

Session 4: Questions about the Bible

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Recommended text: Doug Powell, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics*, 2006.
WITH ANSWERS

Introduction

- A. Some key points from last session: Miracles and Jesus
1. Biblical claims about miracles (e.g. OT examples, Jesus' works & resurrection, fulfilled prophecy)
 2. The purpose of miracles
 3. Types of miracles: Creation, Sustenance, Coincidence, Predictive, Suspension)
- B. The resurrection of Jesus: an example of a predictive and suspension miracle (see previous session outline for more).
1. Historical data to explain (e.g. Jesus' crucifixion; disciples' fear and subsequent boldness to the point of death; Jesus' burial in a "new tomb" [Mt 27:60; Lk 23:53] owned by a named and described individual, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin [Mt 27:47-60; Mk 15:42-46; Lk 23:50-53; Jn 19:38-42]).
 2. Biblical testimony of eyewitness accounts.
 3. Post-resurrection appearances (period of _____ **40** days, in different settings, on at least _____ **10** occasions)
 4. Jesus' disciples did NOT expect the resurrection.
 - a. They did not understand the OT prophecies.
 - b. Jewish beliefs about resurrection expected only a resurrection at the _____ **END** of the world, and only a _____ **GENERAL** resurrection, not the resurrection of an _____ **INDIVIDUAL**.
 5. Implausible alternative explanations:
 - a. Jesus not really dead.
 - b. Disciples went to the wrong tomb.
 - c. Resurrection appearances were wish-fulfillment hallucinations.
 - d. Christians simply borrowed the ideas from the **mystery religions (M.R.)**.
 - (1) **Chronological problems:** The terminology of the M.R. (e.g. resurrection) is *later than* the 1st century.
 - (2) **Conceptual problems:** The M.R. did NOT have genuine "resurrections" of god(s) given embodied life in *this* world.
- C. This session's primary focus: Why should we trust the Bible's claims?
1. The Bible's _____ **INTERNAL** witness (e.g. its claims about itself; its overall coherence; its uniqueness; the trustworthiness of its authors; its fulfilled prophecies; its personal and social power).
 2. The Bible's _____ **EXTERNAL** witness (e.g. the confirmations of its accuracy and authenticity through ancient testimony, historical analysis, and archaeological discoveries; the plausibility of the professed origin of its books and their selection authoritative books [the "canon"]; and the reliability of its transmission through time).

I. Prominent Skeptic Claims about the Bible

- A. The Bible is an error-filled collection of **purely-human** writings.

¹ The class webpage provides access to handouts (with blanks filled-in), a "Question/Answer" section, and links to helpful resources, including books and Internet resources. Please feel free to submit questions.

- B. The **Pentateuch** (first five books) is a product of different editors from four source traditions, not Moses (who presumably lived around 1450 BC or perhaps 1250 BC):
1. **J** (Yahwist source) written c. 950 BC.
 2. **E** (Elohist source) written c. 850 BC.
 3. **D** (Deuteronomist source) written c. 600 BC in Jerusalem during religious reform.
 4. **P** (Priestly source) written c. 500 BC by Jewish priests in Babylonian exile.
- C. There are **no genuine predictive prophecies**. “Prophecies” written *after* the event.
- D. The New Testament **Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John):
1. Are filled with inconsistencies and are **unreliable** as accounts of the life of a historical Jesus.
 2. The early church retroactively concocted a “divine” portrait of Jesus: **Jesus is a legend**. The real “historical Jesus” was very different from the church’s “Christ of faith.”²
 3. The early church used the **mystery religions** to construct their view of Jesus and Christianity.
- E. **Other ancient “Gospels”** were written about Jesus that were illegitimately suppressed by the early church (e.g. The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Peter, The Gospel of Mary).³
- F. Since no *original* New Testament documents exist, the **available copies** have been substantially altered and are **unreliable**.

II. The Bible’s Character and Claims

- A. **God’s revelation** was given in a variety of ways (e.g. prophets, burning bush, urim & thummim; dreams; visions). Note Deut 10:2; Ex 20:1; Lev 1:1; Josh 1:8; Neh 13:1; Heb 1:1.
- B. God’s revelation was **incarnate in Jesus Christ**
1. Jn. 1:1,14,18 “In the beginning was the *Word* [*logos*], and the *Word* was with God, and the *Word* was God.... And the *Word* became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.... No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has *explained* [*<exegesis*] Him.”
 2. Col. 1:15 “And He [Christ] is the image [*icon*] of the invisible God . . .”
 3. Heb. 1:1-3 “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son whom He appointed heir of all things . . . [the Son is] the image of His glory and the exact representation [*charakter*] of his nature”
- C. A portion of God’s revelation was preserved in **scripture**.
1. **Moses** wrote the words of God (Ex 17:14; 24:3-4; 34:27; Deut 31:24-26).
 2. Many references to **“scripture”** (e.g. Lk 4:21; Jn 2:22; Jn 5:39; Jn 10:35; Acts 1:16; Rom 9:17; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20; 3:14-16).
 3. Scripture viewed as **authoritative**: “It is written” (e.g. Matt 4:4,7,10)
 4. Scripture offers **eyewitness testimony** along with God’s **“inspiration”** (Jn 20:30-31; 1 Jn 1:3; 2 Pet 1:16-21; 2 Tim 3:14-17).

Jn 20:30-31 “Many other signs therefore Jesus also **performed in the presence of the disciples**, which are not written in this book; but **these have been written** that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” (cf. Jn 21:24-25)

² The Jesus Seminar, a group of more liberal scholars, published *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say? The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (1996). Based on their votes, they determined that over one-half of the Gospel statements attributed to Jesus were NOT actually statements of Jesus. Only about 20% of the Jesus-Gospel statements were regarded as something Jesus undoubtedly or probably said. A key figure in this group is John Dominic Crossan who frequently appears on TV episodes dealing with Jesus and early Christianity. He taught at DePaul University for many years.

³ Another widely published and prominent TV personality who emphasizes this point is Bart Ehrman, professor at the University of North Carolina. Especially note his *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (2005), *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who changed the bible and Why* (2007), and *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (2012).

1 Jn 1:3 ³ **what we have seen and heard** we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ **These things we write**, so that our joy may be made complete.

2 Pet 1: ¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **we were eyewitnesses** of His majesty. ¹⁷ For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased” — ¹⁸ and **we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven** when we were with Him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ **So we have the prophetic word made more sure**, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. ²⁰ But know this first of all, that **no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation**, ²¹ for **no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

2 Tim 3:14-17 ¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known **the sacred writings** which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ **All Scripture is inspired by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

III. The Bible’s Historical Framework (See the chart on “The Bible’s Historical Framework” and Paul’s concise history in Acts 13:15-41)

A. Old Testament Era:

1. Abraham (c. 2000 BC) > Isaac > Jacob > Joseph.
2. Egyptian bondage; deliverance by Moses (c. 1450 or 1250 BC); and God’s covenant with Israel.
3. Kings Saul (c. 1065 BC), David, and Solomon.
4. Northern Kingdom (“Israel”): Eventual defeat by Assyria in 722 BC.
5. Southern Kingdom (“Judah”): Eventual fall of Jerusalem and captivity in Babylon in 586 BC.
6. Rebuilding the Jerusalem temple begins (ordered by the Persian Cyrus) and is finished during the reign of Darius (c. 516 BC). [Ezra 1:1; Ezra 5-6; Zach 1:16-17]
7. Last of the Hebrew prophets about 400 BC (e.g. Nehemiah, Malachi).

B. New Testament Era (birth of John the baptizer and Jesus).

1. Jesus’ death/resurrection on Passover weekend (AD30).
2. Day of Pentecost (50 days later) and the birth of the church (AD30). [Acts 2]
3. Paul’s missionary journeys (AD45-58) and death (c. AD67).
 - a. Paul’s trial under Gallio (Acts 18:12-17) on 2nd missionary journey.
 - b. The “Gallio Inscription,” discovered in Delphi in 1905: From Emperor Claudius to “Junius Gallio my friend and proconsul of Achaia.”
 - c. Gallio was proconsul from June AD51 to May AD52.
4. Paul’s letters (AD48-67).
5. Gospels of Mark (AD62), Luke (AD62-65), and Matthew (AD68-85).
6. Book of Acts (AD65-68) (Last chapter puts Paul in Rome but nothing about his death)
7. Execution of Paul in Rome (AD68).
8. Roman destruction of Jerusalem (AD70).
9. John’s Gospel (AD80-95) and Revelation (AD95).

C. **Summary** characteristics: Bible covers about 1600 years; 66 books; about 40 authors; 3 languages; many literary styles; yet a unified message of God’s salvation.

IV. Dates of Earliest New Testament Books (see chart on “Early New Testament Timeline”)

A. Paul’s message

1. Early interaction with other apostles
 - a. Paul converted AD33-35. Miraculous encounter with the resurrected Christ on the way to persecute Christians in Damascus (see Acts 9).
 - b. “After three years,” went to Jerusalem and visited with Peter and James (Gal 1:11-20).

- c. “After fourteen years,” went to Jerusalem again and was given “the right hand of fellowship” from James, Peter, and John (Cf. Gal 2:1-10; Acts 15:1-35). (* The message of Paul and the original apostles was apparently the same!)

2. **Galatians:** Written AD48-50

Gal 1:1 Paul, an apostle (not *sent* from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),...

- 3. **I Corinthians** (esp. note ch. 15): Written AD54-56 in Ephesus (I Cor 16:8).
 - a. Corinth church likely founded on 2nd missionary journey in AD51-52 (note the Gallio Inscription discussed above).
 - b. Resurrection message is already well established (I Cor 15:1-4).

1 Cor 15: Now I make known to you, brethren, **the gospel** which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ²by **which also you are saved**, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³For **I delivered to you** as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that **He was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures,

- c. The resurrection appearances (I Cor 15:5-9)

1 Cor 15: ⁵and that **He appeared to Cephas**, then **to the twelve**. ⁶After that He appeared **to more than five hundred brethren at one time**, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷then He appeared **to James**, then **to all the apostles**; ⁸and last of all, as to one untimely born, **He appeared to me** also. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

4. **I Thessalonians** (esp. 1:9-10; 4:13-14): Written AD50-52

⁹For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

B. The Gospels of Mark and Luke.

- 1. Neither Mark nor Luke were Jesus’ chosen apostles.
- 2. Mark traditionally the earliest (c. AD60-63).
- 3. Luke (c. AD62-68)
 - a. Apparently written before Luke’s book of Acts (Lk 1:1-4; Acts 1:1).
 - b. Acknowledges earlier written accounts of Jesus (Lk 1:1-4).

Lk 1:1-4 ¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ²just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

- 4. Mark and Luke were close associates of Jesus’ apostles.
 - a. **Irenaeus**, disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John, says that Mark was “a disciple and interpreter of Peter.”
 - b. **Papias** (died c. 155), an associate of Polycarp who was a disciple of John, says that Mark “had become the interpreter of Peter.”
 - c. **Eusebius** (263-339) claims that Clement (c. 150-215) and Papias say that Mark was a “follower of Peter” and that Mark’s gospel “obtained the sanction of his [Peter’s] authority” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 2, Ch. 15).

V. Comparative Evidence of Ancient Document Copies

A. Comparisons of ancient texts and their earliest copies.⁴

AUTHOR	BOOK	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPIES	TIME GAP	# of COPIES
Homer	Iliad	900 BC	c. 400 BC	c. 500 yrs.	643
Herodotus	History	480-425 BC	c. AD 900	c. 1,350 yrs.	8
Thucydides	History	460-400 BC	c. AD 900	c. 1,380 yrs.	8
Plato		400 BC	c. AD 900	c. 1,300 yrs.	7
Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 BC	c. AD 900	c. 1,000 yrs.	10
Tacitus	Annals	AD 100	AD 1100	c. 1,000 yrs.	20
Pliny Secundus	Natural History	AD 61-113	c. AD 850	c. 750 yrs.	7
	New Testament	AD 48-95	c. 114 (fragment) c. 200 (books) c. 250 (most of N.T.) c. 325 (complete N.T.)	+ 50 yrs. 100 yrs. 150 yrs. 225 yrs.	Over 5,600

B. Significant early papyri and manuscripts of biblical material.

Key Biblical Materials	Book(s)	Document Date
John Ryland's MS (P ⁵²)	John 18:31-33, 37-38	c. 125-130
Bodmer Papyrus II	Most of John's Gospel	c. AD 150-200
• P ⁶⁶	104 leaves of Jn 1:1-6:11; 6:35b-1:26; fragments of 40 other pages; fragment of 14:29-21:9	c. 200
The Diatessaron of Tatian	A harmony of the Gospels	c. 160
Codex Vaticanus	Nearly all the Bible	AD 325-350
Codex Sinaiticus	Most of NT and about half of OT	AD 350
Codex Alexandrinus	Almost all of Bible (all NT books except 2 Thess and 2 John)	AD 400

VI. Some New Testament Connections with Other Ancient Writers⁵

A. Early non-Christian witnesses: Josephus, Jewish historian (AD37-100); Tacitus, Roman historian (AD55-117); Seutonius, Roman historian and Hadrian's court official (c. AD69-122).

B. Some intersections

AD6-7	Revolt of Judas	Acts 5:37 "... Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census ..."	"... a Galilean ... Judas incited his countrymen to revolt ..." (Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i> 2:118).
	Execution of John the Baptist	Mk 6:14-29; Matt 14:1-12 "Herod had John arrested ... had John beheaded ..."	"Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him" (Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> 18:116).
AD30	Jesus' crucifixion	Cf. Mk 15:15 "Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified."	"At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus.... Pilate condemned him ... to the cross..." (Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> , 18:3).

⁴ This type of information is provided in many apologetics texts, including *The New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* and Lee Strobel's *The Case for the Real Jesus*.

⁵ See Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (InterVarsity Press, 1992), 159-162.

	Execution of Jesus	Cf. Mk 15:15	“Christus ... suffered the extreme penalty ... at the hands of ... Pontius Pilate” (Tacitus, <i>Annals</i> 15:44).
AD44	Death of Agrippa	Cf. Acts 12:20-23. “On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat ... ²² The people kept crying out, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” ²³ And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.”	“Clad in a garment woven completely of silver ... he entered the theatre at daybreak.... His flatterers addressed him as a god ... the king did not rebuke him ... felt a stab of pain in his heart ... after five days ... he departed this life” (<i>Jewish Antiquities</i> 19:344-349).
AD49	Expulsion of Jews from Rome	Cf. Acts 18:2 “And he [Paul] found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.”	“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome” (Seutonius, <i>The Life of Claudius</i> 25, 4)
	James, brother of Jesus, killed	Early leader of Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13-29; Gal 2:9-10) and “the Lord’s brother” (Mk 6:3; Gal 1:19).	“[Ananus] assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and ... delivered them to be stoned; (Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> , 20, ch. 9:200)

C. Early NT citations and references

1. Clement of Rome, bishop in Rome (92-101): Cites from Matthew, John, and I Corinthians.
2. Ignatius (c. 110): Referred to six of Paul’s epistles.
3. Polycarp (69-155), disciple of apostle John, quotes from all four Gospels, Acts, and many Pauline epistles.
4. Table of other church fathers who quoted the New Testament:

Writer	Writer Dates	Gospels	Acts of Apostles	Pauline Epistles	Catholic Epistles	Revelation	Total
Justin Martyr	100-165	268	10	43	6	3 (266 allusions)	330
Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon	170	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement of Alexandria	150-211	1,017	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen	185-254	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,922
Tertullian	160-225	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus	170-236	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius	263-339	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Totals		19,368	1,352	14,035	870	664	36,289

D. Contrasts with another “Gospel”: The Gospel of Thomas

“Other” Gospel Materials	Book(s)	Date of Origin	Comments
<i>Gospel of Thomas</i> (discovered as part of Nag Hammadi writings in 1945)	114 “hidden” sayings of Jesus.	The Jesus Seminar’s <i>Five Gospels</i> (1993) claims AD 50. Elaine Pagels claims AD 80-90. BUT ... >>>>>>>>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 52 texts dating from c. 350. • Earliest references are from Hippolytus (170-236) and Origen (185-254) (<i>New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics</i> 290) • Thomas shows awareness of 14-15 NT books; The <i>Epistles of Ignatius</i> (110) does not show awareness of even half the NT.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas quotes from Gospel of John, which was probably not written until the mid-90s. • Thomas follows distinctive forms of the <i>Diatessaron</i> of Tatian not written until AD160+. • Thomas the person is referred to as “Judas Thomas”—a designation used only in the Syrian church, which suggests that it was not written in the 1st century Palestinian church. (See Strobel, <i>Case for Real Jesus</i>, 36-38)
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VII. Some Key Archaeological Artifact Connections to the Bible⁶

A. Old Testament examples

1. **Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III** (cf. 2 Kings 9-10).
 - a. 6.5 foot tall monument discovered in 1846 in Calah (Gen 10:11-12).
 - b. Shalmaneser received tribute from Jehu, son of Omri, in 841 BC.: “The tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: I received from him silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king [and] spears.”
 - c. The relief shows an Israelite bowing before Shalmaneser.
2. **The Moabite Stone** or Mesha Stele (cf. 2 Kings 3:4-5).
 - a. Discovered in 1868 in Palestine. Original date: c. 830 BC.
 - b. Inscription mentions Mesha, the Moabite king who rebelled against Israelite rule, and mentions the name “Yahweh” and possibly a reference to the “House of David.”
3. **Sennacherib’s Prism** (cf. 2 Kings 18-19; 2 Chronicles 32; Isa 36-37).
 - a. Assyrian ruler in Nineveh (705-681 BC).
 - b. Discusses Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem.
 - c. 2 Kings 18-19; 2 Kings 18:9 “Now in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it.”
 - d. Mentioned Hezekiah “like a caged bird within his royal capital.”
 - e. At the Oriental Institute in Chicago.
4. **The Cyrus Cylinder** (cf. Ezra 1:1-3; 6:3; 2 Chron 3:23; Isa 44:28).
 - a. Clay cylinder discovered in 1879 in ruins of Babylon.
 - b. The cylinder indicates that Cyrus, who began Persian rule in 539 BC, repatriated subjected peoples and restored their holy places: “I returned the images of the gods, who had resided there [i.e., in Babylon], to their places and I let them dwell in eternal abodes. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned to them their dwellings.”

B. New Testament examples (also note the historical literary connections presented above)

1. **The Pilate Stone** (cf. Lk 3:1 -- Pilate, a judge in Jesus’ trials, who ruled AD26-36).
 - a. 2’x3’ limestone inscription discovered in 1961 in Caesarea (Maritima).
 - b. A Latin inscription to Emperor Tiberius from Pontius Pilate: “To the Divine Augusti [this] Tiberium ... Pontius Pilate ... prefect of Judea ... has dedicated”
2. **The Pool of Bethesda** (cf. John 5:1-5 “2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes”)
 - a. Skeptics used to claim it was written by someone unacquainted with the time or place.
 - b. Discovered in 1956: A rectangular pool 40 feet underground, along with 5 porticoes.
3. **Caiaphas Ossuary**
 - a. Discovered in 1990. Certified as genuine in *Israel Exploration Journal*, vol. 61, in 2011.
 - b. Inscription: “Miriam daughter of Yeshua son of Caiaphus, priest of Maaziah from Beth Imri.”
 - c. The inscription was certified as genuine in *Israel Exploration Journal*, vol. 61, in 2011.

⁶ For a concise but helpful survey, see Doug Powell, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics* (2006), pp.162-163, 194-199. Helpful websites include: <http://bibleandarchaeology.blogspot.com>; <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_artifacts_significant_to_the_Bible.