put an end to any further speculation. Why didn't they do it? Because the body wasn't there. The Gospel of Matthew records one of the arguments that the religious leaders of the day used to explain the fact of the empty tomb. Apparently the story was widely spread among the Jews that the disciples had stolen the body from the tomb while the guards were sleeping (Matt, 28:13 15). They did not deny that the tomb was empty. They simply

offered another explanation for the disappearance of the body! Some may suggest that the body of Jesus was never buried in a recognizable tomb, and that the opponents of Christianity simply were unable to locate the corpse when Jesus' disciples began talking about the resurrection. However, the earliest historical accounts maintain that He was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin. There is no reason to question the credibility of this testimony, which is very ancient and contains a number of specific details. As Craig writes,

> *Even the most skeptical scholars acknowledge that Joseph was probably the genuine, historical individual who buried Jesus, since it is unlikely that early Christian believers would invent an individual, give him a name and nearby town of origin, and place that fictional character on the historical council of the Sanhedrin, whose members were well known.*

Jesus *was* buried in a known tomb, but the tomb was empty the third day. This is a fact that even the opponents of Christianity recognized, and it's one that Christians can appeal to in their arguments for the gospel (Acts 26:26).

If the tomb had not been empty, it probably would have been treated as a shrine. It was common in first-century Judaism to regard the graves of holy men as shrines, but there is absolutely no suggestion that the grave of Jesus was ever treated in that way. His followers did not come back again and again to the place to worship, nor did they treat it with any special esteem. There was no reason to, because there was nothing inside.

If the tomb was occupied, what would make the disciples of Jesus risk their lives by saying that it was empty? Jesus' followers clearly believed His tomb was empty, for they were persecuted from the very beginning for their testimony to that effect. That doesn't prove that what they said was true, but

it does strongly suggest that they believed what they said. People have died for lies, but only because they believed them. What would make the followers of Jesus believe that His tomb was empty? Their own writings state that they believed it because they went to see the tomb and found that His body was no longer there. They did what you and I would do. They checked it out, and it was empty.

The tomb of Jesus was empty because He had been resurrected from the dead.

There is very little question that the tomb of Jesus was found empty on the third day after His death. This is a fact that was widely proclaimed at a time when it would have been easily discredited had it not been true. Even the opponents of Christianity agreed that the tomb was empty, and therein lies the crux of our next problem.

Given that the tomb was empty, what happened to the body of Jesus? There have been several suggestions, only one of which can be true.

Did the disciples steal the body? As noted above, this was one of the earliest skeptical explanations for the empty tomb. It may be early, but it isn't very credible. For the disciples to steal the body, they would have had to overcome guards who were stationed there specifically to prevent its theft. At the same time, they would have had to manifest a tremendous amount of courage, which is some thing they apparently did not have when they fled the night Jesus was arrested. If the disciples had stolen the body, they obviously would have known that the resurrection had not really taken place. The fact that these men suffered in life and were then killed for their faith in the resurrection strongly suggests that they believed it really happened. They did not give their lives for what they knew was a lie. The disciples did not steal the body of Jesus.

Were the disciples deceived? Some have suggested that the

disciples really did believe in the resurrection, but that they were deceived by hallucinations or religious hysteria. This would be possible if only one or two persons were involved, but He was seen alive after His death by groups of people who touched Him, ate with Him, and conversed with Him. Even more to the point, the tomb really was empty! If the disciples didn't steal it, even if they did only imagine that they had seen it, what happened to the body of Jesus?

Did the Jewish leaders take it? If the Jewish leaders had taken the body of Jesus, they would have certainly produced it in order to refute the idea that He had been raised from the dead. They never did that, because they didn't have the body.

Did Jesus really die? When left with no other credible option, some have suggested that Jesus did not really die, that He only appeared to be dead, was revived, and then appeared to the disciples. This makes a mockery out of the sufferings of the cross, suggesting that a beaten and crucified man could force his way out of a guarded tomb. At the same time, it portrays Jesus as the sort of person who would willingly deceive his disciples, carrying off the greatest hoax of all time. That the disciples would believe Him to be resurrected in triumph over death would be even more surprising if He was in fact on the edge of death after a severe beating. Jesus was truly killed, He was actually buried, and yet His grave was empty. Why? It is extremely unlikely that anybody took the body, but Jesus' disciples offered another explanation.

Jesus was raised from the dead. Since the other explanations do not adequately explain the fact of the empty tomb, we have reason to consider more seriously the testimony of those who claimed to be eyewitnesses. The followers of Jesus said that the tomb was empty because Jesus had been raised from the dead, and many people claimed to have seen Him after the resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul identifies a number of individuals who witnessed the resurrected Christ, noting also that Christ had appeared to over five hundred persons at one

time (v. 6). He tells his readers that most of those people were still alive, essentially challenging them to check out the story with those who claimed to be eyewitnesses. The presence of such eyewitnesses prevented Paul and others from turning history into legend.

Alternative explanations are inadequate, and eyewitnesses were put to death because they continued to maintain that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Christianity exists because these people truly believed in the resurrection, and their testimony continues to be the most reasonable explanation for the empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection Demonstrates the Truth of Christianity

It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian faith rests on the fact of Jesus' resurrection. Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, said that his entire ministry would be worthless if the resurrection had not taken place. "If Christ has not been raised," he wrote, "then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). On the other hand, if Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, then Paul's message is true, faith has meaning, and we can be freed from our sins.

That's essentially what we have been arguing. It makes good sense to believe in the teachings of Christianity, because those teachings are based on a simple historical fact the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If Jesus was raised from the dead, then what He said about himself must have been true. When the religious leaders of His day asked for some proof of His authority, Jesus told them that the only proof they would be given would be His resurrection from the dead (John 2:18 19; Matt. 12:38 40). When He was raised from the dead, that proof was provided.

What was proven through Jesus' resurrection? Here are some of the things that Jesus said about Himself, all of which were affirmed by His resurrection from the dead:

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

"I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM" [a claim to be God himself] (John 8:58).

"I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9).

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies" (John 11:25).

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me" (John 14:6).

If these statements are true, then anything that contradicts them cannot also be true. In other words, if it is true that Jesus is God, then anyone who says Jesus is *not* God must be wrong. If it is true that Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe in Him and that He is the only way to the Father, then anyone who says that there are other ways to salvation must be wrong. How do we know that what Jesus said about Himself is true? We know by His resurrection, which He offered as definitive proof for all that He did and said. What this means is that the statements quoted above demonstrate the uniqueness of Jesus, but they also demonstrate the uniqueness of Christianity. If what Jesus said about Himself is true, then Christianity is true, and any contradictory religious

belief must be false. That’s not a very popular message in today’s pluralistic culture, but the fact is that there are genuine differences between worldviews. Only one can really be correct. If Jesus Christ was actually raised from the dead, there’s little need for further debate. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus is the Lord of History

The material in this outline forms the foundation for a Christian worldview. It is on these critical truths Christians have stood over the centuries. When someone asks us the REASONS for the hope that is within usthat is, why we hold to the Christian faith, these are the reasons. We prefer to believe that the universe and man were created, rather than being the products of blind chance in a closed, material world. We believe that God not only created, but that He communicated, revealed Himself to humankind, through His prophets, apostles, and finally through His Son (Heb. 1:1). We believe that Jesus lived, and that His life and mission, outlined most extensively in the biblical documents but corroborated by extra-biblical documents, are what they have purported to be over the millennia: the seeking and saving of the lost through His sacrificial death. We believe that Christianity cannot be acceptably explained, historically, by leaving a dead Jew hanging on a cross. Only His resurrection from the dead adequately explains the boldness and commitment unto death of His disciples, the forsaking of worship on the Sabbath in preference to Sunday, and the exponential growth of the church which began immediately, and has continued to this day. Every mighty river on this planetthe Mississippi, the Nile, the Volgahas its source. Each one begins somewhere. Every Christian church or community in the world also has an historical source. It flows from Palestine, from Jerusalem, from a hill called Golgotha . . . and a nearby empty tomb. We said in the beginning that everyone has faith, but also pointed out that faith must have an object. Christians believe

that Jesus Christ is the most worthy of all objects to which we could entrust our lives, our purpose, and our destiny.

For Further Reading

Theism

Boa, Kenneth and Larry Moody. *I'm Glad You Asked: In-depth Answers to Difficult Questions about Christianity.* Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1982.

This is a small book, but it is surprisingly thorough. It is exceptionally clear, accurate, and very helpful. A leader's guide is available for those who want to use this book in small group study. Highly recommended.

Brooks, Ron and Norman L. Geisler. *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences.* Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990.

This book addresses a variety of issues in Christian apologetics, from the existence of God to the authority of the Bible and the nature of humanity. It is very readable, and its handbook format makes it easy for the reader to find answers to specific questions without searching through the whole book.

Geisler, Norman L. *Christian Apologetics.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976.

This is a textbook for courses in Christian apologetics, so it is very detailed and at times rather tedious reading. It presents a complete defense of Christianity from a philosophical viewpoint and can be very helpful.

McGrath, Alister E. *The Sunnier Side of Doubt.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990.

It may seem odd to include a book on doubt here, but it really is appropriate. Like the Yancey book noted below, this is written to believers who are having doubts about their faith. It is very readable and very encouraging. Highly recommended.

Montgomery, John W., ed. *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question.* Richardson, TX: Probe, 1991.

This is a collection of essays by scientists who argue that their various disciplines actually provide more evidence for Christianity. As with any multi-author work, some chapters are better than others, but it is extremely

thought-provoking and should be very helpful in a college environment.

Moreland, J. P. and Kai Nielson. *Does God Exist? The Great Debate.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990.

This book consists of an actual debate between a theist (J. P. Moreland) and an atheist (Kai Nielson). It includes responses from two other theists (William Lane Craig and Dallas Willard) and two other atheists (Antony Flew and Keith Parsons). All of these men are philosophers, so the debate can be rather challenging at times, but it is a very helpful work for those who want to explore these issues in some depth.

Watkins, William and Norman L. Geisler. *Perspectives: Understanding and Evaluating Today's Worldviews.* San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life, 1984.

This book examines seven different worldviews and argues for the truth of Christianity. It is very readable and very helpful.

Yancey, Philip. *Disappointment With God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988.

This is a wonderful book that asks some of the hard questions of life. Is God unfair? Is God silent? Is God hidden? For those whose faith in God is being stretched by doubts or trials, this book should be required reading. It is sensitive, biblical, and extremely insightful. Read it!!

The Resurrection of Jesus

Craig, William Lane. *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus.* Chicago: Moody, 1981.

This is an excellent book that thoroughly defends the resurrection of Jesus from a historical perspective. It is well-reasoned and very readable. Highly recommended.

Morison, Frank. *Who Moved the Stone?* London: Faber & Faber, 1930. Reprint. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958.

This book was written by a man who intended to disprove the resurrection. In his studies he became convinced that it had actually occurred, and this book presents the evidence that changed his mind.

The Authority of the Bible

Bruce, F. F. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1960.

This is a helpful book by a highly respected New Testament scholar. He argues for the historical authenticity and reliability of the New Testament.

Geisler, Norman L. and William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible.* Chicago: Moody, 1968.

This book is titled appropriately, for it provides a general overview of the nature of the Bible, the meaning of inspiration, and the reliability of the biblical manuscripts. It is very helpful and very readable.

Goodrick, Edward W. *Is My Bible the Inspired Word of God?* Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988.

This book describes the difference between the original autographs of Scripture, currently available manuscripts, and modern translations. It is very clear and encourages the reader to have confidence in the Scriptures.

McDowell, Josh. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith.* San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972.

One of the most helpful apologetics books available, this work discusses the uniqueness of the Bible, demonstrates the strength of its manuscript support, and also examines the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

_____. *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith.* San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975.

This sequel to McDowell's first book focuses on higher criticism and scholarly attempts to undermine the authenticity of the biblical text. Very thorough and very helpful.

Yamauchi, Edwin. *The Stones and the Scriptures: An Introduction to Biblical Archaeology.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972.

Quite thorough for an introduction, this book argues that archaeological discoveries continue to support the truth of the biblical text.

© 2000 Probe Ministries.