

Reasons to Believe Your Bible - Historical Reasons

Sign Title: Historical Reasons to Believe Your Bible

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Welcome you in the name of Christ. My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. Last week we began a new teaching series called, *Reasons to Believe Your Bible*. This is an important series because many people in our culture consider the Bible to be a work of fantasy rather than a book rooted in factual reality. In this series, we are learning solid reasons we can trust this book as the Word of God. Last week, we began by examining this book from the discipline of logic. This week, we examine the Bible and its relationship to history. Is the Bible's history trustworthy and true? That is the question before us. Before we answer it, I need to warn you. We are entering a vicious battlefield. George Orwell put it this way.

Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past. - George Orwell.

There is a renewed focus in the academic world to snap the links between the Bible and history. If those links, which are many, are shattered; it redefines Christianity as we know it. Let me show you how fast confidence in biblical authority has eroded in the academic world.

In 1990, *Time* magazine featured an article on the walls of Jericho entitled, Score One for the Bible. The assumption was that for once, the Bible was right about history. The article featured archaeologist Brian Wood, who, after an archaeological expedition, believed he had evidence for the walls of Jericho tumbling down at just the right time to match the biblical story.

Just five years later *Time* magazine featured another article from the archeological community; except this one took a completely different stance. Let me quote John Seters of the University of North Carolina from that article. “There was no Moses, no crossing of the Red sea, no revelation on Mount Sinai.” *Time* concluded the article with this sentence, “years of searching for evidence have convinced all but the most conservative experts that Abraham and the rest of the Patriarch were inventions of the Bible’s authors.” In keeping with that viewpoint, Peter Jennings, on an ABC television special on this same subject commented at that time about Abraham, “what can historians tell us about him? They don’t even know that he lived.”

Confidence in biblical history has eroded so quickly that today there are few scholars left who believe there was a full military invasion by Joshua on Jericho. The majority of scholars believe *it is impossible to reconcile the Biblical story of the conquering of Jericho with archaeological evidence*. They believe if there was a Joshua, and if he passed through the region of Jericho, there certainly wasn’t an inhabited city left at that time.

Why are these broken links important for us? While it will not undermine the faith of those of us who are older, for those who are young, and head off to college, they will find their faith rattled by their teachers.

In *Already Gone*, a book by Ken Hamm and Britt Beemer on the 20 year olds in America, they cite some scary facts. For the 20 year olds who grew up attending Sunday School and church, in part, because their faith is so seriously undermined in college, they are *more likely* than kids who didn’t grow up in the

church to believe: the Bible doesn't connect with history, to believe in evolution, to say the Bible was written by men and develop an anti-church bias in their adult years.

Statistically, it is almost better for kids who didn't grow up in church when they approach the Bible than for those who did. Now, I don't believe the answer is to keep our kids out of church. The answer is to give our kids answers. This morning we will do some of that. Another way to take this a step further is to read the book, My Professor Says The Bible is a Myth, which we sold almost a hundred copies of last week. Buy one and give it to your favorite teenager. Of course, we will close this series at the end of February with Dr. Tom Tribelhorn, the man who wrote, My Professor Says The Bible Is A Myth speaking that weekend in church and in our community.

This morning, I will give you 3 reasons to believe the Bible's history. 1) The history to theology connection 2) Important facts of Old Testament history 3) Important facts of New Testament history

The History to Theology Connection

Last week, we learned the Bible claims to be the word of God over 1,500 times. Here is the question we need to answer. "Can the Bible be the very words of God and have historical mistakes in it?" My answer is, "No." Some of you are saying that isn't fair. How can we believe the Bible got everything right in history, especially when archaeology is telling us they are sure the Bible is wrong? Here is my reason, if the Bible makes mistakes about history, then it will also make mistakes in theology.

For instance, if Moses did not actually cross the Red Sea, as John Seters claims, then why should we believe God gave Moses the 10 Commandments? If the Bible names the wrong Roman ruler when the decree was given for Joseph to return to Bethlehem, why should we believe in the virgin birth later in the same chapter? Either the Bible is what it claims to be,... the flawless words of God, and it gets theology and history right, or none of it should be trusted as true. If the Bible doesn't tell the truth about historical places, events, and dates,... then we shouldn't trust it when it talks about God. Verifiable history and unverifiable theology are woven so closely together in the Bible, they can not be torn apart.

Let me show you some examples. Is the crucifixion of Christ a fact of history or a fact of theology? It is both. Is the original sin in the Garden of Eden by a literal Adam and Eve a fact of history or a fact of theology? It is both. The resurrection of Christ, is it a verifiable historical fact or a theological reality? It is both.

This is why verifiable history is so important. God wants our confidence in verifiable historical facts to give us the confidence we need to trust the things we can't verify in theology. Let me show you what I mean. Before Jesus healed a man in Mark 2:5 he said, "My son, your sins are forgiven." What do you think everyone in the room did when they heard that? They burst out laughing.

"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Mark 2:7 (ESV)

Jesus, anybody can say that, why should we believe you... so Jesus gives them something they can verify in history so they can believe theology.

And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” Mark 2:8–12 (ESV)

Here is Christ’s point: My authority to perform a visible miracle, verifiable history; proves my authority to perform an invisible miracle, unverifiable theology. It is the verifiable historical facts that make the Christian faith logical. So the Bible has to be telling the truth about history and theology because they are woven together.

Important Facts of Old Testament History

The Old Testament is, in places, over 3,500 years old. How do we know the copy of the Old Testament we have in our hand, which was copied by hand for thousands of years, is accurate to the original? This is an especially good question because, until recently with the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest copy of an Old Testament we had only dated back to 900 A.D., almost a thousand years after Christ.

The Old Testament was copied accurately.

The Jews were very strict about how they copied the Scriptures so they were sure to be accurate. For instance, when they copied the Scriptures onto an animal skin, there was no defect allowed to be on the animal skin. The length and number of lines on the scroll were specified. The manuscript had to be lined. If even 3 words were written off the line, the whole manuscript was discarded. There was a specific recipe used for preparing the ink. Not a single word of the

manuscript was allowed to be written from memory. The Massorite copiers even counted the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurred in every Bible book, so they could insure a copy was identical to the original. They checked to make sure the middle letter of each book was the same in the copy and the original. These were some of the ways they insured a copy of a Bible book was an exact copy of an original.

In fact, when a copy of an Old Testament book was completed, it was considered even more valuable than the original it was copied from because, as the originals decayed, the new copy was more readable. The old copies were placed in a wooden storage vault called a Gheniza and, after time, when they decayed to the point of being worthless, they were burned. This is one of the reasons we do not have super-old copies of the Old Testament.

How accurate are the copies of the Old Testament we have in our hands? When our Old Testament is compared with Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonia and Moabite literature going back thousands of years, the names of places and individuals in our Bible referring as far back as 3,900 years, match the literature of other ancient civilizations.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in 1950 by a bedouin shepherd boy, provided the academic world with copies of Old Testament books that were 1,000 years older than the oldest books of our Old Testament in our possession. When our Old Testament is compared to the Dead Sea Scrolls that are a thousand years older than previous copies, we find they are essentially identical. Nothing has changed. The Dead Sea Scrolls have an amazing story.

You can read it in the digging deeper section of this weeks Small Group Worksheet.

Archaeology - The stones cry out.

During the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, just prior to Christ's crucifixion, the crowds worshipped him as king. Some of the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke his disciples for worshipping him. Jesus said, "I tell you, if they were silent, the very stones would cry out." What we find as we look at archeology is the stones are crying out that the Bible is true.

Welcome the Hittites.

The Bible talks about an enemy nation of the Israelites called the Hittites. For years, historians were never able to find any evidence of this vast nation, so the Bible was assumed to be wrong. This was considered proof of the Bible's historical inaccuracies. In 1906 an archaeological expedition discovered the existence of the Hittite nation. They even unearthed their capital city and over the last 100 years over 40 other cities that made up their empire. Modern archeology now believes the Hittite nation was vast and lasted for 1,200 years. The Bible was shown to be right after all.

The mystery of Daniel's king.

In Daniel 5, the Bible talks about Belshazzar being king of Babylon. The historical record held that Nabonitis was King. It was a clear-cut contradiction. The Bible was considered wrong, an open and shut case. Then in 1956, archaeologists unearthed three stones that solved the riddle. These stones told how Nabonitis decided to lead his armies to a far away battlefront; while he was

gone, he installed his son as king,... his son's name was Belshazzar. Once again, the Bible proved to be accurate.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The supernatural destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from the sky was always considered by archaeologists to be folklore. There is no way fire could rain down from heaven upon a city. Archaeology recently discovered the Biblical destruction of those wicked cities by fire from heaven, was not just possible, but it is probably what happened.

The region of Sodom and Gomorrah is located in an unstable area of the earth's crust. In the past, the area experienced violent earthquakes where layers of the earth were flung into the air. The area also has a high concentration of Bitumen, a tar like oily pitch. The rocks in the area also seem to be fused together by intense heat, much like that of a volcanic eruption.

It is possible the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by the fallout of a volcanic eruption that possibly mixed hot lava and an underground reservoir of bitumen. This would arch burning tar high in the sky, like a massive flame thrower. Many archaeologists have admitted, maybe the Bible's story of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction was right after all.

With solid evidence supporting Old Testament history, where is the problem?

There are two problems. I will let the book, My Professor Says the Bible Is A Myth, and Tom Tribelhorn, develop them in greater detail .

The Bias of a Minimalist World.

Biblical Minimalism was a term coined in the 1960's. It was invented to deal with the apparent discrepancies between the Bible and archeology. This means that only the bare minimum of the Bible, what is historically verified, is accepted as true. The rest of the Bible is assumed to be false, unless proven otherwise. This allows the so-called facts of history, that conflict with the biblical story, to remain unchallenged. This means, the Exodus of Israel from Egypt is not considered true, since there is currently no extra-biblical evidence to support it. Until just recently, King David was considered folklore, until two inscriptions were discovered that bore his name. Since there is no external evidence to prove Abraham's existence, it is assumed his story is biblical fabrication.

I should note that there is definitely an anti-biblical, anti-supernatural bias in the academic world. No other historical documents are held with such skepticism. Other ancient manuscripts are accepted at face value and are seldom thought to need independent confirmation. If other documents do not agree with the Bible, guess which one is assumed to be wrong?

The Bible is considered guilty of fraudulence until proven innocent, but no other historical documents are held to this same standard.

Some of the best archeology IS proving the Bible wrong.

Some of the best, and most accurate, archeology is proving the Bible wrong. For example, our growing knowledge of the ancient world is further demonstrating that when Joshua came to Jericho, the city was uninhabited and

flat to the ground. So much for the walls of Jericho coming down supernaturally. The Bible is assumed to be wrong.

This is where God has a great sense of humor. While some of us would like to ignore these disturbing facts, God has way of helping the rest of us. David Rohl's, a dutch scientist who is not a Christian, and other scholars, have come to the realization that the time-line we are using to date the ancient world is off by several hundred years. If David Rohls is right, and it appears he is, several million text books will need to be re-written. Thousands of supposed factual conclusions will need to be pushed in the garbage pile. With the new chronology, the walls of Jericho were standing when Joshua came to Jericho. The Bible was proven to be right once again.

As you might guess, this is a hard pill for the academic world to swallow. Most scholars want to spit it out, even though the evidence backs up the conclusion. Want to learn more? Read the book, [My Professor Says the Bible is a Myth](#) on this exciting reversal of events.

Important Facts of New Testament History.

If you thought the accuracy and copying of the Old Testament was amazing, wait until you hear about the New Testament.

The New Testament was copied plentifully.

What was important for us to remember about the Old Testament's copying process was accuracy. What is important for us to remember about the New Testament's copying process is frequency. Today we have more than 5,686 Greek copies, 10,000 Latin copies, 9,300 miscellaneous other versions. That

means today there are almost 25,000 full or partial ancient copies of the New Testament in existence from the ancient world. There is no other book from the ancient world that even comes close to being as plentiful. The second most plentiful copy of anything else we have from antiquity is Homer's Iliad, of which there are only 643 partial copies in existence today and the oldest copy we have dates to 500 years after the original. The next most plentiful work of antiquity is Herodotus, of which there are only 8 copies in existence, the oldest is 1,350 years after the original. That means there are 40 times more originals of the New Testament than the Iliad, and over 3,125 times more originals of the New Testament than Herodotus.¹ Without a question, the most accurate and plentiful book we have today from the ancient world is the New Testament.

Even if you were to throw away all 25,000 full and partial copies of the New Testament and all you had was the quotes of the New Testament written by early church leaders, you would have 36,289 quotes of the New Testament. In fact, you can reconstruct the entire New Testament using just those quotes.

How close is the New Testament we have in our hand to the original? Remember the oldest copy of the Iliad dates over 500 years after the original. Herodotus' oldest copy was 1,350 years after the original. The oldest copies of the New Testament letters we have come from the very time they were written. We have copies of Paul's letter that go back to A.D. 50-66, less than twenty years after Jesus' death and while Paul was still alive. Copies of Matthew's gospel going back to A.D. 70-80 (*recent research has pushed that date even*

¹ Josh, McDowell, The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pg. 38.

earlier). Copies of the gospel of Mark that go back to A.D. 50-60, portions of the gospel of Luke that date to the early 60's, and John that date between A.D.

80-100.

Remember, the New Testament writers claim to be actual eye witnesses of the life of Christ.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, Luke 1:1–2 (ESV)

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 2 Peter 1:16 (ESV)

that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3 (ESV)

If they were lying about being eyewitnesses, it wouldn't work because too many people were still alive who would have laughed the Bible out of town as a hoax. What we find is that the New Testament books were not laughed out of town but they were sought after and copied more than any other books in that day. That is a fact of history. Everybody wanted to read what the New Testament said.

The New Testament is verified by secular history.

It is not just the plentifulness of the New Testament that helps us know it was accurately copied, but much of the New Testament is verified through secular history. We have 13 extra-biblical references to Jesus by ancient historians. Let me share some of them with you.

Our first reference comes from Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote in that date. Here are a few of his unintentional supports of Scripture.

“...he assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned. (Josephus, AJ, 20.9.1)

This passage, written in A.D. 93, refers to James, the brother of Jesus, who was martyred. He thus confirms Jesus as a real person in the first century and he identifies that others called him *the Christ*.

Now there was about this 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 over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. For he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him, and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct to this day. (Josephus, AJ, 18.3.3)

Thallus wrote about A.D. 52, though none of his original works survived, another writer named Julius Africanus quoted Thallus' work in A.D. 221 regarding the darkness that took place at the crucifixion.

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness, and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness, Thallus, in the third book of his history, call, as it appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.

Africanus continues to write that he disagreed with Thallus about the darkness that took place as an eclipse of the sun. Africanus points out that an eclipse isn't possible during a full moon and it was a full moon at the time of Christ's crucifixion because it was Passover.

Conclusion

While the battle rages over the historical accuracy of the Bible, some of the world's greatest historians have found themselves forced, in spite of their bias against this book, to classify it as a trustworthy historical document.

Sir William Ramsey, regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists to have lived, found this happening to him. In the course of his study of the ancient world, he studied the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. He expected they would be filled with historical error. For example, in the first two chapters of Luke, he was sure that Quirinius wasn't governor of Syria and everyone did not need to return to their ancestral town for a census.

As he studied the evidence of history, he completely changed his opinion.

I began with a mind unfavorable to it,... it was gradually born upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth... Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy... this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians. (Ramsey, BRDTNT, 222)

Can we trust our Bible? I think so. The more confident we become in what the Bible says about history, the more confidence we have in its theology. Jesus Christ really did die in our place for our sin. Even though we are sinners, God loves us.

Will there ever be a time when all the evidence is in and all our questions about the Bible are answered? Of course not! It is a never-ending process to reconstruct the past. As they say in the courtroom, The Bible is true beyond reasonable doubt, you can never prove it beyond a shadow of doubt.

At those times, when it looks like the Bible is finally proven wrong, when it looks like the facts have put the last nail in this book's coffin, watch closely my

friends. God smiles, and with a twinkle in his eye, resurrects this book when scholars discover that the measuring stick they use to date events in the ancient world were wrong after all. Everybody goes back to the drawing board and the Bible is left standing.

Benediction

God, in a confusing world where Satan is pulling many of the strings, I pray first of all for our young people. We know they will run headfirst into an academic world that is committed to mocking their faith. I pray this morning's message would bolster their faith. I ask that you would bring resources across their path that would help them to have answers. Give them supernatural amounts of power so they can share their love for Christ from this book with great conviction and clarity.

For those of us who are older, I ask for forgiveness. Forgive us for not preparing our children to answer the tough questions they will face. Thank you for the many solid scholars who love you Jesus and do the hard work of holding onto the gospel and the truth of this book in an environment where they are mocked, denied funding, sequestered and ridiculed.

As we go, we thank you for giving us good reasons to believe your good book. Amen.



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