

Reliability of the Bible

By Steve Gregg

We must remember that the Bible is not so much a book as it is a library of 66 books, written by a wide variety of authors over a long period of historical time. Most of them recorded contemporary facts concerning their own times, though they sometimes looked beyond them, as in the case of prophetic writers.

The Bible claims to be a reliable record and testimony, originating from prophets, historians and friends of Jesus Christ.

Now, not everyone who claims to be telling the truth is necessarily doing so, but we usually do not regard a person as a liar unless there is reason to do so—that is, they have given us reasons to doubt the veracity of their accounts.

Are there reasons to doubt the veracity of the records penned by the biblical authors? Some people have always thought there were such reasons, but the non-objectivity of those critics is often rather glaring. In fact, while most people, whether Christians, or especially non-Christians, have never so much as inquired into the evidence concerning the Bible's reliability, there have been many who have—including a number of former atheists, who have changed their minds and become believers strictly on the basis of that inquiry.

Most people's view of the reliability of scripture is held by default. They either believe in the Bible because their parents or friends believe in it, but they could not tell you why one should hold to such a belief, or else they disbelieve the Bible for comparable reasons, with equal ignorance of what evidence might exist to settle the question.

I. The Objections

Just as is the case with the faith of many believers, most non-Christians' rejection of the Bible is based upon prejudice, rather than inquiry into evidence. Most people who doubt or reject the Bible's reliability do so for one of the following (irrational) reasons:

1. The prescientific worldview and miracles in the Bible
2. The inflexible moral code of the Bible
3. The contrast with modern sentiments (slavery, gender issues, total war, hell)
4. Exclusivity of the Bible
5. The inconsistency or abrasiveness of people who profess to believe the Bible

II. Modern Science

1. *Scientific progress has not been hindered, but encouraged by belief in the Bible*

The general opinion of modern people that there is some fundamental conflict between the Bible and science is absolutely false. Science advanced most spectacularly in the parts of the world which had adopted a biblical worldview—and the greatest scientific innovators were mostly Bible believers.

2. *The idea that miracles are inconsistent with scientific knowledge arises from a misunderstanding of both miracles and the domain of science.*

C.S. Lewis:

"Miracles," said my friend. "Oh, come. Science has knocked the bottom out of all that..."

"Really," said I. "Which of the sciences?"

“Oh, well, that’s a matter of detail,” said my friend. “I can’t give you chapter and verse from memory.”

“But don’t you see,” said I, “that science never could show anything of the sort?”

“Why on earth not?”

“Because science studies Nature. And the question is whether anything *besides* Nature exists—anything ‘outside.’ How could you find that out by studying simply Nature?” ...

“All right,” said he. “Well, I think the laws of Nature are really like two and two making four. The idea of their being altered is as absurd as the idea of altering the laws of arithmetic.”

“Half a moment,” said I. “Suppose you put sixpence into a drawer today, and sixpence into the same drawer tomorrow. Do the laws of arithmetic make it certain you’ll find a shilling’s worth there the day after?”

“Of course,” said he, “provided no one’s been tampering with your drawer.”

“Ah, but that’s the whole point,” said I. “The laws of arithmetic can tell you what you’ll find, with absolute certainty, *provided that* there’s no interference. If a thief has been at the drawer of course you’ll get a different result. But the thief won’t have broken the laws of arithmetic—only the laws of England. Now aren’t the laws of Nature much in the same boat? Don’t they tell you what will happen *provided* there’s no interference?” (*God in the Dock*, “Religion and Science”, pp.72f)

Clark Pinnock:

"The pervasive presence of miracle offends the existential and the naturalistic mood of our day. Despite the offense, however, miracles fit neatly into the world-view of biblical theism, where they function as part of the total discourse of God. Empirical science cannot contest the validity of a miracle for the simple reason the event cannot be repeated for experiment today. The evidence for a miracle, as for any historical event, is the testimony of those who witnessed it. On that ground, the resurrection of Jesus is a very well-attested miracle." (*A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*, p.27)

3. In many cases, the Scriptures have *anticipated* the findings of modern science centuries in advance of those discoveries

- a) Cosmic Creation and the Big Bang (Gen.1:1; Psalm 33:6, 9)
- b) The fixity of “kinds” (Gen.1:12, 21, 25)
- c) Quarantine of infectious disease (Lev.13-14)
- d) Jesus’ coming and the round earth (Luke 17:34-36)

III. The Testimony of Jesus

How do we Know that Jesus really did and said the things recorded in the Bible about Him?

Since so much hangs on the authenticity of Jesus and His testimony, it is no surprise that skeptics have made an all-out attack on the historical accuracy of our records about Jesus. In the past few decades, alleged authorities have floated multiple, mutually-exclusive claims about Jesus—that He was a myth, like the mythical gods of paganism; that He was a mere man, about whom legendary stories were invented; and that, in any event, we cannot know much about Him, due to the lateness and inconsistency of the surviving records about Him.

There are other contemporary historians, not Christian, but not particularly hostile either, who affirm the existence of Christ. These include Josephus, the Jewish historian, who wrote during the latter part of the first century [*Antiquities*, xx.9.1 and xv2i.3.3]; Cornelius Tacitus, the greatest Roman historian in the days of the empire, who wrote around 110 A.D. [*Annals*, xv.44]; and Suetonius, another famous Roman historian, who wrote around 120 A.D. [*Life of Claudius*, xxv.4] and others.

The Gospel records are written by those who lived with Jesus, or who associated firsthand with those who did. They comprise the best historical evidence for any ancient historical figure known to historians. At least three of the four were written before AD70, and the fourth was also written by one familiar with

Jerusalem prior to its destruction in that year. Those who preserved the records for us inform us that two of the authors were among the 12 apostles, and the other two traveled with apostles. No other ancient figure has been recorded by people as close to him, or as soon after the events of his life.

“For we did not follow cleverly devised tales 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 NASB

William F. Albright (the world’s foremost biblical archaeologist):

“In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably sometime between about AD 50 and 75).”

(quoted in an interview in *Christianity Today*, Jan.18, 1963)

Frederic G. Kenyon, former director and principle librarian of the British Museum:

“In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the first century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the fourth century—say, from 250 to 300 years later.” [*Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. P.5]

Since the Gospels were written by people who had access to accurate information, we might ask whether they had any motivation to misconstrue or “massage the truth” in the interest of any personal agendas. It is hard to discover or imagine any advantage that the apostles and evangelists hoped to gain by misleading their readers. They did not receive remuneration, nor privilege, nor celebrity status in exchange for their writings (Luke and Mark, for instance, are very obscure). Most of them, in fact, suffered horrendous persecution, and/or martyrdom for their testimonies. No motive can rationally be assigned to their writing these books other than that they believed them to be true and essential for people to know about.

John Warwick Montgomery:

“...historical and literary scholarship continues to follow Aristotle’s dictum that the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself, not arrogated to the critic to himself. This means that one must listen to the claims of the document under analysis, and not assume fraud or error unless the author disqualifies himself by contradictions or known factual inaccuracies.” (*History and Christianity*, p.28)

All the tests of accuracy that can be applied to historical documents have been applied to the four Gospels, and no evidence suggests that they are forgeries, nor written late, nor are inaccurate. Unlike the mythological stories of pagan gods, the Gospels tell of Jesus’ interaction with well-known historical figures like Herod and Pilate.

John Warwick Montgomery

“Careful comparison of the New Testament documents with inscriptions and other independent early evidence has in the modern period confirmed their primary claims.” (*History and Christianity*, p.31)

John Warwick Montgomery

“We know from the Mishna that it was Jewish custom to memorize a rabbi’s teaching, for a good pupil was like a ‘plastered cistern that loses not a drop.’ And we can be sure that the early church, impressed as it was by Jesus, governed itself by this ideal.” (*History and Christianity*, pp.37f)

F.F. Bruce:

“The earliest preachers of the gospel knew the value of...firsthand testimony, and appealed to it time and again. ‘We are witnesses of these things,’ was their constant and confident assertion. And it can have been by no means so easy as some writers seem to think to invent words and deeds of Jesus in those early years, when so many of His disciples were about, who could remember what had and had not happened.”

(*The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th ed., p.33)

The only grounds for rejecting the testimony of the Gospels would be an *a priori* prejudice against either the strict moral imperative, or the miraculous events, or both, mentioned in them. Such prejudice is not conducive to the discovery of truth.

Simon Greenleaf (Founder of Harvard Law School and author of the 3-volume text "Rules of Evidence"):
"When we have this degree of evidence, it is unreasonable to require more. A juror would violate his oath, if he should refuse to acquit or condemn a person charged with an offense, where this measure of proof was adduced." (*The Testimony of the Evangelists*, p.29)

The main evidence that the Bible is true is that Jesus believed it to be true and communicated by God. He quoted scripture as being God's word. He accepted the Jewish canon of the Tenakh (the Old Testament) and regarded it to be the inspired word of God

"...all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." (Luke 24:44)

"You are mistaken, not knowing the scriptures". (Matthew 22:29)

"All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition...making the word of God of no effect through your tradition..." (Mark 7:9-13)

He quoted passages from the law and the prophets to prove the correctness of His own propositions, and He scolded the Pharisees and Sadducees for their disbelief and neglect of the scriptures. If Jesus was who He claimed to be (as the historical evidence would indicate) then, as the Son of God, His views on this, as well as on everything else, would carry supreme credibility.

Jesus selected and trained His apostles (writers of the New Testament), and authorized them to speak on His behalf as His agents.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." (John 13:20)

IV. What Archaeologists Know

We should point out that most of the Bible's contents consists in narrative history. This history is ancient from our point of view, but, over the past 200 years, modern researchers have gained much light concerning ancient history in the lands of the Bible through archaeology. Very many places and persons mentioned in the Bible have become familiar to archaeologists, and, in every case, what they have found has confirmed (or at least not contradicted) the incidentals of the biblical narrative. We can only brush the surface here, but I will cite some of the greatest secular authorities concerning the nature of the evidence they have found:

Nelson Glueck, the most renowned Jewish archaeologist of Palestine:

"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 in exact detail historical statements in the Bible." (*Rivers in the Desert*, p.31)

William F. Albright, Prof. Emeritus of Johns Hopkins University, considered the world's greatest archaeologist:

"There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition." (*Archaeology and the Religions of Israel*, p.176)

Millar Burrows, a nonevangelical, Yale archaeologist, *What Mean These Stones?*, p.1

"On the whole... 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."

Belshazzar: Daniel 5 names this man as the king in Babylon at the time of its fall in 538 B.C.

"Until 1853 no mention of Belshazzar was found in Babylonian records; and Nabonidas (555-538 B.C.) was known to have been the last king of Babylon. To the critics, this was one of the evidences that the book of Daniel was not historical. But in 1853 an inscription was found in a cornerstone of a temple built by Nabonidas in Ur to a god, which read: 'May I, Nabonidas, king of Babylon, not sin against thee.

And may reverence for thee dwell in the heart of Belshazzar, my first-born, favorite son.' " [Halley's Bible Handbook, p.344/ see also E.J.Young The Prophecy of Daniel, pp.115f]

Tiglath-Pileser: This king of Assyria is mentioned in 2 Kings 15:29 as one who conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, taking many captives. A generation ago critics argued that this king never existed. When Tiglath-Pileser's capital city was excavated, however, his name was found pressed into clay tablets reading, "I, Tiglath-Pileser, king of the west lands, king of the earth, whose kingdom extends to the great sea..." [from James Montgomery Boice, Does Inerrancy Matter?, p.22]

Sargon 2: Isaiah 20:1 says, "Sargon, king of Assyria, sent Tartan and fought against Ashdod and took it." In all ancient literature, this is the only mention of Sargon 2, and was once held to be a historical mistake in the Bible: "...in 1842, Botta discovered the ruins of Sargon's palace, in Khorsabad, on the north edge of Nineveh, with treasures and inscriptions showing him to have been one of Assyria's greatest kings. Yet his name had disappeared from history, save this lone mention in Isaiah, till Botta's discovery." [Halley's Bible Handbook, p.287]

Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director of the British Museum:

"Archaeology has not yet said its last word, but the results already achieved confirm what faith would suggest - that the Bible can do nothing but gain from an increase in knowledge." (*The Bible and Archaeology*, p.279)

Time Magazine: — in a cover story on the Bible (December 30, 1974)

"After more than two centuries of facing the heaviest scientific guns that could be brought to bear, the Bible has survived - and is perhaps the better for the siege. Even on the critics' own terms—historical fact—the Scriptures seem more acceptable now than they did when the rationalists began the attack."

V. Prophecy

"Tell us, you idols, what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods." (Isaiah 41:22-23)

"Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He." (John 13:19)

"And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe." (John 14:29)

The biblical prophets foretold major and minor world events, in significant detail, decades or centuries before they occurred in history.

A. Details of the fall of Tyre. (Ezek.26:3-4, 7-8, 12-14)

B. Seventy years Babylonian exile (Jer.25:11-12)

C. What Cyrus would do (Isa. 44:26—45:2)

In particular, they prophesied of the coming of the Messiah, including the place of his birth (700 years in advance), the time of his coming (600 years in advance), and many details of his career, life, death, and resurrection. These were all fulfilled.

Scores, if not hundreds, of messianic prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. Prophecies that can never be fulfilled in the future by any other, due to time-sensitive predictions, including the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 and the extinction of the destruction of the Jewish temple.

1. Tribe of Judah (Gen.49:10)
2. Descended from David (2 Sam.7:12-13)
3. Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)

4. Time of coming (Daniel 9:25)
5. The Forerunner (Malachi 3:1)
6. 30 pieces of silver (Zech.11:12-13)
7. Rejection, trial (Isaiah 53:7-9)
8. Crucifixion (Psalm 22:16-18)

Computer models have been used to calculate the compound probabilities that any man would fulfill the various prophecies known to have been fulfilled by Jesus. When only eight prophecies are considered the chances are 1 in 10^{17} that one man would fulfill them all.

When one studies the details of the prophecies and their fulfillments, it leaves no room to doubt that the writers of the predictions were inspired by God, as they invariably claimed they were—and also that Jesus was the Messiah whom they foresaw.

VI. The Impact of the Bible upon Human Civilization

“The entrance of your words gives light...” (Psalm 119:130)

“I am the Light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

Paul L. Maier (Professor of Ancient History, Western Michigan University)

“[Biblical teachings] ...halted infanticide, enhanced human life, emancipated women, abolished slavery, inspired charities and relief organizations, created hospitals, established orphanages...advanced science, instilled concepts of political and social and economic freedom, fostered justice, and provided the greatest single source of inspiration for the magnificent achievements in art, architecture, music and literature that we treasure to the present day...No religion, philosophy, teaching, nation, movement—whatever—has so changed the world for the better as Christianity has done.” (In Foreword: *How Christianity Changed the World*, by Alvin J. Schmidt, p.8)

- Dignity of human life (anti-abortion, rescuing exposed infants, ending gladiatorial games)
- Equality of all races and classes (treatment of children, slaves)
- Elevation of women’s dignity and rights (foot-binding; female circumcision; female equality)
- Monogamous, life-long marriage
- Value of humility, manual labor (Romans despised it)
- Freedom of conscience (First Amendment freedoms)

B. Shimabuku

"Some years ago, 'Readers' Digest' carried an amazing story called, 'Shimabuku - The Village That Lives By The Bible.' When American troops liberated Okinawa towards the end of World War 2, they found it in an appalling social and moral condition. Then they reached the village of Shimabuku, where they were greeted by two old men, one of them carrying a Bible. Suspicious of a trap, they entered the village very cautiously - only to find it spotlessly clean, its fields tilled and fertile, and everything a model of neatness and cleanliness in stark contrast to all the other villages round about. The reason? Thirty years earlier, an American missionary on his way to Japan had called at Shimabuku. He only stayed long enough to make two converts (those two old men), teach them some hymns, leave them a Japanese translation of the Bible and urge them to live by it. With no other Christian contact, and guided only by the Bible, those two old men had transformed their community. There was no jail, no brothel, no drunkenness, no divorce; instead, the people lived healthy, happy, fulfilled lives - an oasis of love and purity in a desert of degradation all

around them. Clarence Hall, the war correspondent who wrote the story, summed up his feelings in the words of his dumbfounded driver: '...maybe we're using the wrong kind of weapons to change the world!'... The evidence of history is that wherever the straightforward teaching of the Bible has been rightly applied and obeyed, society has undergone a moral and spiritual revolution." [John Blanchard, *How to Enjoy Your Bible*]

During World War II on a remote island in the Pacific an American serviceman encountered a literate native, from a tribe of former cannibals, who was carrying a Bible. Gesturing to the man's Bible, the American said, "We educated people no longer put much faith in that book." The native replied, "Well, it's good that we do, or you would be eaten by my people today." (cited by James Hefley, *So What's So Great About the Bible?* P.76

Paraphrasing Dennis Prager, 8/29/19—

When I see what the belief in the Bible has done for civilization, and what becomes of a society that loses its respect for the Bible, it makes me believe it is true. If you remove a pillar from a building, and the building collapses, you know that pillar was essential to the whole thing.

Additional notes on “Science”

A Testimony

“The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will turn you into an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass God is waiting for you.” -Werner Heisenberg

During my graduate education in neuroscience, I gulped down the natural sciences like drinking from a fire hydrant. Like so many, I exchanged the religious beliefs of my childhood for the so-called scientific worldview perpetuated by higher education. And this exchange was wholesale. The light of science had at last illumined and freed my mind from the dark cave of Bronze-Age superstition. Or so I thought.

I pushed so hard against any notion of faith in God for a time that there was an almost inevitable rebound. The atheism/naturalism that seemed so freeing at first turned out to be a blind alley leading to a dead end. I slowly realized that this worldview simply cannot be lived out. Without God, there can be no real right or wrong, good or evil. More than that, no God means no choice-no free will, and it means that things like love and beauty are mere illusions created by our brain chemicals.

Consequently, I gave atheism the boot, not knowing at the time where my return to theism would lead me. After a brief trial of a vague, feel-good “higher powerism” that made no real demands on my life, I took another intense look at the Nazarene. In no time, I was captivated and could not let go. Where every other system failed, Jesus succeeded! And just like He transformed and revolutionized human history, He made me a new creation.

Dr. Richard Suplita, PhD.
Professor of Brain and Behavioral Sciences
University of Georgia

Yale Scientist Denounces Evolution

By Julie Roys

A prominent Yale scientist has just publicly denounced Darwinism as not only improbable, but statistically “a dead loss”!

Writing for The Claremont Review of Books, Yale professor of computer science, David Gelernter, explains how he was predisposed to believe in Darwinism, yet when he investigated it, he found it wanting:

There’s no reason to doubt that Darwin successfully explained the small adjustments by which an organism adapts to local circumstances: changes to fur density or wing style or beak shape. Yet there are many reasons to doubt whether he can answer the hard questions and explain the big picture—not the fine-tuning of existing species but the emergence of new ones. The origin of species is exactly what Darwin cannot explain.

Gelernter largely credits the Discover Institute's Stephen Meyer, and his "thoughtful and meticulous" book, *Darwin's Doubt*, for opening his eyes to the flaws in evolution. Gelernter explains that what's known as the "Cambrian Explosion" showed the exact opposite of what Darwin predicted the fossil record would show. Instead of change developing in a gradual, step-by-step fashion, the animal-groups that appeared during the Cambrian Explosion arrived fully formed—and their forms resisted all major changes to their body plans. Next, Gelernter shows how modern molecular biology has essentially destroyed Darwin's theory by showing the complexity of protein and the impossibility that protein could have formed randomly.

(Molecular biologist Douglas Axe) estimated that, of all 150-link amino acid sequences, 1 in 10^{74} will be capable of folding into a stable protein. To say that your chances are 1 in 10^{74} is no different, in practice, from saying that they are zero. It's not surprising that your chances of hitting a stable protein that performs some useful function, and might therefore play a part in evolution, are even smaller. Axe puts them at 1 in 10^{77} . In other words: immense is so big, and tiny is so small, that neo-Darwinian evolution is—so far—a dead loss. Try to mutate your way from 150 links of gibberish to a working, useful protein and you are guaranteed to fail. Try it with ten mutations, a thousand, a million—you fail. The odds bury you. It can't be done.

My husband, Neal, who's an AP Statistics instructor, has long said the problem with evolutionary biologists is that most don't know statistics. If they did, they'd see that Darwin's theory of evolution amounts to a "null hypothesis" that reasonable scientists must reject due to embarrassingly low probabilities. After reading the article, Neal wrote:

Like it or not, conclusions in science are based on probabilities calculated by mathematicians. And the probability of observing new proteins, when calculated on the assumption that Darwin was right, is too low for the assumption to stand. An intellectually honest scientist is obligated to reject the assumption that Darwin was right. The time has come to admit there is sufficient evidence to conclude that Intelligent Design is the only reasonable alternative, unless you're willing to resort to blind faith in the religion of naturalism.

Gelernter, who's Jewish, doesn't embrace Intelligent Design but he comes close. And he says what very few secular scientists are willing to admit—that the evolutionists are the ideologues while the proponents of I.D. are "dispassionate intellectuals.":

Meyer doesn't only demolish Darwin; he defends a replacement theory, intelligent design (I.D.). Although I can't accept intelligent design as Meyer presents it, he does show that it is a plain case of the emperor's new clothes: it says aloud what anyone who ponders biology must think, at some point, while sifting possible answers to hard questions. Intelligent design as Meyer explains it never uses religious arguments, draws religious

conclusions, or refers to religion in any way. It does underline an obvious but important truth: Darwin's mission was exactly to explain the flagrant appearance of design in nature.

The religion is all on the other side. Meyer and other proponents of I.D. are the dispassionate intellectuals making orderly scientific arguments. Some I.D.-haters have shown themselves willing to use any argument—fair or not, true or not, ad hominem or not—to keep this dangerous idea locked in a box forever. They remind us of the extent to which Darwinism is no longer just a scientific theory but the basis of a worldview, and an emergency replacement religion for the many troubled souls who need one.