

Class Objective: To reaffirm, renew and expand the believer's understanding of and confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible.

### Class Overview

1. Clarify the role of the Bible in evangelical Christianity
2. Understand the factors that make the study of the Bible's reliability a critical necessity
3. Address the charge of circular reasoning in defending the integrity of Scripture
4. Remember that conversion is not primarily a product of logic but a work of the Spirit
5. Identify common attempts to discredit Scripture
6. Explore alleged contradictions in the Bible
7. Examine the formation of the Bible
8. Describe the history and importance of the copying of the Bible
9. Consider the principles and place of interpretation of Scripture
10. Explain the purpose and value of translations of Scripture
11. Reflect on the ultimate confirmation of the Bible's truthfulness
12. Delineate the practical implications of believing the Bible is trustworthy

### Notes

#### V. Common Attempts to Discredit Scripture

A. Generally speaking, attempts to discredit the Bible could be summarized as follows:

1. The Bible is **morally** objectionable.
  - a) God is presented as a judgmental being who at times orders the slaughter of men, women and children, ordains the torture and death of his own Son and consigns unbelievers to an eternal hell.
2. The Bible is **socially** repressive.
  - a) Women are subjugated to the authority of men in marriage and in the church, human sexual identity is limited to birth gender and sexual contact is restricted to heterosexual marriage.
3. The Bible is **scientifically** inaccurate.
  - a) The world is understood to be created and sustained by divine agency.
4. The Bible is **historically** inconsistent.
  - a) The Bible gives contradictory accounts of creation, the birth of Jesus and resurrection of Jesus. It is also claimed that certain places and events mentioned in the Bible are not corroborated in other historical records.
5. The Bible is **literarily** unreliable.
  - a) Since original manuscripts of the Bible no longer exist, one must rely on copies of copies of copies made over many hundreds of years with their accompanying errors, omissions and alterations.

#### VI. The Documents Of The Bible Are Reliable (see previous weeks notes for content of A-C)

- A. The New Testament writers claimed to be eyewitnesses to the events they recorded or to have consulted eyewitnesses to those events.
- B. How do the documents of the New Testament compare with other ancient literature?
- C. What is the time difference between the original writing of the New Testament documents and the existing copies? (i.e. Do centuries of copying make it impossible to trust the NT?)

- D. What is the time difference between the events of the New Testament and the original writing?
1. The skeptics perspective: The NT Gospel accounts are simply legend fabricated by the followers of Jesus.
  2. The writing of the New Testament is far too early for the formation of legend. There is simply not enough time to formulate a legend about Jesus.
    - a) Paul writes 15-25 years after Jesus.
    - b) The Gospels were written 35-65 years after Jesus.
    - c) Many eyewitnesses to Jesus' life lived on for many years after his death.
      - (1) Paul notes that Jesus appeared to more than 500 witnesses at one time and that most of them were still living when he wrote 15-25 years after Jesus' death. (cf. 1 Cor.15:1-8)
      - (2) The British scholar, Vincent Taylor remarked that if the skeptics of the Bible are right, "the disciples must have been translated into heaven immediately after the resurrection."
  3. The details of the Gospels are not indicative of legend.
    - (1) It is most likely that the Gospel writers composed their books while not in Jewish Palestine. (Mark in Rome, Luke in Antioch likely, John in Ephesus, Matthew in Antioch likely.) If they wrote from outside of Palestine some 35-65 years after the events, why should we trust them? Do they get the details right as eyewitnesses would?
    - (2) The kind of detail given in the narrative of the Gospels demonstrates that it cannot be fiction because such fictional writing was unknown in the first century.
      - (a) Literary critic, C. S. Lewis, observed: "I have been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends, and myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know none of them are like this. Of this [Gospel] text there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage . . . or else, some unknown [ancient] writer . . . without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern novelistic, realistic narrative . . ."
      - (b) In his book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Richard Bauckham compiled a large collection of recent research on recollective memory comparing how they differ from fictional accounts or composite historical reconstructions.
        - (i) He notes, "Recollective memory is selective—it fixes on unique and consequential events, it retains irrelevant detail, it

takes the limited vantage point of a participant rather than that of an omniscient narrator, and it shows signs of frequent rehearsal.”

- (ii) Bauckham demonstrates that these are the marks of the New Testament Gospels.
- (c) Do the authors know by name the actual places where the events took place?
- (i) The most commonly mentioned place in the Gospels is Jerusalem (66x), the second most mentioned is Nazareth (21), the third is Capernaum (16) in addition to many other specific place names. How would someone in a distant location like Syria, Greece, Turkey or Egypt know of these places unless they were reporting eyewitness accounts.
    - (a) The four Gospels mention 12-14 place names each, a total of 23 different place names in all. The writers took enormous care to give accurate details. This is characteristic of eyewitness testimony.
    - (b) Later false-gospels mention only one place name and sometimes none.
- (d) Do the writers call the characters the correct names?
- (i) In 2002 Israeli scholar, Tal Ilan, listed three thousand Jewish names found in archeological materials of 1st century Jewish communities in the Middle East. These names show a different frequency of use in various geographical locations.
  - (ii) Richard Bauckham (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 2008) looked at this study and correlated it with the Gospels to discover what people were actually called in first century Jewish Palestine and what they were called in the New Testament. Of the top 9 names used in that first century culture they represent 41% of all names used. In the NT Gospels and Acts they represent 40 percent of all names used! If one examines names used in any other first century community outside of Palestine a completely different pattern of names occurs. This is not something a person with no eyewitness access would or could get right. Yet the Gospel writers get the right names and the right proportion of names used in this place at this time. For example, in Matthew 10 where the disciples are listed, when any of the ten most frequently used names occur they are differentiated while the

names that are not popular have no distinguishing identification.

For example:

- (a) Simon (1st) Peter
- (b) Andrew (not in top 100)
- (c) James (11th) the son of Zebedee
- (d) John (5th) his brother
- (e) not Phillip (65th)
- (f) not Bartholomew (50th)
- (g) not Thomas (not in top 100)
- (h) Matthew (9th) the tax collector
- (i) James (11th) the son of Alphaeus
- (j) not Thaddeus (39th)
- (k) Simon (1st) the Zealot
- (l) Judas (4th) Iscariot

(e) These correlations could not have been artificially produced since these statistics were completely unknown until recently.

(f) Later so-called gospels such as the Gospels of Thomas, Mary, and Judas, are not congruent with first century Palestinian Jewish names revealing that they were forgeries written much later.

E. The present manuscript evidence for text of the Bible reflects that it has been carefully preserved over the last 3500 years.

1. [recall that the Bible is 66 books written by 40 authors over 1500 years totaling 557,707 words in the original languages] Biblical scholar and translator, Kenneth Barker, notes that the OT manuscripts provide us with even greater accuracy than the NT documents which is to say a lot for he says this of the NT evidence, “. . . keep in mind that all of our major manuscripts – and the texts which scholars have compiled from those manuscripts – agree with one another approximately ninety-eight percent of the time. All of the copyists’ errors combined affect only about two percent of the text. And nowhere does a major article of the Christian faith hinge on a disputed passage. . . . And with the recovery of so many witnesses [manuscripts], the science of textual criticism has grown in importance and influence. . . . Textual critics, through years of careful study and comparison, have given us a text of the Holy Scriptures that are virtually the same as the original copies.” Kenneth Barker

VII. The Historical Data of the Bible Is Verifiable

A. Extra-biblical sources corroborate historical facts in the Bible.

1. “Over 39 extra-biblical sources attest to more than 100 facts regarding the life and teachings of Jesus. . . . There are numerous first and second-century extra-biblical writings that witness to the fact that Christians believed that Christ did extraordinary things, died on a cross,

and rose from the grave: Josephus, Clement, Papias, Didache, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Hermas, Tatian, Theophilus, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria.” C. Michael Patton

B. Archeological materials corroborate biblical references.

1. Jewish Archaeologist Nelson Glueck says this about the Bible: “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. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries.”

2. Examples:

- a) Shishak’s Invasion of Judah. 1828
- b) The Sennacherib Prism. 1830
- c) Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. 1846
- d) The Moabite Stone. 1868
- e) Hezekiah’s Siloam Tunnel Inscription. 1880
- f) The Merneptah Stele. 1896
- g) The Code of Hammurabi. 1901
- h) The Existence of Hittites. 1906
- i) The Nuzi Tablets. 1925
- j) Burial Plaque of King Uzziah. 1931
- k) Biblical Cities Attested Archaeologically. Jericho, Haran, Hazor, Dan, Megiddo, Shechem, Samaria, Shiloh, Gezer, Gibeah, Beth Shemesh, Beth Shean, Beersheba, Lachish, among others

C. Place names are accurately recorded in the Bible.

1. Remember that in the ancient world there were comparatively few maps and they were not accessible to most people. Local place names would only have been known by local people. Remember as well that the Gospels were all written from outside Jewish Palestine, and two of them by men who were not Apostles, so the likelihood of them getting place names correct was very small unless they were reporting the testimony of eyewitnesses who would have known the actual place names. Richard Bauckham notes that the four Gospels accurately mention 12-14 place names each, for a total of 23 different place names in all. The writers took enormous care to give accurate details. This then, is characteristic of eyewitness testimony. In contrast, later false-gospels mention at most only one major place name and often none.

D. Personal names correlate to known names in the region of Jesus ministry.

1. In 2002, for the very first time archeological research revealed that the top 9 names used in the specific geographical area of Jewish Palestine where Jesus was during the first century represent 41% of all names used at that time and in that region. In the NT Gospels and Acts those very same names represent 40 percent of all names used! This is a statistic that can be neither coincidence nor fabrication.

VIII. The Content of the Bible Is Credible

A. Jesus’ character is compelling.

1. C.S. Lewis' very often quoted assessment of the options for understanding Jesus still bear weight. To briefly summarize Lewis' comment which he wrote in his book, *Mere Christianity*, he said that if Jesus was not the Lord, as he claimed to be, then he was either a lunatic or a liar. Lewis and many others since, have shown convincingly that Jesus does not reflect the characteristics of someone detached from reality nor would he ever have been believed as truthful if his claims were not consistent with his miraculous works and his willingness to die for what he taught.
  2. The wisdom of Jesus teaching combined with the power of his works and the grace of his character make his claim to deity eminently credible.
- B. Events in the Gospels are recorded realistically.
1. As noted earlier, British scholar Richard Bauckham, using contemporary psychological research on recollective memory, has shown that the characteristics of the accounts in the Gospels and Acts reflect the testimony of eyewitnesses who gave credible accounts of historic events.
    - a) "Recollective memory is selective—it fixes on unique and consequential events, it retains irrelevant detail, it takes the limited vantage point of a participant rather than that of an omniscient narrator, and it shows signs of frequent rehearsal." R. Bauckham
  2. The NT accounts are not given as people reporting private esoteric spiritual experiences. They are eyewitness accounts of objective events often involving many other observing participants.
- C. Leading characters of the Bible are portrayed transparently.
1. Adam and Eve, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Noah, Sampson, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, and Peter among others, are all presented realistically.
  2. This is particularly surprising in view of their prominent roles in the biblical narrative.
    - a) Of particular import are the accounts of David's sins. Typically kings in the ancient east were extolled as omnipotent conquerors and even deified in some cultures.
  3. The Scripture makes no effort to defend the sins or weaknesses of these people but shows them to be flawed human beings.
- D. Human nature is described accurately in Scripture.
1. Not only are even the most prominent characters of the Bible presented candidly, the Bible's direct commentary on the condition the human heart rings true.
    - a) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9
    - b) Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another. . . Colossians 3:5-9