



✠ VOLUME 1 ✠

HOW DO WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS TRUE?



KEN HAM
GENERAL EDITOR

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What Does Biblical Authority Have to Do with Today's Church and Culture?

Ken Ham



Change the Culture?

What is your real motivation at AiG? Are you political activists? Are you trying to get creation taught in the public school classroom? Does your ministry aim to change the culture? Isn't the Church irrelevant in today's world?

These are just a few of the many questions I have been asked by the secular media over the years, particularly during the media blitz surrounding the opening of the Creation Museum in 2007. In these interviews, I made it clear that the thrust of Answers in Genesis (AiG) is to uphold the authority of God's Word as we not only provide answers to the questions of skeptics but also preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and see people won to the Lord.

At AiG, we understand that the Christian culture we once had in America (and the once-Christianized culture of the West in general) has become increasingly secularized over the past few years. AiG helps the Church understand that this societal change occurred from the foundation up — that is, instead of the culture generally being founded on the teachings in God's Word, generations were eventually taught to exalt

autonomous human reason instead and build their worldview on that foundation.

And what has been the basic and most successful mechanism for this secularization of the culture? Over the decades, millions upon millions of Americans, one person at a time, have been indoctrinated to believe in the idea of evolutionary naturalism and millions (billions!) of years and thus to doubt and ultimately disbelieve the Bible as true history.

As generations began to reject God's Word as reliable and authoritative, they began to consistently build a secular worldview based on moral relativism. As this change occurred, many such secular humanists moved into positions in education, the government, legal systems, etc. The worldview they had adopted determined how they would vote in passing laws, establishing curricula, making moral choices, and so on. The Western culture changed from a predominantly Christian worldview to an increasingly secular worldview. To understand how important a person's worldview truly is, consider what the Bible teaches about how a person's actions are governed by their thoughts.

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7).

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks
(Matthew 12:34).

As people repent, are converted to Christ, and are then taught to build their thinking consistently on God's Word (and as Christians are challenged to de-secularize their own thinking and build a proper worldview), then they can make an impact on the culture. After all, God's people are told to be "salt" and "light" (Matthew 5:13–14) — and thus affect the world for good. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). That's why I often explain to the secular media that the ministry of AiG and the Creation Museum is to preach the gospel and hope to see people converted to Christ and thus be "salt" and "light" in their daily living. As these people find themselves on school boards, are elected to local government, or obtain influential positions in the media, their worldview will govern the way they vote and effect changes.

The AiG ministry is providing answers to the skeptical questions of our day that cause people to doubt the Bible's historicity and truthfulness.

And in this era of history, the most attacked part of the Bible's history is Genesis 1–11. When people understand they can trust the history in the early chapters of Genesis, they can better understand and be more responsive to the gospel — the gospel that is based on that history. Of course, countering the skeptics brings up other apologetics questions that need to be answered.

AiG's aim is not to change the culture. Changing the culture is a by-product of a much bigger and more eternally significant goal. As one life at a time is changed, each of those Christians can have an impact on the culture for the glory of Christ.

So this is what AiG and the Creation Museum are “about” — and what we believe every Christian should be doing: presenting and defending the life-changing gospel message to see lives changed for the glory of God and to see the Church return to the rock-solid foundation on which it was built (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20).

Is the Church a Relic?

The Grand Canyon is a form of relic. What do I mean? Well, the present processes operating at the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona, such as the minimal erosion by the Colorado River, cannot explain how the canyon was really carved. In addition, no processes operating today at the canyon can explain the laying down of the massive sedimentary strata that I have seen there (e.g., Coconino Sandstone), nor the massive sheet erosion that resulted in the Kaibab Plateau.

In order to produce this “relic” of a deep canyon and layers we see today, something very different than what is happening in the present occurred in the past. It was the result of the aftereffects of the global Flood of Noah's time.

To me, this is analogous to something happening with the Christian Church in our Western world. For example, I have traveled to the United Kingdom many times over the past 25 years. Several years ago, I began taking photos of British churches that have been turned into bars, night-clubs, Sikh temples, theaters, shopping centers — the list is a long one.

The U.K. was once predominantly Christian. Today, most of the U.K. has become extremely pagan; just a remnant of Christianity remains in England and the other U.K. nations. Even though there are some new

churches (thank God!), “relic” churches exist all across the U.K. The Christian influence is largely gone.

You see, just like the Grand Canyon, something was different in the past. The current state of England and the rest of the U.K. does not explain why there were so many churches in the past and why they had considerable Christian influence on society.

I want to suggest to you that where the U.K. is today, America will be “tomorrow” — and for the same reasons if we continue on this trend. The Church could very well become a “relic” in America if God’s people don’t deal with the foundational nature of the problem that has produced the sad situation in the U.K. today. Imagine how this must grieve the heart of God!

Here is one thing that particularly alarms me: research by George Barna has shown that of those students from Christian homes in America who go to public schools (about 95 percent of all students), at least 70 percent of them will walk away from the Church and the faith of their parents once they leave home.¹

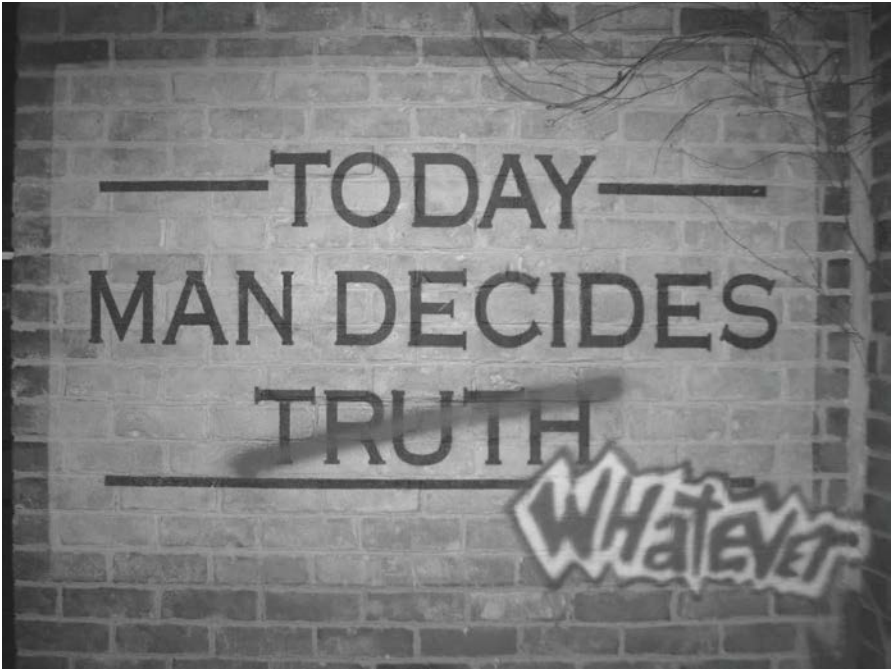
A fairly recent report states: “A new study by The Barna Group conducted among 16- to 29-year-olds shows that a new generation is more skeptical of and resistant to Christianity than were people of the same age just a decade ago.”²

These statistics were confirmed in *Already Gone*, the book I co-authored with Britt Beemer from America’s Research Group. In fact, our research revealed that many of these young people who walk away from the Church once they leave home have actually “checked out” long before leaving home. These young people have serious doubts about biblical authority, particularly in the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

AiG has been continually bringing to the Church’s attention a major challenge of the day: our culture is filled with increasing numbers of people who do not believe the Bible is a credible book. As a result, the culture has lost faith in biblical authority.

And why has this happened? It did not occur overnight. Generation after generation, there has been a slow erosion of biblical authority in

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1. Barna Research Online, “Teenagers Embrace Religion but Are Not Excited About Christianity,” January 10, 2000.
 2. Barna Research Online, “A New Generation Expresses Its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity,” September 24, 2007.



America. In fact, ever since the early 19th century the idea of a millions- or billions-of-years-old age for the earth/universe was beginning to become popular in the U.K. and the United States. Much of the Church quickly adopted the old-age view. And they reinterpreted the days of creation and Noah's Flood in Genesis.

Soon, much of the Church also adopted many of Darwin's blatant evolutionary beliefs (and just added God to this). Generation after generation, the Church has reinterpreted God's Word in Genesis in response to secular ideas. Each subsequent generation has become more firm in the belief that if the first part of the Bible (which is the foundational history for all Christian doctrine, including the gospel) is not true, how can the rest be? Biblical authority is undermined, the Bible's credibility is destroyed, and the Christian influence in the culture is eroded.

AiG has been raised up by God for this era of history to help challenge the Church concerning biblical authority, which could (as God blesses) ultimately change the culture. Remember: "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3).

Calling for Reformation

Here is an example of how the foundation has shifted for one particular group. In 1977, the Assemblies of God denomination adopted a “Doctrine of Creation” report, which stated the following:

This Bible record of creation thus rules out the evolutionary philosophy which states that all forms of life have come into being by gradual, progressive evolution carried on by resident forces. It also rules out any evolutionary origin for the human race, since no theory of evolution, including theistic evolution, can explain the origin of the male before the female, nor can it explain how a man could evolve into a woman. . . .

The account of creation is intended to be taken as factual and historical. Our understanding of God as Creator is rooted in a revelation that is historical in nature, just as our understanding of God as Redeemer is rooted in the revelation of God’s dealings with Israel in history and in the historical events of the life, death, and resurrection of His Son.³

But fast forward to 2010 and see what has changed. A new “Doctrine of Creation” was adopted by the “General Presbytery,” the governing body of the Assembly of God churches. Here is the denomination’s official view today:

The advance of scientific research, particularly in the last few centuries, has raised many questions about the interpretation of the Genesis accounts of creation. In attempting to reconcile the Bible and the theories and conclusions of contemporary scientists, it should be remembered that the creation accounts do not give precise details as to how God went about His creative activity. Nor do these accounts provide us with complete chronologies that enable us to date with precision the time of the various stages of creation. Similarly, the findings of science are constantly expanding; the accepted theories of one generation are often revised in the next.

As a result, equally devout Christian believers have formed

³ “The Doctrine of Creation,” copyrighted by the General Council of the Assemblies of God; adopted by the Assemblies of God General Presbytery, August 15–17, 1977.

very different opinions about the age of the earth, the age of humankind, and the ways in which God went about the creative processes. Given the limited information available in Scripture, it does not seem wise to be overly dogmatic about any particular creation theory. . . . We urge all sincere and conscientious believers to adhere to what the Bible plainly teaches and to avoid divisiveness over debatable theories of creation.⁴

My heart was heavy as I read the statement “the findings of science are constantly expanding; the accepted theories of one generation are often revised in the next.” Well, at least the Bible hasn’t changed in the past 33 years. But man’s ideas certainly have!

The message here from this denomination is essentially this: because of “the theories and conclusions of contemporary scientists” regarding origins, Christians must change their interpretation of the Bible in Genesis! This low view of Scripture and esteeming man’s ideas is a major problem within many denominations. In fact, the tragedy of reinterpreting God’s clear words to fit in man’s beliefs has always existed with God’s people. The same problem is recorded in Genesis when the serpent tempted Eve by asking, “Did God really say . . . ?” (Genesis 3:1; NIV).

Creating doubt regarding God’s Word has greatly undermined biblical authority in society as a whole, even its churches.

We live in an era of great scientific advancement. But remember: *science* means “knowledge.” There is a big difference between knowledge gained by observation that builds our technology in the present (“operational science”) and knowledge concerning the past (“historical science”), which cannot be observed directly. “Historical science” is being used as the authority over God’s Word.

The Assembly of God denomination is insisting that fallible man’s historical science (beliefs about the past concerning origins) must be used to reinterpret God’s clear and infallible Word. (By the way, I thank God for the many pastors in these churches who stand on the Word of God and cringe at their denomination’s new position.)

AiG’s mission statement declares that we are to be “a catalyst to bring

⁴ “The Doctrine of Creation,” copyrighted by the General Council of the Assemblies of God; adopted by the Assemblies of God General Presbytery, August 9–11, 2010.

reformation by reclaiming the foundations of our faith which are found in the Bible, from the very first verse.”

What can the righteous do as the foundations of Christianity are being destroyed? We need a new reformation in our churches. Christians need to be figuratively nailing Genesis chapters 1–11 on the doors of churches and Christian colleges/seminaries, challenging God’s people to return to the authority of the Bible.

We will continue to see a decline in our nation, churches, and families — unless God’s people repent of compromise and return to His Word! We need to understand that the Bible is true and it is the authority when it comes to creation apologetics as well as general apologetics. This book is designed to show you how to answer many of the skeptical questions of our day while firmly standing upon the Word of God. It is time for a new reformation, a time to return to the 66 books of the Bible as the absolute standard in all areas.

How Do We Know the Bible Is True?

Jason Lisle



The Bible is an extraordinary work of literature, and it makes some astonishing claims. It records the details of the creation of the universe, the origin of life, the moral law of God, the history of man's rebellion against God, and the historical details of God's work of redemption for all who trust in His Son. Moreover, the Bible claims to be God's revelation to mankind. If true, this has implications for all aspects of life: how we should live, why we exist, what happens when we die, and what our meaning and purpose is. But how do we know if the claims of the Bible are *true*?

Some Typical Answers

A number of Christians have tried to answer this question. Unfortunately, not all of those answers have been as cogent as we might hope. Some answers make very little sense at all. Others have some merit but fall short of proving the truth of the Bible with certainty. Let's consider some of the arguments that have been put forth by Christians.

A Subjective Standard

Some Christians have argued for the truth of the Scriptures by pointing to the changes in their own lives that belief in the God who inspired

the Bible has induced. Receiving Jesus as Lord is a life-changing experience that brings great joy. A believer is a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). However, this change does not in and of itself prove the Bible is true. People might experience positive feelings and changes by believing in a position that happens to be false.

At best, a changed life shows consistency with the Scriptures. We would expect a difference in attitudes and actions given that the Bible is true. Although giving a testimony is certainly acceptable, a changed life does not (by itself) demonstrate the truth of the Scriptures. Even an atheist might argue that his belief in atheism produces feelings of inner peace or satisfaction. This does not mean that his position is *true*.

By Faith

When asked how they know that the Bible is true, some Christians have answered, “We know the Bible is true *by faith*.” While that answer may sound pious, it is not very logical, nor is it a correct application of Scripture. Faith is the confident belief in something that you cannot perceive with your senses (Hebrews 11:1). So when I believe without observation that the earth’s core is molten, I am acting on a type of faith. Likewise, when I believe in God whom I cannot directly see, I am acting on faith. Don’t misunderstand. We should indeed have faith in God and His Word. But the “by faith” response does not actually answer the objection that has been posed — namely, *how we know* that the Bible is true.

Since faith is a belief in something unseen, the above response is not a good argument. “We know by faith” is the equivalent of saying, “We know by believing.” But clearly, the act of believing in something doesn’t necessarily make it true. A person doesn’t really know something just by believing it. He simply believes it. So the response is essentially, “We believe because we believe.” While it is true that we believe, this answer is totally irrelevant to the question being asked. It is a non-answer. Such a response is not acceptable for a person who is a follower of Christ. The Bible teaches that we are to be ready to give an *answer* to anyone who asks a reason of the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15). Saying that we have faith is not the same as giving a *reason* for that faith.

Begging the Question

Some have cited 2 Timothy 3:16 as proof that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. This text indicates that all Scripture is inspired by God (or “God-breathed”) and useful for teaching. That is, every writing in the Bible is a revelation from God that can be trusted as factually true. Clearly, if the Bible is given by revelation of the God of truth, then it can be trusted at every point as an accurate depiction. The problem with answering the question this way is that it presupposes that the verse itself is truthful — which is the very claim at issue.

In other words, how do we know that 2 Timothy 3:16 is true? “Well it’s in the Bible,” some might say. But how do we know the Bible is true? “Because 2 Timothy 3:16 assures us that it is.” This is a vicious circular argument. It must first arbitrarily assume the very thing it is trying to prove. Circular reasoning of this type (while technically valid) is not useful in a debate because it does not prove anything beyond what it merely assumes. After all, this type of argument would be equally valid for any other book that claims to be inspired by God. How do we know that book X is inspired by God? “Because it says it is.” But how do we know that what it’s saying is true? “Well, God wouldn’t lie!”

On the other hand, some Christians might go too far the other way — thinking that what the Bible says about itself is utterly irrelevant to the question of its truthfulness or its inspiration from God. This, too, is a mistake. After all, how would we know that a book is inspired by God unless it claimed to be? Think about it: how do you know who wrote a particular book? The book itself usually states who the author is. Most people are willing to accept what a book says about itself unless they have good evidence to the contrary.

So it is quite relevant that the Bible itself claims to be inspired by God. It does claim that all of its assertions are true and useful for teaching. Such statements do prove *at least* that the writers of the Bible considered it to be not merely their own opinion, but in fact the inerrant Word of God. However, arguing that the Bible must be true *solely* on the basis that it says so is not a powerful argument. Yes, it is a relevant claim. But we need some additional information if we are to escape a vicious circle.

Textual Consistency and Uniqueness

Another argument for the truthfulness of the Bible concerns its uniqueness and internal consistency. The Bible is remarkably self-consistent, despite having been written by more than 40 different writers over a time span of about 2,000 years. God's moral law, man's rebellion against God's law, and God's plan of salvation are the continuing themes throughout the pages of Scripture. This internal consistency is what we would expect if the Bible really is what it claims to be — God's revelation.

Moreover, the Bible is uniquely authentic among ancient literary works in terms of the number of ancient manuscripts found and the smallness of the time scale between when the work was first written and the oldest extant manuscript (thereby minimizing any possibility of alteration from the original).¹ This indicates that the Bible has been accurately transmitted throughout the ages, far more so than other ancient documents. Few people would doubt that Plato really wrote the works ascribed to him, and yet the Bible is *far* more authenticated. Such textual criticism shows at least that the Bible (1) is unique in ancient literature and (2) has been accurately transmitted throughout the ages. What we have today is a good representation of the original. No one could consistently argue that the Bible's authenticity is in doubt unless he is willing to doubt all other works of antiquity (because they are far less substantiated).²

To be sure, this is what we would expect, given the premise that the Bible is true. And yet, uniqueness and authenticity to the original do not necessarily prove that the source is *true*. They simply mean that the Bible is unique and has been accurately transmitted. This is consistent with the claim that the Bible is the Word of God, but it does not decisively prove the claim.

External Evidence

Some Christians have argued for the truth of Scripture on the basis of various lines of external evidence. For example, archaeological discoveries have confirmed many events of the Bible. The excavation of Jericho reveals that the walls of this city did indeed fall as described in the Book

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1. See chapters 5 and 12 of Brian Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2006).
 2. Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, *A Ready Defense* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), p. 42–55.

of Joshua.³ Indeed, some passages of the Bible, which critics once claimed were merely myth, have now been confirmed archeologically. For example, the five cities of the plain described in Genesis 14:2 were once thought by secular scholars to be mythical, but ancient documents have been found that list these cities as part of ancient trade routes.⁴

Archaeology certainly confirms Scripture. Yet it does not prove that the Bible is *entirely* true. After all, not every claim in Scripture has been confirmed archeologically. The Garden of Eden has never been found, nor has the Tower of Babel or Noah's ark (as of this writing). So at best, archaeology demonstrates that *some* of the Bible is true.

Such consistency is to be expected. Yet, using archaeology in an attempt to *prove* the Bible seems inappropriate. After all, archaeology is an uncertain science; its findings are inevitably subject to the interpretation and bias of the observer and are sometimes overturned by newer evidence. Archaeology is useful, but fallible. Is it appropriate to use a *fallible* procedure to judge what claims to be the *infallible* Word of God? Using the less certain to judge the more certain seems logically flawed. Yes, archaeology can show consistency with Scripture but is not in a position to *prove* the Bible in any decisive way because archaeology itself is not decisive.

Predictive Prophecy and Divine Insight

A number of passages in the Bible predict future events in great detail — events that were future to the writers but are now in our past. For example, in Daniel 2 a prophecy predicted the next three world empires (up to and including the Roman Empire) and their falls. If the Bible were not inspired by God, how could its mere human writers possibly have known about events in the distant future?⁵

3. Bryant Wood, "The Walls of Jericho," *Creation* 21 (2) March–May 1999, p. 36–40, <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v21/i2/jericho.asp#>.

4. Bryant Wood, "The Discovery of the Sin Cities of Sodom and Gomorrah," *Bible and Spade* (Summer 1999), <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/chronological-categories/patriarchal-era/2364-the-discovery-of-the-sin-cities-of-sodom-and-gomorrah>.

5. Even this begs the question to some degree. A critic could (hypothetically) argue that some people have the ability to perceive distant future events through some as-yet-undiscovered mechanism (be it psychic powers or whatever). The Christian knows better; he knows that God *alone* declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:9–10). But the Christian knows this because it is what the Bible says. So only by presupposing the truth of the Bible could we cogently argue that *only God* can know the future.

The Bible also touches on matters of science in ways that seem to go beyond what was known to humankind at the time. In Isaiah 40:22 we read about the spreading out (expansion) of the heavens (the universe). Yet secular scientists did not discover such expansion until the 1920s. The spherical nature of the earth and the fact that the earth hangs in space are suggested in Scriptures such as Job 26:10 and Job 26:7 respectively. The Book of Job is thought to have been written around 2000 B.C. — long before the nature of our planet was generally known.

Such evidence is certainly consistent with the claim that the Bible is inspired by God. And some people find such evidence convincing. Yet, persons who tenaciously resist the idea that the Bible is the Word of God have offered their counterarguments to the above examples. They have suggested that the predictive prophetic passages were written after the fact, much later than the text itself would indicate. Examples of apparent scientific insight in the Bible are chalked up to coincidence.

Moreover, there is something inappropriate about using secular science to judge the claims of the Bible. As with archeological claims, what constitutes a scientific fact is often subject to the bias of the interpreter. Some people would claim that particles-to-people evolution is a scientific fact. Although creationists would disagree, we must concede that what some people *think* is good science does not always coincide with the Bible.

The Bible does show agreement with some of what is commonly accepted as scientific fact. But what is considered scientific fact today might not be tomorrow. We are once again in the embarrassing position of attempting to judge what claims to be infallible revelation from God by the questionable standards of men. Again, how can we judge what claims to be *inerrant* revelation by a standard that is itself uncertain and ever-changing? This would be like using something we merely suspect to be about three feet long to check whether a yardstick is accurate. Using the less certain to judge the more certain just doesn't make sense. At best, such things merely show consistency.

The Standard of Standards

The above lines of evidence are certainly consistent with the premise that the Bible is true. Many people have no doubt found such evidence quite convincing. Yet we must admit that none of the above lines of evidence quite

proves that the Bible must be the inerrant Word of God. Critics have their counterarguments to all of the above. If we are to know *for certain* that the Bible is true, we will need a different kind of argument — one that is absolutely conclusive and irrefutable. In all the above cases, we took as an unstated premise that there are certain standards by which we judge how likely something is true. **When we stop to consider what these standards are, we will see that the standards themselves are proof that the Bible is true.**

Putting it another way, only the Bible can make sense of the standards by which we evaluate whether or not something is true. One such set of standards are the laws of logic. We all know that a true claim cannot contradict another true claim. That would violate a law of logic: the law of non-contradiction. The statements “The light is red” and “The light is not red” cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. Laws of logic thus represent a standard by which we can judge certain truth claims. Moreover, all people seem to “know” laws like the law of non-contradiction. We all assume that such laws are the same everywhere and apply at all times without exception. But why is this? How do we *know* such things?

If we consider the biblical worldview, we find that we can make sense of the laws of logic. The Bible tells us that God’s mind is the standard for all knowledge (Colossians 2:3). Since God upholds the entire universe and since He is beyond time, we would expect that laws of logic apply everywhere in the universe and at all times. There can never be an exception to a law of logic because God’s mind is sovereign over all truth. We can know laws of logic because we are made in God’s image and are thus able to think in a way that is consistent with His nature (Genesis 1:27). So when we take the Bible as our worldview, we find that laws of logic make sense.

But if we don’t accept the Bible as true, we are left without a foundation for laws of logic. How could we know (apart from God) that laws of logic work *everywhere*? After all, none of us has universal knowledge. We have not experienced the future nor have we traveled to distant regions of the universe. Yet we assume that laws of logic will work in the future as they have in the past and that they work in the distant cosmos as they work here. But how could we possibly know that apart from revelation from God?

Arguing that laws of logic have worked in our past experiences is pointless — because that’s not the question. The question is: how can we know that they will work in the future or in regions of space that we have

never visited? Only the Christian worldview can make sense of the universal, exception-less, unchanging nature of laws of logic. Apart from the truth revealed in the Bible, we would have no reason to assume that laws of logic apply everywhere at all times, yet we all do assume this. Only the Christian has a good reason to presume the continued reliability of logic. The non-Christian does not have such a reason in his own professed worldview, and so he is being irrational: believing something without a good reason. The unbeliever has only “blind faith” but the Christian’s faith in the Bible makes knowledge possible.

The Foundation of Science

Another standard we use when evaluating certain kinds of claims is the standard of science. The tools of science allow us to describe the predictable, consistent way in which the universe normally behaves. Science allows us to make successful predictions about certain future states. For example, if I mix chemical A with chemical B, I expect to get result C because it has always been that way in the past. This happens the same way every time: if the conditions are the same, I will get the same result. Science is based on an underlying uniformity in nature. But why should there be such uniformity in nature? And how do we know about it?

We all presume that the future will be like the past in terms of the basic operation of nature. This does not mean that Friday will be exactly like Monday — conditions change. But it does mean that things like gravity will work the same on Friday as they have on Monday. With great precision, astronomers are able to calculate years in advance the positions of planets, the timing of eclipses, and so on — only because the universe operates in such a consistent way. We all know that (in basic ways) the universe will behave in the future as it has in the past. Science would be impossible without this critical principle. But what is the foundation for this principle?

The Bible provides that foundation. According to the biblical worldview, God has chosen to uphold the universe in a consistent way for our benefit. He has promised us in places such as Genesis 8:22 that the basic cycles of nature will continue to be in the future as they have been in the past. Although specific circumstances change, the basic laws of nature (such as gravity) will continue to work in the future as they have in the past. Interestingly, only God is in a position to tell us on His own authority that

this will be true. According to the Bible, God is beyond time,⁶ and so only He knows what the future will be. But we are within time and have not experienced the future. The only way we could know the future will be (in certain ways) like the past is because God has told us in His Word that it will be.

Apart from the Bible, is there any way we could know that the future will be like the past? So far, no one has been able to show how such a belief would make sense apart from Scripture. The only nonbiblical explanations offered have turned out to be faulty. For example, consider the following.

Some people argue that they can know that the future will be like the past on the basis of past experience. That is, in the past when they assumed that the future would be like the past, they were right. They then argue that this past success is a good indicator of future success. However, in doing so they arbitrarily assume the very thing they are supposed to be proving: that the future will be like the past. They commit the logical fallacy of begging the question. Any time we use past experience as an indicator of what will probably happen in the future, we are relying on the belief that the future will be (in basic ways) like the past. So we cannot merely use past experience as our reason for belief that in the future nature will be uniform, unless we *already knew* by some other way that nature is uniform. If nature were not uniform, then past success would be *utterly irrelevant* to the future! Only the biblical worldview can provide an escape from this vicious logical circle. And that is another very good reason to believe the Bible is true.

We Already Know the God of the Bible

Since only the Bible can make sense of the standards of knowledge, it may seem perplexing at first that people who deny the Bible are able to have knowledge. We must admit that non-Christians are able to use laws of logic and the methods of science with great success — despite the fact that such procedures only make sense in light of what the Bible teaches. How are we to explain this inconsistency? How is it that people deny the truth of the Bible and yet simultaneously *rely* upon the truth of the Bible?

The Bible itself gives us the resolution to this paradox. In Romans 1:18–21 the Scriptures teach that God has revealed Himself to everyone.

6. E.g., 2 Peter 3:8; Isaiah 46:9–10.

God has “hardwired” knowledge of Himself into every human being, such that we all have inescapable knowledge of God. However, people have rebelled against God — they “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). People go to great lengths to convince themselves and others that they do not know what, in fact, they must know. They are denying the existence of a God who is rightly angry at them for their rebellion against Him.

But since all men are made in God’s image, we are able to use the knowledge of logic and uniformity that He has placed within us,⁷ even if we inconsistently deny the God that makes such knowledge possible. So the fact that even unbelievers are able to use logic and science is a proof that the Bible really is true. When we understand the Bible, we find that what it teaches can make sense of those things necessary for science and reasoning. God has designed us so that when believers read His Word, we recognize it as the voice of our Creator (John 10:27). The truth of the Bible is inescapably certain, for if the Bible were not true, we couldn’t know anything at all. It turns out that the worldview delineated by the Bible is the only worldview that can make sense of all those things necessary for knowledge.

Conclusion

The truth of the Bible is obvious to anyone willing to fairly investigate it. The Bible is uniquely self-consistent and extraordinarily authentic. It has changed the lives of millions of people who have placed their faith in Christ. It has been confirmed countless times by archaeology and other sciences. It possesses divine insight into the nature of the universe and has made correct predictions about distant future events with perfect accuracy. When Christians read the Bible, they cannot help but recognize the voice of their Creator. The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and it demonstrates this claim by making knowledge possible. It is the standard of standards. The proof of the Bible is that unless its truth is presupposed, we couldn’t prove anything at all.⁸

7. Babies do not “learn” uniformity in nature. They are born already knowing it. When a baby burns his hand on a candle, he does not quickly do it again because he rightly believes that if he does it again it will hurt again. The baby already knows that the future reflects the past.

8. This fact has been recognized and elaborated upon by Christian scholars such as Dr. Cornelius Van Til and Dr. Greg Bahnsen.

Is the Old Testament Reliable?

Brian Edwards



Why Read the Bible?

Some years ago, I informed my congregation that over the next few months something would happen in our church that the world would find strange. In the first place, I proposed to preach on a book that was more than 3,000 years old, and second, I knew the whole congregation would be there each week to listen. And they were there — for the 30 weeks as we worked our way through the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy.

Across the world every week, millions of Christians listen to thousands of sermons from the Bible, a book that begins at the dawn of history itself. Why do they listen? The answer is that Christians believe the Bible to be both reliable and relevant to the need of 21st-century people to learn about their God and how they should live to please Him.

But must they have blind, unreasonable faith to believe the Bible to be true? Or are there sound reasons that the Bible, and specifically for this chapter, the Old Testament, can be accepted as reliable in every part?

What the Bible Writers Believed

The Old Testament writers believed their message was God-breathed and, therefore, utterly reliable. More than 400 times from Exodus 4:22 to Malachi 1:4, they declared, in just three Hebrew words, “Thus says the LORD.”

To emphasize this divine authority many of the prophets received God’s message through a powerful experience. For example, the prophet Jeremiah recorded that at the beginning of his ministry, “The LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth’ ” (Jeremiah 1:9).

The prophets so identified themselves as God’s spokesmen that they frequently spoke as though God Himself were speaking. In Isaiah 5:1–2 the prophet spoke of God in the third person — *He* — but in verses 3–6 Isaiah spoke for God in the first person — *I*. Isaiah had become the actual spokesperson for God. No wonder King David spoke of the word of the Lord as “perfect” (2 Samuel 22:31; see also Proverbs 30:5. The NIV translates this word as “flawless”).

The New Testament writers did not doubt that the Old Testament prophets spoke for God. Peter and John saw the words of David in Psalm 2, not as the opinion of a king in Israel, but as the Word of God: “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David” (Acts 4:25; NIV). Similarly, Paul accepted Isaiah’s words as God speaking to men: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers” (Acts 28:25).

The New Testament writers were so convinced all the words of the Old Testament Scripture were inspired by God that they even claimed, “Scripture says,” when the words quoted came directly from God. For example, “The Scripture says to the Pharaoh” (Romans 9:17).

Clearly, the Lord Jesus Himself believed the words of the Old Testament were God-breathed. In John 10:34 (quoting from Psalm 82:6), He based His teaching upon a single phrase: “I said, ‘You are gods.’ ” In Matthew 22:43–44 He quoted from Psalm 110:1 and emphasized a single word, “Lord,” to reveal Himself as the Son of God.

Where Are All the Gods?

The entire history of Israel covered by the Old Testament took place under the shadow of at least four major empires across the Fertile

Crescent: Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. Their influence is seen throughout the Old Testament record, and the religious life of each of these powers was dominated by a vast pantheon of gods and goddesses. The Egyptian collection included at least 1,500 gods, a number nearly matched by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. They had gods for the land and sea, hills and valleys, planets and seasons, birth and death, and everything in between. The pantheon of the Greeks and Romans who carried us into the New Testament was equally numerous. Their collection included the same gods with different names as centuries and empires rolled by.

In staggeringly marked contrast to this polytheism, the Israelites, from their earliest history, were taught to believe in one God and one alone. Moses fixed this truth in the mind of the nation: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Other ancient peoples of the world were polytheistic, so where did this “strange” idea come from? And why did the prophets of Israel hold to monotheism so



The Fertile Crescent and the main empires

firmly? The often-quoted idea that Israel garnered its religious ideas from the surrounding nations is completely toppled by the fact that Israel stood alone as a people who believed there was only one God, the God of the whole universe. Jonah's God of "heaven, sea, and land" (Jonah 1:9) was a radical idea to the sailors on the Phoenician ship as well as to the citizens of Nineveh.

Tell It Like It Is

Another unique feature of the Old Testament is its ruthless honesty in the records of Israel. In the ancient world, bad things were not recorded. If a king lost a battle, either government spin would turn it into a victory or else the defeat would simply be left unstated in the records. The 50-year struggle between the Egyptians and the Hittites, in which both sides were frequently bested in the fight, is vividly recorded in the temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel as a great victory for the pharaoh. Similarly, when recording the ancient dynasties of Egypt, this king deliberately omitted the dynasty of Amenhotep IV, who was considered the "heretic king" for elevating the god Aten above all others in the pantheon.¹ The Romans followed suit with purposeful omissions from the record, and they had a phrase for it: *damnatio memoria* (the damnation of memory). To record it was to perpetuate it; to ignore it meant that it never happened.

Contrast this with the authenticity of the Old Testament. If Israel lost a battle, it was recorded. When Israel's hero King David committed a terrible double crime of adultery and murder, that was also recorded. Even the godly King Hezekiah, in whose reign a spiritual revival took place, is on record as failing in his latter days and committing an act of foolish pride that brought disaster on the nation in years to come (2 Kings 20:12–18).

Why did the Israelites buck the majority vote of the nations and refuse to censor their history?

Tell It Like It Will Be

The fulfillment of biblical prophecy has always been a great embarrassment to the critics of the Bible, and their only escape route is to believe that the prophecies were written long after the event predicted. One significant problem with this conjecture is that no one has been able to explain how

1. See The Egyptian King List in the British Museum, London (EA117), www.britishmuseum.org.

the “prophetic con men” managed to pull off their “deception” so consistently, convincingly, and completely over so many centuries!

One writer on this subject has concluded that “the number of prophecies in the Bible is so large and their distribution so evenly spread through both Testaments and all types of literary forms that the interpreter is alerted to the fact that he or she is dealing with a major component of the Bible.”² With that amount available, we can only toe the water here.³

The prophets of God challenged the false prophets of the nations to tell something prophetic: “‘Present your case,’ says the LORD. ‘Bring forth your strong reasons,’ says the King of Jacob. ‘Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come’ ” (Isaiah 41:21–22).

The punishment for a prophet who gave false predictions was death. Conversely, the prophet Ezekiel, when prophesying of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, could claim with confidence, “When this comes to pass — surely it will come — then they will know that a prophet has been among them” (Ezekiel 33:33). For an Israelite it was unimaginable that a prophet would write up his “prophecy” after the event! A prophet would be stoned for such deceit.

The Prophecy of Nahum

The small Book of Nahum in the Bible contains a clear prophecy of the final destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the powerful Assyrian empire. If the prophet had written his prophecy after the event, it is hardly likely that the Jews would have been so gullible as to have accepted the retrospective prophecy of a prophet they knew to be still among them.

The argument most favored by scholars who will not accept Bible prophecy is that the author, under the pseudonym of Nahum, wrote many years beyond the lifetime of any who could have witnessed the fall of Nineveh. The problem with this argument is that Nahum records the precise way in which this impregnable city would eventually fall: primarily through fire and water (see Nahum 1:10, 2:4, 6–8, 3:8, 13, 15). Archaeologists have discovered how accurate his descriptions are, and some of the

2. Walter Kaiser, *Back Toward the Future* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), p. 20.

3. For more detail on this subject, see Brian Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), p. 76–96.



fire-burnt palace reliefs can be seen in the British Museum in London.⁴ The city was so utterly destroyed in 612 B.C. that two centuries after its destruction, the Greek historian Xenophon sat on top of the ruins and had no idea what city it had been. It would be another 2,246 years before the site was positively identified!

Attempts to deny Nahum's accurate prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. are more difficult to accept than believing real prophecy took place.

The Prophecies About Christ

The clearest and most challenging evidence of the reliability of the Old Testament is its consistent promise of the coming of the Messiah. Not even the most liberal critic of the Bible will doubt that Micah 5, Zechariah 9, Psalm 22, and Isaiah 53, to take four examples among many, were written centuries before Christ was born. Yet the details of His birth, triumphal entry, crucifixion, and burial are too close to doubt the connection. The suggestions that either Jesus deliberately arranged to fulfill the prophecies (including His place of birth and the soldiers casting lots for His clothes) or that the accounts were written two or three centuries after the events have themselves long been consigned to the stuff of myth.⁵

The Voice of Silent Stones

Archaeology is rubbish, but sometimes it turns up gold. Archaeology searches through yesterday's trash to discover how people lived, worked, fought, and died, as well as what they believed. The mantra that "archaeology disproves the Bible" is simple to refute if only people would check out the evidence. Archaeology is a big subject, so we can focus only on a

4. British Museum, London, England, Accession no. WA 124785, for example.

5. See, for example, *Redating the New Testament* by John A.T. Robinson (London: S C M Press, 1976), where Robinson (a liberal critic) concludes the entire New Testament was completed before 70 A.D.

few illustrations. But remember that the purpose of archaeology, as James Hoffmeier comments, is not to prove the Bible but to improve it.⁶ By this he means that archaeology can throw new light on old accounts and help us understand the Bible better.

Many details of the Bible, once rejected as fanciful at best or in error at worst, are now accepted by biblical scholars. Here are three of many.

David Who?

Critics once claimed King David did not ever exist since they could find no record of him outside the Bible. The common idea was that sometime after the Persians came to power in the sixth century B.C., he and Solomon were invented by Jewish scribes in order to boost the morale of the Jews in exile.

In July 1993 at Tel Dan in northern Israel, a broken basalt inscription was found, which is dated by archaeologists to the eighth century B.C. The inscription claims that the king of Damascus (Ben-Hadad of Syria) killed the king of Israel (that would be Jehoahaz) and the king of the “house of David” (that would be Joash of Judah). The account is found in 2 Kings 13:1–25. This means that the dynasty of King David was known 250 years before the scribes supposedly invented him in the sixth century B.C.!⁷ Few now deny the existence of David as a figure of history.

The King Who Never Existed

For a long time the only reference to an Assyrian king by the name of Sargon was found in Isaiah 20:1. It was therefore assumed that no such king existed and that the writer had made up the name. In 1843 Paul-Emil Botta, the French vice-consul and archaeologist in Mosul (northern Iraq), uncovered the great city of Khorsabad, and Sharru-kin (Sargon) is now one of the best known Assyrian kings in the ancient world.

Be Patient, Herr Hitzig

In 1850 German scholar Ferdinand Hitzig wrote a commentary on the Book of Daniel and boldly declared that Belshazzar was “a figment of

6. James K. Hoffmeier, *The Archaeology of the Bible* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2008), preface.

7. George Athas, *The Tel Dan Inscription* (London: T & T Clark, 2003). See also K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), p. 92.

the writer's imagination."⁸ Hitzig's reasoning was that the only references in known history to a king called Belshazzar were found in the Book of Daniel.

Four years later, the British Consul in Basra, J.E. Taylor, discovered four identical time capsules from building works of King Nabonidus of Babylon in which he offered a prayer for himself and "Belshazzar my firstborn son, the offspring of my heart." Today, no one doubts the existence of Belshazzar.

Some archaeological discoveries may *appear* to clash with the biblical record. Yet conclusive archaeology consistently confirms the Bible. For example, evidence of the conquest of Canaan in the time of Joshua is slowly coming to light.⁹ Also, the absence of evidence of the Hebrews in the land of Goshen has been answered by the Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen, who asks what evidence we would expect to find from a people who, 3,500 years ago, lived in mud brick houses in an area frequently flooded. In fact, virtually all Egypt's administrative records of the Delta area have been lost.¹⁰

On the other hand, a comparison of the names of foreign kings known from inscriptions and those in the Bible is "impeccably accurate."¹¹ In brief, it is simply false to claim that "archaeology disproves the Bible" when every year something new is turned up out of the ground that authenticates the biblical record. While there are still some unresolved issues, nothing in archaeology contradicts the Bible.

The Big Picture

Oxford lecturer Richard Dawkins dismissed the Bible as "a chaotically cobbled-together anthology of disjointed documents."¹² Any well-taught Bible student will know that far from being "chaotically cobbled-together," one of the hallmarks of the Bible as a trustworthy book is its progressive unfolding of one great theme from beginning to end.

8. Ferdinand Hitzig, *Das Buch Daniel* (Leipzig: Weidman, 1850).

9. Hoffmeier, *The Archaeology of the Bible*, p. 76.

10. Professor Kitchen comments, "Those who squawk intermittently 'No trace of the Hebrews has ever been found' (so, of course, no exodus) are wasting their breath." Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, p. 246.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 62

12. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Transworld Publishers, Bantam Press, 2006), p. 237.

We know the second part of the Bible focuses on Jesus Christ, but it is not always appreciated that the first part of the Bible is also consistently about Christ. While the Old Testament explores many subjects, the grand theme is Christ. Jesus called attention to the numerous Old Testament passages that spoke of Him (Luke 24:27, 44).

The first reference to Christ is made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Shortly after they fell, God promised that the day would come when the offspring of a woman would crush Satan (Genesis 3:15). The whole of the Old Testament nudges history closer to the fulfillment of that promise. We have no space here to explore this in detail,¹³ but the record of Noah and the Flood, the life of Abraham and the patriarchs, the accounts of Joseph and Israel in Egypt, the Exodus, Sinai and the moral and ceremonial law under Moses, the monarchy from Saul to Zedekiah, and all the prophets in between, nudge the big picture forward until the climax: “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son” (Galatians 4:4). Every book, even the small ones like Ruth and Esther, plays its part in the big picture.

This perfect harmony of the 39 books in the Old Testament is as unique as it is remarkable and stands as one of the great witnesses to the divine authorship, not only of the books, but of the record they relate.

What the Wise Men Say

Many able archaeologists and Old Testament scholars, both past and present, have accepted the historical accuracy of the Old Testament record.

Robert Dick Wilson was professor of Semitic philology at Princeton Theological Seminary during the 1920s. His knowledge of languages (he learned 26 languages, both ancient and modern) was phenomenal and his understanding of the biblical text equally so. He concluded, “No man knows enough to assail the truthfulness of the Old Testament. . . . I try to give my students such an intelligent faith in the Old Testament Scriptures that they will never doubt them as long as they live.”¹⁴

13. For more detail on this theme see Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth*, chapter 3, “The Master Plan.”

14. Robert Dick Wilson, *Is the Higher Criticism Scholarly?* (Philadelphia, PA: The Sunday School Times Company, 1922). See also Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Sunday School Times, 1926; reprinted by Solid Ground Christian Books, Vestavia Hills, AL), p. 8.

Kenneth Kitchen, professor emeritus of Egyptology and Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Archaeology, Classics, and Oriental Studies, University of Liverpool, England, has made the point that in the ancient world, “people did not write ‘historical novels’ with authentic research . . . in Near Eastern antiquity, as we do today.”¹⁵

James Hoffmeier, Professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern History and Archaeology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, while borrowing a phrase from his mentor Alfred Hoerth that archaeology “improves” rather than “proves” the Bible, nevertheless rigorously defends the historical accuracy of the Old Testament.¹⁶

Donald J. Wiseman, who, until his death in 2009, was professor emeritus of Assyriology at the University of London, has claimed that archaeology, “correctly understood, always confirms the accuracy of the Bible.”¹⁷

Alan Millard, Rankin professor emeritus of Hebrew and ancient Semitic languages at the University of Liverpool, wisely reminds us that archaeology can never prove or disprove the important message of the Bible, but it does “provide a good basis for a positive approach to the biblical records” and thus “enable its distinctive religious message to stand out more boldly.”¹⁸

While archaeology can never “prove the Bible true” in that the Bible’s most important message is about God’s promise of the Savior Jesus Christ, the accuracy of its historical data confirms the integrity of its message.

15. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, p. 188.

16. Hoffmeier, *The Archaeology of the Bible*. Preface and throughout this excellent volume.

17. In private conversation with the author, and this faithfully represents his view.

18. Alan Millard, *Treasures from Bible Times* (Belleville, MI: Lion, 1985), p. 14.