

Hard Questions *Can I Really Trust The Bible?*

It's been an interesting couple of months for Christian/Atheist dialogue. Last month Hemant Mehta, an avowed atheist and leader of a national secular students organization, decided to put his soul up for bid on eBay.

He said for every \$10 bid he would attend one hour of church to see if what he heard changed his mind. He said, "I didn't expect to spend much time in church because I didn't expect the bidding to go above \$9.99."

Evangelists bid, eager to save a sinner. Atheists bid, hoping to keep Mr. Mehta in their fold. When the auction stopped on Feb. 3 after 41 bids, the buyer was Jim Henderson, a former evangelical minister from Seattle, whose \$504 bid prevailed.

Henderson runs a web site called "Off the map," as kind of a refuge for disenchanted Christians. For his winning bid he struck a deal with Mehta. Rather than trying to convert him he hired him to visit Chicago area churches and write reviews from an atheist's perspective.

You can read his blog on the off the map web site. Now Chicago area pastors are all wondering if he's going to show up at their church next.

Alan Cooney is an atheist who publishes the Philosophy Forge Newsletter. His challenge is for ever 50 new subscriptions (free newsletter) he'll read a book of the Bible and comment on it in his blog.

So far he's read Mark, John, and Acts.

So if you want to help motivate an atheist to read the Bible you can sign up.

Mark Twain once said, "(The Bible) has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies." On the other hand, Woodrow Wilson, our 28th president, once said, "When you have read the Bible, you will know it is the Word of God."

What would persuade Woodrow Wilson to come to a different conclusion about the Bible than Mark Twain? For that matter, why should anybody believe what Christians believe about the Bible at all? How do I know the Bible is true?

We're in a series where we're grappling with tough questions that often become obstacles to people's faith. We've talked about doubt, the rationality of believing in God, religions, the origin of life on the planet, and the issue of suffering.

Throughout these messages we've repeatedly referenced the Bible. But can we really trust the Bible? That's what we want to look at today.

We begin this church's statement of faith with this declaration: *The Bible in its original documents is the inspired Word of God, the written record of His supernatural revelation of Himself to man, absolute in its authority, complete in its revelation, final in its content, and without error in its statement.*

That's pretty bold, isn't it? We wanted to make sure that people know exactly where we're coming from.

What is it about the Bible that would make us have that kind of confidence?

I. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Claims

Turn to II Timothy 3 pg 1057 Read 16-17

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament in Greek. The word "inspiration" here is a translation of the Greek term *theopneustos*. That's a compound word made up of *theos* (theology) meaning "God" and *pneuma* (pneumatic) which means "breath" or "wind."

Now that's very different from the way we often use the word "inspiration." There's a magazine called "Inspired House" which is all about home decorating. We talk about authors being inspired by certain events and say their books are inspiring.

Literally *theopneustos* means "God breathed." It doesn't refer to the authors being inspired it means what they wrote was God breathed. It was God's Word.

We could go on to give a hundred more examples. Four hundred thirteen times the Old Testament authors use the phrase "Thus says the Lord" to preface what they wrote.

In passages like Mark 7 Jesus called the Law of Moses “The Word of God.” Not the words of a prophet or a great leader, but “The Word of God.”

The Bible’s very specific in it’s claims about itself.

Now I know the Bible’s claims about itself aren’t proof, but I believe it’s a claim we shouldn’t take lightly.

There are lots of other religious books that are revered as Scripture that never make that claim.

I. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It’s Claims

II. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It’s Uniqueness

The Bible is really a library of 66 different books, written by 40 plus authors over a period of 1500 years. The authors came from all walks of life. Two were fishermen, two were shepherds, two were kings.

One was a physician, another was a tax collector and another was a soldier. The list goes on. All of these authors wrote over a period of 15 centuries and we bind their writings together in one cohesive book.

The Bible is a compilation of writings that never contradicts itself and has a theme which flows from Genesis through Revelation.

By the way, when people say to me that they don’t believe the Bible because of all the contradictions I always ask, “Which ones are you referring too?”

Some people give a verse or two out of context but most are silent. They’re just repeating something they heard but never investigated.

The Bible is a book that can be understood in it’s basics by a child, but at the same time you could read it for a lifetime and never stop learning the depths of it’s truths.

Professor Monier Williams, a former professor of Sanskrit, spent 42 years studying books of the ancient near east. He said this, “Pile them if you will, on the left side of your study table, but place your own Holy Bible on the right side - all by itself, all alone - and with a wide gap between them. For there is a gulf between it and the so called scared books of the East which severs the one from the other, hopelessly and forever.”

Every week for 27 years we've gotten together at Faith Community Church to study the Bible. We sing about it's truths, hear sermons from it's pages and study it in classes and on our own. I've preached hundreds of sermons from the Bible and people keep coming back for more.

That's amazing! Could you imagine us doing that with *Cell* by Steven King? It's on the NY Times best seller list. Let's study that for the next 27 years!

Think about it.

If there's a personal, thinking, rational, God who created us in His image He would want to communicate with us. A book is the perfect way. Without words there is no thought and without a book there would be no way for God to communicate His thoughts to all people at all points in history.

The Bible claims to be, and is filled with evidence, that it is that book.

I. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Claims

II. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Uniqueness

III. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Historical Accuracy

For the Bible to really be God's Word it has to be true in all it's aspects. Either we can believe all of it or we can't believe any of it. If there are errors in the Bible in areas of history of science then how could we trust it in the even more important realms of salvation and eternity.

If the Bible is really from God it's going to be accurate 100% of the time.

Early in the 19th century a new science was born. We call it the science of archeology.

More than a century ago critics questioned almost every event and person you read about in the Bible. Today professors in university class rooms and even an occasional pastor still spouts off the rhetoric.

The thing is, the past century has been a gold mine of archeological discoveries.

We now have the capacity to check out the events and people mentioned in the Bible.

Dr. F. W. Albright, Professor Emeritus of Johns Hopkins says, “There can be no doubt that archeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition.”

Millar Burrows of Yale, in a book published by the American Schools of Oriental Research, writes, “On the whole, archeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the scriptural record. More than one archeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.”

Nelson Glueck, renowned Jewish archeologist wrote, “...it may be stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”

I’d like you to see just a couple of once presumed mythological references in the Bible.

Turn to Genesis 11 pg 11 Read vs 31

The critics had a field day with references like this. No one had ever heard of the city of Ur. They said it’s a made-up place like most of the references in the Bible.

Then in 1922 a British archeologist, Charles Leonard Wolley excavated the city of Ur.

Abram wasn’t some wandering bedouin from the back side of the desert.

He lived in one of the most important commercial centers of the ancient world. Ur had a population of 300,000 and covered 4 square miles.

Incidentally, they had two-story brick, whitewashed houses in Ur with indoor plumbing. And this was 4000 years ago in 2000BC! I can remember when my grandparents got indoor plumbing.

Maybe even more dramatic was the discovery of the Hittite kingdom.

Turn to Genesis 15 Read verses 18-21

The ancient Hittites are mentioned 40 times in 8 different chapters of the Old Testament but they weren't mentioned outside of the Bible. For critics that's proof enough that the Bible writers made it all up.

In 1906 a German archeological team went to Boghaz-koy in central Turkey and unearthed the Hittite capital of Hattusa. This is called "The Lions Gate" in the ruins of Hattusa.

They found 10,000 clay tablets and discovered that the Hittites were a major power in 1800 BC.

My favorite is a king mentioned one time in the Bible. He's Sargon, king of Assyria. One mention in the Bible and no mention outside the Bible, conclusion: Sargon must be another one of those Bible myths.

In 1843 a French archeologist excavated an area 12 miles north of the site of ancient Nineveh at Korsadad, Iraq.

What he found was the 25 acre palace of King Sargon. This is one of the 40 ton winged bulls from the palace. You can see it at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute Museum.

Can we trust the historicity of the Bible? We can't keep up with the amount of stuff that's being unearthed and studied. Over and over again the Bible is shown to be accurate.

III. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Historical Accuracy

IV. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Scientific Accuracy

The Bible doesn't claim to be a science text book but if it comes from God through human authors then it can't contradict scientific truth.

A few weeks ago when we dealt with the question of origins I read a quote from Julian Huxley about how science explained away any need for God. His brother Aldous, author of Brave New World, said, "Modern Science makes it impossible to believe in a personal God."

Is that true? Is there a conflict between the Bible and science? Remember a couple of things as we look at some biblical references.

First, the Bible was written in the language of common people. God's purpose was to have a message that is understandable by all people of every time and culture. We're not going to read scientific jargon from 2006 because no one would have been able to understand it in the past.

Obviously that doesn't mean that the Bible can't use figures of speech. When the Weather Channel gives you the times for sunrise and sunset you don't accuse them of being scientifically ignorant.

Second, the Bible was written in a day of superstition and scientific ignorance but it doesn't contain any of the errors of the day.

What it does is, speak accurately and simply.

Listen to these examples:

Jeremiah 33:22 *As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.*

In 150 AD Ptolemy counted 1056 stars. Galileo used his first telescope in 1610. Even then man was still counting the stars.

Seven hundred years before Ptolemy the Bible said the stars can't be numbered. Today we know that we don't know nor can we count the number of stars.

I Corinthians 15:41 *There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.*

Galileo believed all stars were the same just some were closer than others. Today we know there are infinite varieties and sizes. Once again the Bible already knew that. That's because the Bible comes from the one who made the stars.

The prophet Isaiah wrote (Isaiah 40:22) *It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.*

The Hebrew word translated "circle" means "sphere." It means circle in the sense of a ball, not a flat disc. That was written almost 2000 years before Columbus set sail.

The man Moses was raised and tutored in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was brought up in Pharaoh's court and given the best education Egypt had to offer.

The Egyptians were pretty smart when it came to making mummies but they weren't to sharp on other aspects of medicine.

They used mixtures of lizards blood, crushed swine's teeth, parts of donkey's hooves and all sorts of other interesting ingredients to cure everything from baldness to puncture wounds.

Moses wrote pages and pages of instructions for life, including extensive health regulations. Why didn't Moses include any of these established medical procedures in his writings?

Remember Jesus called Moses' writings the Word of God. He also called them Scripture which cannot be broken.

Moses wrote quarantine laws. In the 14th century the Black Death took the lives of 60 million people. It was the greatest disaster in human history. It only stopped when the quarantine laws of Leviticus were applied.

The list could go on and on.

A baby doesn't have sufficient vitamin K in his body to promote blood clotting until the 5th to 7th day. Within a few hours after birth prothrombin becomes relatively depleted and does not become replenished by the infant's liver until about the eighth day of life. Prothrombin is the precursor of the active clotting agent thrombin.

Leviticus 12:2-3 *Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child... on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.*

Turn to I Corinthians 15 pg 1023

Read vs 39

That's a very simple straightforward statement. It was only 167 years ago that Theodore Schwann put forth his cell theory which identified the cell as the basic building block.

It wasn't until a little over 70 years ago with the invention of the electron microscope that we had a way of distinguishing the difference in the flesh of humans and that of animals.

Today that's something we all take for granted. How did a first century Jewish writer know that was true?

All Scripture is "God breathed." If it's going to touch on any area of science it has to be accurate.

By the way, I Corinthians 15:39 has some tremendous implications for the theory of macro evolution, doesn't it.

Eight times in Genesis chapter 1 God says things reproduce after their own kind. The birds, the fish, the cattle, were all designed to reproduce after their own kind.

There's no change from one species to another.

The Bible isn't in conflict with any facts of science. Only some unproved and unprovable theories.

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- II. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Uniqueness*
- III. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Historical Accuracy*
- IV. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Scientific Accuracy*
- V. We Believe The Bible Is Trustworthy Because Of It's Prophetic Accuracy*

In 2004 a blue-ribbon panel of psychics, prophets and visionaries was convened to make their predictions for 2005.

They included these: there would be cures for just about every major disease, communications would be disrupted when Earth's magnetic field reverses, a California inventor would cause earthquakes in Los Angeles and San Francisco, NASA astronomers would find a ruined city on Mars, and Israel and the U.S. would invade Syria and Iran.

The psychics never foresaw the September 11 terrorist attack, nor did any psychic issue a warning about the tsunami wave that killed over 150,000 in southern Asia the day after Christmas.

Gene Emory a writer for *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine says, "It's hard to think of two events that reverberated around the globe as much as those did, yet the psychics never picked up on them. It's just more evidence that people who claim to have psychic powers really don't."

Now let's contrast those non-predictions with what we see in the Bible. Remember in all of these areas of uniqueness, history, science, prophecy, we're just skimming the surface.

Turn to Deuteronomy 18 pg 176 Read vs. 20-22

I don't know if you caught that or not, but God just laid out an iron clad guarantee. His prophets are always right. Not Most of the time. Not 99% of the time. One hundred percent of the time!

Probably the most recognized prophet of the past 100 years was Edger Cayce. His Association for Research and Enlightenment is still going strong almost 60 years after his death.

Edger Cayce predicted that North Carolina and Georgia would slide into the ocean around 1960 and New York would follow in the early 70's. Around that time the lost continent of Atlantis would reappear.

One quarter of the Bible is prophetic. Some of it is prophecy of things that will happen. But much of it is prophecy that was made in the past with the fulfillment in the past too. That means we can check the predictions out and apply the Bible's own test. The predictions must be 100% accurate.

One of the most unique prophecies of all is found in the writings of the prophet Ezekiel regarding the ancient city of Tyre.

Turn to Ezekiel 26 Pg 754

Read vs 1-14, 21

Several things are said about this city:

1. Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the city and smash its walls
2. Many nations would come against Tyre
3. Tyre would be scraped flat like the top of a rock
4. The stones and timbers would be thrown into the sea
5. Fishermen would spread their nets there
6. Tyre would never be rebuilt

Tyre was a city on the northern coast of Palestine. It was inhabited by the Phoenicians, one of the strongest maritime powers of the day. Tyre was a crucial point of commerce and was well fortified. Its walls were over 100 feet high and 15 feet thick.

Three years after Ezekiel made this prediction Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon laid siege to the city. The siege lasted 13 years until 573 BC. When Nebuchadnezzar finally took the city the Phoenicians had moved everything of value to an island 1/2 mile off shore.

Babylon had no navy so they went home.

For 241 years the mainland of the original city remained just as Nebuchadnezzar had left it.

Then out of the West came a 24 year old general named Alexander. He had a massive army, had just defeated the Persians, and was on his way to Egypt.

He commanded the people of Tyre to surrender. They told him to buzz off.

But Alexander wasn't a guy who took no for an answer.

He ordered his men to begin to haul the rubble from the old city and use it to build a causeway out to the island. To do this they even scraped up the soil to complete the land bridge.

In the end the island fortress of Tyre was captured.

Many nations came against Tyre. She was scraped flat like the top of a rock. Her stones and timbers were cast into the sea.

Secular historian, Philip Myers, writes, “The larger part of the site of the once great city is now bare...a place where fishermen that still frequent the spot spread their nets.”

You can read about ancient Tyre on Lebanon’s tourism web site.

Isaiah 48:3-5 I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. Because I knew that you were obstinate, And your neck was an iron sinew, And your brow bronze, even from the beginning I have declared it to you; Before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you.

There are literally hundreds of prophecies in the Bible. There’s over a hundred just about Jesus Christ. Hundreds of years before His birth the prophets foretold what family He’d be born into, what town He’d be born in, how He’d live His life, and how and when He’d die.

Can I really trust the Bible? I’ve found it to be trustworthy from beginning to end.

It tells me about God my Creator and his love for me.

It tells me about my own sinful heart. And it tells me that the only way to stand with confidence at the final judgment is to humbly believe the truth that God provided His Son to be my Savior.